



Title 416

The **Gleisdreieck** in Berlin 1910, where the author's father was nearly killed when an *elevated* train fell from the top of its trestle of three transport levels which gave this traffic junction its name. Luckily he was unhurt and was able to give first-aid. *Courtesy Sammlung Eickemeyer Berlin.*

Fortunately, a collection of excellent photographs exists of what Berlin looked like, now a century ago. (L. Levy *Berlin um 1900* Hueber Verlag, Munich, 1986). This rare book contains 70 full page pictures, each about 230 × 170 mm, showing not only the architecture, but also the street life of the city. They are based on the *Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte*, Ismaning, Munich.

The first impression, when looking at these historical documents, is of the emptiness of the broad streets and avenues in the center of the city. All traffic is still horse drawn, from the occasional elegant equipage, with its two top-hatted grooms, the horse-drawn tramcars running on rails, the *Droschken* (taxis), and the heavy goods carriages, all relying on animal power. Even a dog-drawn cart with its load of vegetables for domestic consumption can be seen. I found no single automobile on these 70 photographs of 1900, although the first few cars were by then owned by rich and enthusiastic amateurs.

The public transport by Metro Line was much admired in Berlin. It was running as an Elevated on huge iron and masonry support bridges for many kilometers through the center of the city. It then submerged below ground and finished in open trenches towards the suburbs. At one point there were four traffic systems, one above the other; below the Elevated ran the Main Railway line, then below the road system and still lower the Landwehr Canal with its many long barges. All these are still in existence now and much used.

This crucial crossing was famous and is called *Gleisdreieck*, the 'triangle of rails'. There, on 26 September 1908, at a junction of two elevated lines, a collision occurred between two trains, and several carriages fell from their elevated rails to the ground below. By misfortune my father was travelling in one of these carriages, and miraculously was unhurt, able to give first aid to the many injured, in spite of the severe shock he must have sustained himself. My mother's horror, just about a week before the announcement of her engagement, can be imagined, when she heard of my father's involvement in the accident, until she was informed of his extremely lucky escape.

The second impression of the historical photographs is of the monumental prestige buildings on nearly all photographs, obviously the choice of preference for the photographer. Some of these buildings still exist a century later, no doubt much restored or even rebuilt after the destructions of World War II. Today they are equally impressive, as I found during my recent visits to Berlin. There is first the famous *Brandenburger Tor*, then the *Reichstag*, the *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche* (now mainly in ruins), the *Neue Dom* (Protestant Cathedral), the *Siegestsäule* and the Great Museums.