

The history of Engel-dolls

Doll manufacturing in Mönchröden and establishment of the Edmund Knoch doll factory

End of the 19th century, doll manufacturing spreaded in Mönchröden/Coburg, now part of the city of Rödental.

In piggyback baskets, home-workers collected materials from their contractors located in world city of toys, Sonneberg. Usually by the week, the finished doll parts were delivered and wages were paid. For most of the workers, their living rooms were also their workshop.

The first doll factory in Mönchröden was founded in October/November 1896 by the 1866 born book-keeper Edmund Knoch and his one year younger wife Emilie, born Lipfert. They worked in her father's house, Rothinestr. 33, only in one room.

Soon, this location became too small and they had to move to another house in Rothinestr. 7. They also rented a small stock at this time.

In 1908, another move was made into their own factory building in Lange Wiesen 6, which still exists. In the beginning, they produced small porcelain dolls, papier-mâché dolls and dolls with fabric body, which were stuffed with wooden wool.

All these dolls had porcelain heads, mostly branded with the trade mark "A.M.", which stands for Armand Marseille in Köppelsdorf, who's name and models are well known and liked by the American doll collectors.

The first big success of the Edmund Knoch company were the small princess dolls, which had been sold mostly by exporters from Hamburg. Besides them, their biggest customers were the export companies from Sonneberg, the oldest toy city in the world.

The production of dolls stopped during the first world war and the workers were raised to make bullet baskets.

After the war, the contacts to the toy customers had to be build up new.

The Edmund Knoch company founded contacts to customers in Great Britain, Argentina, Switzerland and Sweden. Showrooms were installed in London, Glasgow, Buenos Aires, Zug and Stockholm, later also in New York and Los Angeles. Since 1921, Edmund Knoch had shown his dolls twice a year on the fair in Leipzig and several times also on the St. Eriks fair in Stockholm. At that time about 70 percent of the production were exported.

Death of the founder - accession of Otto Knoch

After Edmund Knoch died in 1934, his 1895 born son Otto came into the company and directed it together with his mother Emilie. By this time, the company had 30 employees and home-workers.

During the second world war, the production stopped again for years, while uniforms were made in the factory.

After this war, Otto Knoch and his 1910 born wife Helga (they married in 1935, her maiden name was Hutschgau) restarted the doll production. Their trade mark were the letters "E.K." with a crown over them.

Until 1948 most deliveries went to the wholesalers and exporters in Sonneberg, but the splitting of Germany also cut the trade channels that had grown for decades, forcing Knoch to find new channels of distribution.

With the growing impact of Mönchröden in doll manufacturing - three more important doll factories had been founded (E. Maar & Sohn in 1910, Drei-M in 1920 and Zapf in 1931) - the place obtained the surname "Bavarian Doll Village". Today, Rödental is named the "City of Ceramics and Dolls".

The materials have changed over the years from pressing compo, papier-mâché, casting compo, porcelain and rubber to hard plastic and vinyl, which is now the mostly used material for doll production.

When Helga Knoch died in 1975, Otto decided to retire, because his only son Lothar, who had become a lawyer, was not interested in the doll business. Otto Knoch died in 1985.

Acquisition of the Knoch company by Helmuth Engel

So, on January 1st, 1976, Helmuth Engel came into the company and rented it for three years.

Helmuth Engel, born in 1936, had already worked with dolls for all his life. His first contacts to doll business were as a child, when he had to help his mother making paper doll shoes and doll dresses in home-work. After he finished ground school and secondary school, he entered into the "Drei-M" doll company, one of the biggest doll-companies in Germany at that time. He worked there for 25 years, before he decided to run his own company.

Helmuth Engel married his wife Inge in 1958. They have three children in the years 1959 to 1962, another son follows in 1970.

When Helmuth Engel took over the Knoch-company in 1976, a new trade-mark was designed: an angel with a crown, placed in an oval.

In 1979, when the rental contract with Knoch expired, Helmuth Engel bought the Knoch company, but without the building, and moved to a larger building at Mönchrödener Str. 55, on the main road in Rödental, which is located very close to the old factory. Helmuth Engel bought this new building of the Emaso-E. Maar & Sohn doll-company, which had closed some years before. At the same time, the company's name was changed from "Edmund Knoch" to "Helmuth Engel".

In 1983, Helmuth's daughter Susanne enters into the company and learns about the manufacturing of doll dresses for several years.

Since about 1988, she supports Mrs. Gerda Völk, the dress designer, who had followed Helmuth Engel from the "Drei-M"-company to the Knoch company, and later to his own company. By 1992, Susanne Engel already created a part of the Engel collection on her own.

Markus Engel enters the company's succession

When Markus Engel, the youngest child of Helmuth and Inge Engel and designated successor of Helmuth Engel, entered into the factory in 1989, the company was changed into a corporation with name "Engel-Puppen GmbH".

Since several years Engel had negotiated with W. Goebel Porzellanfabrik, the manufacturer of the world-famous Hummel®-figurines, about the manufacturing and distribution of the M.I. Hummel®-vinyl dolls, which succeeded in 1995 and lasted until 2005. At the same time, Goebel gave Engel the license for the models of the famous American doll artist Charlot Byi®, which Engel manufactured until 2002. Both lines brought new groups of customers to Engel-Puppen, which influenced the business results considerable.

In the celebration year 1996, there were four anniversaries at Engel-Puppen. Besides the centennial of the company and the takeover of the company by Helmuth Engel 20 years before, the 60th birthday of president Helmuth Engel and the 65th birthday of senior-designer Gerda Völk were celebrated.

The very good export business in this year reached about 70 percent of the turnover, same as about 75 years before.

In the beginning of 1997, Helmuth Engel decided to transfer the majority of the company to his son. Markus Engel at the same time was appointed to a manager of Engel-Puppen GmbH.

Since November 1999, Markus Engel leads the business as the sole manager.

Acquisition of the costume doll line from H.u.E. Wilhelm

At the beginning 1950s, Heinrich Wilhelm and his wife Emilie, born Clarner, began to make Black Forest dolls in a former carpenter's workshop. Later their line was extended with original costumes from all over Germany and the surrounding countries.

Daughter Sonja entered the management of the company in 1967, and after Heinrich Wilhelm died in 1972, leaded it together with her husband Hans Völker.

In October 2001, Sonja and Hans Völker, both now aged over 70, decided to retire.

Engel-Puppen took over the models of the neighborhood company in their own assortment and continues to manufacture the original costume dolls in traditional German handicraft.

Acquisition of the Hans Völk dolls

Hans Völk, born 1893, bought the building of the old terracotta factory in Mönchröden. There, on December 8th, 1922, he founded a company specialized in punching and stamping paperboard together with his four years younger wife Martha, born Wendler.

From beginning they manufactured dolls from paperboard and papier-mâché.

Daughter Lotte, born Aug. 6th, 1923, and her husband Otto Buchner, born Nov. 6th, 1923, continued the company in next generation. Under Lotte Buchner's artistical influence, additional beautiful doll models were created.

End of the 1950s the manufacturing was changed to plastics. Selected dolls from the earlier papier-mâché collection were now manufactured from hard plastic in the blow-moulding process. Together with the rotational moulding technique, which came up in the late 1950s and was also installed in the factory, the Hans Völk company developed to a modern company in polymer processing.

After Hans Völk died in 1961, Lotte Buchner owned the company together with her mother and after Martha Völk died in 1969, she became the sole owner. Otto Buchner leaded the company together with her and was mainly involved in technical issues in the production.

When Lotte Buchner died on Aug. 5th, 1989, the ownership of the company went to Otto Buchner and his daughter Barbara. After Otto Buchner died on June 29th, 1995, Barbara Buchner continued the company on her own.

The own polymer processing department of the Völk company was given up in 1997 and Barbara concentrated the business on the manufacturing of nostalgic collector dolls and delivery of dolls and doll parts to other doll manufacturers.

Wilhelm, the custom doll maker whom Engel-Puppen had acquired in 2001 was also among Völk's customers. They had purchased undressed dolls and sold them after dressing them in original regional costumes.

In May 2002 Barbara Buchner decided to give up the doll department, and after short negotiations, the Hans Völk doll models were taken over by Engel-Puppen.

Also in 2002, on June 11th, the fifth family generation in the company's history was founded with the birth of Victoria Sundari Engel, daughter of Claudia and Markus Engel, who had married in 2001.

In 2003, Engel-Puppen introduced the nostalgic dolls of the Hans Völk trade-mark, which are still made in the original procedures of the 1950s, to their customers.

Together with the Wilhelm original costumes collection and the Hans Völk nostalgic dolls, the Engel-Puppen assortment grew to about 600 different doll styles since 2003, which are still manufactured in Germany by the Engel-Puppen staff.