Object to old train station as a doll museum

By BRUCE CHADWICK

Perhaps playwright Henrik Ibsen, who wrote "A Doll's House," would have loved the idea of turning the marvelous 90-year-old Jersey City railroad terminal into a museum for dolls, but the idea is getting bad reviews from several local critics.

Jerry English, Department of Environmental Protection commissioner, yesterday announced the signing of a three-year lease to turn over 75% of the space in the terminal, now the museum in Liberty State Park, to Princeton philanthropist Frank Caplan.

Caplan will set up a "Museum of Fantasy and Play" which will include his private collection of 45,000 dolls, toys and pieces of international folk art.

The decision to let Caplan, founder of Creative Playthings Inc., start his doll museum has touched off a war of the toy soldiers in Jersey City.

TWO MEMBERS OF the Liberty State Park Commission will meet with Jersey City Mayor Gerald McCann today before issuing a formal request for the state to back out of its agreement with Caplan.

Morris Pesin and Audrey Zapp charge that the department entered into a secret agreement with Caplan and did not hold required public hearings in violation of federal law. They want the deal voided and the railroad terminal restored as a museum for transportation equipment and ethnic festivals.

"They sneaked this thing past us without asking our opinion and now we have a museum which is going to prevent any further use of the terminal and which is going to create a shopping center in a federally and state funded park. It doesn't belong there," said Pesin.

A spokesman for the department said no secret deals were made and that Caplan's museum will be nonprofit, charge no admission and turn over any revenue from museum shops to the operation of the museum.

CAPLAN HIMSELF doesn't understand why anyone would want to keep a doll museum out of Jersey City.

"New Jersey is 39th among the states in museums. This one is something very rare anywhere in the world. I would think everyone would be eager for it," said Caplan, whose doll and toy collection is worth over $1 million. I want the deal voided and the railroad revenue from museum shops to the operation of the museum.

TWO MEMBERS OF the Liberty State Park Commission will meet with Jersey City Mayor Gerald McCann today before issuing a formal request for the state to back out of its agreement with Caplan.

"At this point, I can't see the state changing its mind about this," he added.

DOLL

FROM PAGE ONE

...think this is just local politics. Most Liberty State Park commissioners favor it.”

Caplan said he may try to get the large toy collections of the late Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and publisher Malcolm Forbes housed in his museum, scheduled to open in 1982.

“I think this can be a great asset for the park,” said Caplan.

The Department of Environmental Protection agrees. "There is opposition to the museum, but not much. We have to think in terms of how best to serve the people of New Jersey. We think this museum will be a great attraction for people of this state and other states,” said Assistant Commissioner Donald Graham.

GRAHAM SAID THAT several public hearings on the doll museum were held in addition to special meetings between department officials, Caplan and Liberty State Park commissioners.

"At this point, I can't see the state changing its mind about this," he added.