

“Bei uns ist immer was los!” Feste in Rheinland

## „FASCHING IN MÜNCHEN“ / „CARNIVAL SEASON IN MUNICH“

Wie feierte man gestern Fasching? (How was Fasching celebrated in past?)

1. The first official recognition of Fasching came from city council in 1537, but the celebration goes back at least two centuries. It was first mentioned in German writings in 1359.
2. Early festivals featured sleigh rides, tournaments (lublgestach) in which knights jostled wearing small wooden barrels on their heads instead of helmets and first “Fast Night” dances were held in a special hall built by the council.
3. Masquerade balls began to appear at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A bulletin from St. Peters Church mentions a ball in 1828, which attracted 5,000 costumed Bavarians (including King Ludwig I).
4. Fasching activities which have become traditions continued to be added:
  - Well-organized balls began to be held in 1894.
  - The first “Fasching Prince” was chosen and crowned.
  - The first big Fasching parade was started, with its floats wandering through the decorated streets of the city.
  - In 1908 the first Munich “Fasching Society” (Narrhalla) was founded, with the purpose in maintaining the artistic standards of the event.

Fasching in the city has become more of a social occasion and has nothing more to do with the banning of winter and demons, which was the original purpose. Examples of this kind have remained in many mountain villages. An obvious explanation is the need to have a gay time before the time of lent begins.



During the last two centuries, the importance of this “safety valve” principle was not lost on monarchs, politicians and even dictators. During the period of Fasching, the ordinary citizen was able to lampoon official malpractices, provided he was in disguise and clothed his criticism in the proper amount of wit, without having to fear for his life. I remember that

Any organization worth its salt in Germany stages a Fasching ball of one kind or another. The hooplah begins on the dot of German “elevenies” — the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour of the eleventh month, mixes itself up with Christmas and the New Year’s revellery for almost two months, then breaks loose to assume its own identity up until Shrove Tuesday. 3000 balls take place in Munich, almost 300 costume affairs in Cologne, over 200 in Dusseldorf, more than 50 in Frankfurt. The International Criminalists stage a suitably cloak-and-dagger fiesta; the organizers of the Grand Ball of the Hairdressers give a prize for the most unique hair-do. Cafe Fischer in Grunewald holds an annual topless affair.

even during Hitler’s regime in the ’30s, the Fasching parades in Cologne managed to get in quite a few sly digs at the government, which would normally have resulted in dire consequences for the authors.

Learned historians have written thick volumes on this fascinating subject of “Fasching.”