



The sparrow on the roof of Ulm Minster is copper and was originally gilded.

The folk tale of Ulm's sparrow was recorded in writing for the first time in a travelogue by Carl Julius Weber dated 1826. It was described in detail for the first time in 1842 in a poem by journalist Carl Hertzog. Local expert Otto Häcker and historian Rudolf Biedermann have researched the origins of the legend, revealing that it has altered many times over the years. In the version printed here we have freely recounted the story with its central motifs.

#ulmerspatz  
[www.ulm.de/spatz](http://www.ulm.de/spatz)

Editor: City of Ulm, Public Relations (2020)  
Text: Marlene Müller, Translation: Paul East  
Photos: City Archives  
Cover photo: Frank Genet  
Printed on 100% recycled paper  
(certified with Blauer Engel)



Stadt Ulm

ulm

## The Ulm Sparrow



## The legend of the Ulm Sparrow

Once upon a time, the proud citizens of the Free Imperial City of Ulm wanted to build a minster. The church was to be beautiful and high. The master builder needed long wooden beams to support the roof. He sent his agents out of the city to obtain strong timber. And so off they went.

The agents merrily gathered tree trunks and stacked them across a cart. When they wanted to pass through the city wall it became apparent that the gate in the wall was too narrow. The beams protruded on both sides. The agents tried and tried, moving the cart this way and that, but it was in vain: When the beams were flush with the gate on the left, they protruded all the more on the right, and vice versa.

The entire city was in uproar about it. The citizens, the city councillors and even the mayor – who actually had an answer for everything – tried to find a solution. Yet no-one had ever experienced anything like it. No advice could be found even in clever books. There seemed to be just one solution: to tear down the gate.

Just when the confusion was at its peak, a little sparrow flew over the crowd. It was carrying a bright golden stalk of corn in its beak. It fluttered with this at the gateway. A small gap between the stones of the wall there provided space for a nest. To get the stalk in, the clever sparrow turned it lengthwise and pushed it in.

It was an epiphany for the people of Ulm. In no time at all they moved the beams and laid them lengthwise rather than crosswise on the cart. Then the crowd fell silent. Hesitantly the vehicle began to move. And lo and behold: inch by inch, bit by bit, the cart rolled smoothly through the gate.

The crowd were jubilant. People applauded the sparrow and he found a special place in their hearts. A monument was later erected in thanks on the roof of the minster: the figure of a sparrow with a stalk in its beak. And thus the sparrow became the unofficial – all the more popular because of that – symbol of Ulm.

Until 1888 the roof was adorned by a sandstone sparrow, which is now on display in the Minster.

The sparrow is a central figure in the traditional "Fischerstechen" jousting tournament every four years.

