



„Winnetou“-Büste in neuer Dauerausstellung

## A Tour of the Museum

On 1 July 2022, after two years of construction, the Karl May House Depot, designed by the architectural firm Raum + Bau from Dresden, was inaugurated. With its modern design, it discreetly complements the Karl May Birthplace. It provides optimal conditions for housing the collection and offers barrier-free access to the old building through wall openings on all floors and an elevator. A large window, adorned with a portrait of Karl May illuminated at night, decorates the staircase. The new entrance area with a ticket office and museum shop features glazing that spans the entire ground floor, decorated with Karl May's signature. The new building now welcomes visitors in an open and inviting manner. This impression is enhanced by a colorful four-sided panoramic painting above the ticket office and the front area of the new exhibition space. Created by Dresden artist Torsten Hermann (signet: TOHER), it depicts four settings from Karl May's stories – the local Erzgebirge with the Red Mill in Hohenstein-Ernstthal, the Wild West with a canyon landscape, the Orient with the Egyptian pyramids, and Sitara, the fictional land from his later works. Karl May is depicted as a citizen of the late 19th century and in the costumes of Old Shatterhand and Kara Ben Nemsi. The Sitara painting features a depiction of the main character Marah Durimeh next to a banner with the inscription "Sitara, the land of the noble human."

The tour begins by following the glass front, past the museum shop's display case, into the former "Grandmother's Room" on the ground floor of the Karl May House, which Karl May likely remembered best due to his close relationship with this remarkable woman. *"Grandmother, my father's mother, moved into the ground floor, where there was only one room with two windows and the front door. Behind it was a room with an old laundry roller, which was rented out to other people for two pennies per hour."* Here, visitors are greeted by the Old Shatterhand wooden sculpture by sculptor Siegfried Otto Hüttengrund in front of a panorama from the puppet film "The Trail Leads to Silver Lake," which can be used as a photo spot. Opposite, one can listen to a conversation between Karl May and

his alter ego Old Shatterhand, both portrayed by Dresden actor Robby Langer, discussing truth and fiction in the great writer's work through historical letter quotes. The wall display case features changing exhibits as a cabinet exhibition.

Before ascending to the first floor, it is recommended to take a look in the cellar, whose entrance is opposite the back exit: *"There was also a cellar, but it was always empty. Once, there were some sacks of potatoes in it, but they did not belong to us; they belonged to a neighbor who did not have a cellar."*

From 1995 until the opening of the Karl May Meeting Place in 2001, the lowered cellar vault was used as a meeting and lecture room. After necessary masonry repairs, the cellar was decorated with a scene from "The Forest King"/"The Bush Ghost" and thus included in the permanent exhibition. Now, the cellar contains two flour sacks labeled "Red Mill near Hohenstein," reminiscent of Karl May's childhood: *"We went to the 'Red Mill' and were given a few handfuls of bag dust and chaff waste to make something resembling food."*

A look into the garden described in the autobiography is also worthwhile. *"The yard was just big enough for the five of us children to stand without bumping into each other. Adjacent to it was the garden, which had an elderberry bush, an apple tree, a plum tree, and a water puddle that we called a 'pond'."* The garden's current design is modeled after Karl May's description.

A narrow spiral staircase leads to the first floor. *"On the first floor, the parents lived with us. There stood the loom with the spinning wheel."* On this floor, the recreated living and working space of the May family can be seen in its historical location. Its realistic depiction testifies to the social environment of May's childhood years. The home weaver's room, where one can feel the physical and mental confinement of that time, allows visitors a glimpse into 19th-century daily life and reveals more about Karl May and his books than many documents. In the back part of the room, historical photos depict the sometimes impoverished living conditions in Hohenstein-Ernstthal in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This is also evident from the May family tree, which impressively shows that nine out of fourteen children died early.

Climbing the spiral staircase again, one reaches the second floor, the former sleeping quarters of the May family: *"On the second*

*floor, we slept with a colony of mice and some larger rodents that actually lived in the dovecote and only came to visit us at night."*

In chronological order, the various stages of Karl May's life and his work are presented and appreciated. A human fate is revealed, which at times was even more adventurous than the stories of his heroes. In a small separate room, used as an office since the museum's opening until 2001, secondary literature about Karl May is displayed. Visitors can browse selected works on a touchscreen. Behind flaps with portraits of Karl May's famous contemporaries, positive and negative quotes about him and his work can be found on text panels. These show that he was anything but uncontroversial during his lifetime. The quote wall "The World about Karl May" impressively illustrates how Karl May's stories have captivated generations of readers.

As narrow as the Karl May Birthplace is, there is still a third floor: *"... and at the ridge under the roof, there was a dovecote..."*. In the museum's early years, this room was used as a "reading room" to provide interested visitors access to Karl May literature, which was hard to obtain in the GDR. Until the attic renovation (1997), only individual props from the DEFA puppet film "The Trail Leads to Silver Lake" were presented here. They are now embedded in the depiction of Karl May's extraordinarily versatile impact history. This also includes coins and medals, which are displayed in a separate showcase to the left of the stairs. At three screens – mounted on a decorative saloon bar – visitors can delve into the various facets of Karl May's impact history. In the window niche, the Winnetou bust created by sculptor Selmar Werner (1864–1953) has found its place.

It is now recommended to take the staircase of the new building, where numerous exhibition, film, and open-air theater posters can be admired. Visitors are accompanied by the well-known Old Shatterhand melody by Martin Böttcher (1927–2019). Through the north window, one can look towards Mittelstraße and Neumarkt.

Upon reaching the ground floor, turn right to enter the lowered exhibition area of the new building, past the accessible restroom, which also has a changing table for the youngest visitors. First, you reach the special exhibition area, where an annually changing show is presented.

The tour through the permanent exhibition continues thematically at the rear left corner of the building, where Kara Ben Nemsi and an Arab sheikh greet visitors in the Oriental tent. On the left is a text panel informing about Karl May's great Orient journey in 1899/1900. In the rear right corner of the building, the presented Indian artifacts indicate that the Wild West stories probably captivate readers the most. A replica of Old Shatterhand's famous bear killer can also be seen. Children can play with Indian figures or color oriental motifs at two tables in this area.

If the visitors turn around, they will see a colorful selection of exhibits showcasing various representations of Karl May stories on open-air stages. Among them are many program booklets, brochures, and tickets from well-known venues such as Rathen or Bad Segeberg, as well as a layout plan of the unfortunately short-lived Karl May stage in Hohenstein-Ernstthal. The display case is framed by a red curtain.

Not only have Karl May's works been adapted for open-air stages, but also for film. Particularly well-known are the film adaptations from the 1960s starring Pierre Brice and Lex Barker,

Karl-May-Haus und Depot bei Nacht



which are detailed on an information board. Visitors can admire some costumes from the East German film adaptations "The Buch Ghost" and "Prairie Hunters in Mexico," which were produced in the 1980s. Excerpts from both films are shown in a cozy film corner.

The tour of the Karl May House and the exhibition area in the depot building concludes with the foreign and translated editions of Karl May's works, which are a focal point of the museum's collection. The long display case and a colorful wall frieze made of cover images present numerous May editions from around the world. The impression of the international spread of Karl May's works is enhanced by listening stations where visitors can hear the introduction to "Winnetou I" in various foreign languages. These are grouped around a wooden sculpture, created by Siegfried Otto Hüttengrund, like the Old Shatterhand sculpture at the beginning. It depicts a globe on a stack of books.

In this exhibition area, there is also a small selection of visual arts related to Karl May. Among them is the Winnetou bust created by the Munich artist Vittorio Güttner (1869-1937), which captivates with its warm gaze.

Before leaving the house – certainly with the feeling of having experienced a worthwhile museum visit – visitors can find a suitable souvenir in the museum shop. Among other things, all the books of Karl May's collected works are, of course, available.

#### Literature:

All quotes from: May, Karl: My Life and Aspirations. Freiburg i. Br. 1910, pp. 13-15.  
(Reprint edited by Hainer Plaul, Hildesheim/New York 1975, 1982)