

The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:

Christmas Greetings from the past

Nostalgic postcards from our childhood

The Doll's House Museum in Basel will be presenting from 26th November 2005 until 26th February 2006 a selection of impressive Christmas cards from the period around 1900 until 1950.

Where did postcards originally come from?

Every year millions of Christmas cards and other festive cards are sent around the world. Whereas originally they were rather classic cards, nowadays they are in the form of letter cards, SMS, MMS or e-mail cards. When did this custom first start and how did it come about?

Greetings have been printed, duplicated and sent out, ever since copperplate engraving and the art of printing books were invented more than half a millenium ago. Formerly, these greetings were not usually sent, but were given out by hand to family and relations personally. In those days, they were exclusively goodwill wishes for the New Year, as celebrating Christmas only gained importance in the families from the middle of the nineteenth century.

On 1st October 1869, the Austrian General Director for Post and Telegraphs introduced the first national postcard on which was printed a 2 Kreuzer stamp. This correspondence card measured 85 x 122 mm. and cost half the postage of a normal letter. Similar cards appeared in other European countries including Germany and Switzerland. These cards were initially only sent within the issuing country. However, this changed in 1874 with the establishment of the Universal Postal Union.

In the beginning there was a lot of opposition to the introduction of the postcard. It was felt that this was an attack on the personal sphere, as servants could read the messages written to their masters.

It is not clear who invented the picture postcard. It is said that Ludolf Parisius, a student in Göttingen and later a parson, designed the illustrated greetings card. In 1871 he drew miniature scenes and pictures of the countryside, which were distributed by the book printer and stationery supplier H. Lange. Soon Parisius designed new themes for his cards with the sole aim of giving joy to those who received them.

It was not until 1872 that the postal authorities accepted postcards created by individual people. These needed to have a stamp stuck on them. Greetings postcards experienced a decisive breakthrough in popularity thanks to the World Exhibition in Paris in 1889. They became a lucrative sales item which encouraged more postcard publishers to open business. The production of picture postcards was facilitated by the introduction of the fast lithograph print method, which enabled the mass printing of postcards. Halftone printing, autotype, letterpresses and heliography all came into operation at this time as well. The introduction of rapid copy machines led to the production of real photo prints, some of which were hand-coloured using templates. Other modern techniques used were embossing, punching and appliqué.

The postcard's heyday was from 1895 to 1918. By 1903 already, Germany had a large concentration of publishing houses and was an international leader in the manufacture of postcards.

Christmas postcards

The aim of the postcard was primarily to send greetings to somebody. Such cards were related to important festive occasions in the year, such as Easter, Whitsun, St. Nicholas and Christmas, New Year's Eve and New Year. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, an unexpectedly large number of Christmas postcards were in circulation in Germany due to mass production. The predetermined theme for the picture as well as the wording for the greetings considerably helped whoever was writing the postcards. Initially, mainly Christmas and Christian themes were used for the cards, whereas at a later stage the reason for the family festivity was depicted. A popular theme was the giving of gifts, which was often combined with Christmas greetings. Children were often

represented with their toys at the moment the gifts were given or shortly afterwards. Other popular themes were children, angels and the Christ Child, either decorating the Christmas tree or giving gifts. Such themes represent people's wishes for a peaceful and ideal world.

Current Special Exhibition

The Doll's House Museum will be presenting more than 130 nostalgic postcards from the period around 1900 until 1950. The predominant theme is children giving gifts, decorating the Christmas tree or accompanying Santa Claus with his sack of presents. Although they seem rather trashy by today's standards, these imaginatively created and hand-coloured festive cards are quite amazing. Teddy bears feature in almost all of these nostalgic cards.

Come and enjoy this contemplative insight into the beautiful and lovingly-kept tradition from the past.

Opening Hours

Museum, Shop and Café: Daily from 10 am. to 6 pm.

Entry

CHF 7.–/CHF 5.–

Children up to 16 years are admitted free of charge, only if accompanied by an adult.

There is no additional entrance fee for this special exhibition.
The whole building is accessible to wheelchairs.

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