ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

January 2017 – The Toy Making Tradition

Toys and Nuremberg go hand in hand. There's the International Toy Fair that has taken place every February since 1949, a must for toy manufacturers and dealers. There are the meticulously-made dolls' houses in the Germanisches National Museum, used in bygone days to help instruct daughters on how an important merchant's house was to be run. And then there is Nuremberg's splendid Toy Museum, opened in 1971 and housed in a fine old building with a Renaissance facade, located close to the church of St. Sebald. The collection spans centuries of childhood enjoyment: there are wooden toys from the Erzgebirge (the Ore Mountains) and Thuringia, where wood carving and wood turning on a large scale have traditions stretching back centuries. And, in contrast, there are the tin toys – steam engines and train sets, cars and trucks, animals and clowns – that were so popular particularly in the early twentieth century.

The first mention of toy making in Nuremberg takes us back to around 1400, when so-called "Dockenmacher" (doll makers) are mentioned in the city's tax records. These plaster or alabaster dolls were sold in market towns around Nuremberg. Later, in the 18th century, toys out of wood and metal were made in the city and exported far and wide, culminating in the model train sets manufactured by such famous names as Trix, Arnold, Fleischmann, Bub und Lehmann.

1927 Toy Car

This golden age of Nuremberg toy manufacture came to an end with the outbreak of the First World War and the end of international trade and the necessity to concentrate on the armaments industry. The economic crisis after the Great War and the rise of National Socialism made a rebirth of large-scale toy manufacturing impossible.

It was only after the end of the Second World War that the toy industry began to flourish again with names such as Playmobil, BIG and many others, explaining perhaps why, in 1949, Nuremberg was chosen as the location of the world's largest toy fair. To my mind a very fitting choice.

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