

“A peak at the 100-year-old history of the printed Advent calendar through one of the 24 little windows”

A special exhibition at the Doll's House Museum from 9th November 2002 to 2nd February 2003

Innovative parents

Different customs prepare us for the Christmas festivities long before Christmas Eve. The Advent calendar is one of them.

Since generations children have constantly asked how many days are left until Christmas. Some inventive parents in the middle of the nineteenth century thought of a good way to help children count the seemingly endless days until Christmas Eve. Christmas trees were set up on which the children were allowed to pin a small paper tag each day, which was inscribed with a biblical promise. In other families a different religious picture was hung up on the wall each evening. There were also Advent candles which burnt down a little bit each day and hand-painted Christmas clocks with chains and small presents or home-made sheet calendars.

The first printed versions

The first printed Advent calendars came out at the beginning of the twentieth century. An Advent clock appeared in 1902 in an evangelical publishing house in Hamburg. A few years later Gerhard Lang published his first Christmas calendar. It was handed out with issues of a Stuttgart paper as a present for the children of the subscribers. In 1908 the same Advent calendar entitled “The infant Jesus” was put on sale. It did not have any windows to open, but consisted of a printed cardboard card with 24 numbered squares and a small sheet of paper with the corresponding number of pictures. The children were to cut out daily one of the precious and colourful drawings and stick it on the allotted square on the cardboard card. Each day had its own verse of poetry written by Gerhard Lang.

A variety of developments

The cut-out calendar was followed by the lithographic versions printed by Reichhold & Lang, which consisted of a block of sheets of paper to tear off and stick in. In 1920 the first Advent calendar appeared as we know it today, with windows to open. There were versions which were filled with little presents. There were figurines to prop up, houses to build and best of all were the extravagantly made figurines which could be moved by means of cardboard flaps on the back. Gerhard Lang had to close down his company at the end of the 1930s as the production costs were no longer in relationship to the selling price. Up to this time he had published calendars representing about 30 different themes. At the beginning of the 1920s the Sankt Johannis publishers in the Baden region published religious Advent calendars which showed biblical verses in the windows instead of pictures.

Ban on publishing

Advent calendars were banned during the Second World War due to a lack of paper. During the years between 1942 and 1944 the central publishing agency of the NSDAP was given special permission to publish a so-called pre-Christmas calendar. All the Christian elements of Christmas were replaced and given new meanings. The war was given a predominant importance.

Revival

During the Second World War the spread of Advent calendars in Germany and the bordering countries was halted. However, by the beginning of the 1950s many of the publishing houses were producing Advent calendars again. The calendars had secular or sacred themes as they do today, whereby the sacred themes are in the minority. There were and are no limits to the diversity of themes. In the old days dwarfs and angels played in the snow-covered countryside. Nowadays the calendars show Mickey Mouse and Pingu.

Rationalisation

Due to cost factors the production techniques for Advent calendars have been considerably simplified. Whereas in the old days Gerhard Lang offered a selection of different types of calendars, nowadays the majority of calendars offer paper windows which can be opened. A century after their first appearance, young and old are still delighted by printed Advent calendars.

Come and let yourself be enchanted by the the special charm of old Advent calendars.

Opening hours

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| Museum/Shop: | Daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursdays until 8 p.m. |
| Café: | Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursdays until 9 p.m. |

Entry: CHF 7.-/CHF 5.-, children up to 16 years are admitted free of charge, and only if accompanied by an adult.

The whole building is accessible to wheelchairs.

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