

## ***San Antonio People of Faith Historical Museum***

**FOR RENT: Apt., gated community, \$1 + 1,095 prayers/yr**

His name was Jakob Fugger von der Lilie, but most folks in Augsburg, Germany called him Fugger the Rich. Born in 1459 into a wealthy merchant's family, Jakob and his brothers would one day expand the family's textile business throughout Europe. Under Jakob's strong business leadership, they also founded banking as well as silver and copper mining operations. He and the entire Fugger family were devout Catholics, and according to biographer Peter Geffcken, "The Fugger family was the first German trading house in a direct business relationship with the Roman Curia. In the year 1500, Jakob Fugger loaned the Vatican the money necessary to build the new St. Peter's Basilica, The Sistine Chapel, as well as other buildings within the Vatican." Geffcken goes on to state that Fugger is still "...held to be one of the wealthiest individuals in modern history, alongside the early 20th century industrialists John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie." However, Jakob Fugger wanted his family--particularly he and his brothers--to be memorialized for something other than their wealth; he sought a living, long-lasting memorial which he realized in 1514 when he conceived the idea of establishing the Fuggerei in Augsburg, the first "social" (low income) housing complex in the world.

The vision Fugger had in mind was a charitable one: to provide safe, affordable, and comfortable housing for the city's neediest Catholic workers. He envisioned them living together in a walled community, debt-free and with less stress as they tried to get by on "too-low salaries." In order to keep the Fuggerei an honorable, respected place, Jakob Fugger set forth rules for those allowed to live there. First, they had to be Catholic and citizens of Augsburg, and they had to be "respectable" members of society. They had to have low incomes but no debt. They would have to abide by a curfew of 10 p.m. when the gates would be locked, or there would be a fine to pay. Finally, and most importantly, in addition to paying just one guilder annually (about .88 Euro or \$1 today, but then about one month's wages for a low income worker), prospective residents had to promise to say three prayers daily for the Fugger family: one Lord's Prayer, one Hail Mary, and the Nicene Creed.

Construction of the Fuggerei houses, each with two apartments, was completed in several phases between 1514 and 1523. The community was walled and became a small city unto itself. Each apartment had three rooms--a kitchen with a wood burning stove, a living room that drew heat from the kitchen, and a bedroom. Following Jakob Fugger's death in 1525, Fuggerei continued to develop through the support of a charitable trust he had established in 1520. In 1582, St. Markus Catholic Church was built within the walls for Fuggerei residents. Twice in its history--once following the Thirty Years War and the other after being bombed in World War II--the housing complex suffered devastating destruction, but each time it was not only rebuilt but expanded.

Fuggerei has been in continuous operation since its opening and, even more amazing, the annual rent and prayer requirements have never changed. Today the low income housing complex is supported by the same charitable trust established by Jacob Fugger and is now

under the administration of the Fugger Family Foundation. It is headed by a Fugger descendant, Maria-Elisabeth Gräfin Thun-Fugger. Maintenance fees are also provided from tour fees through the Fuggerei, which now houses two museums, one of which is an exact replica of an original apartment. In addition to the 67 houses which contain 147 apartments, there is also a well, an administration building, and, of course, St. Markus Church. Each apartment has its own street entrance, all modern conveniences, and about 600 square feet of living space that includes a kitchen, a parlor, a bedroom and a small spare room. Rules for the residents include those originally set forth by Jakob Fugger, with the addition that residents will work a part-time job--such as gardening--within the Fuggerei. One long-time resident, Ilona Barber, works part time at the tour admission desk. In an interview for *Smithsonian Magazine*, she said, "Before coming here, you don't have enough money and you have to try to survive paying rent and life's expenses. But here, you have peace of mind." Astrid Gabler of the Fugger Foundation added, "The Fuggerei is more than just a cheap roof over one's head. Above all, the residents should lead successful lives despite being in need."

The San Antonio People of Faith Historical Museum would welcome photos and stories from those who have visited the Fuggerei--as well as stories and photos from those who experienced San Antonio's own first public housing, the Alazan-Apache Courts which Father Carmelo Tranchese helped establish. The St. Paul Community Center at 1201 Donaldson houses the museum. Call 210-733-7152 for information on when the museum can resume normal touring times. Digital photos and stories can also be sent as email attachments to [muldoonkathleen12@gmail.com](mailto:muldoonkathleen12@gmail.com).



**Herrengasse (Lord's Lane) is a street in Fuggerei; the vine-covered houses contain two apartments each. Photo courtesy of Culture Trip.**