

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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All About Dolls

At this season of the year, it is most appropriate that we write and talk about dolls. According to the encyclopedia, dolls are a comparatively modern usage. Dolls were not given as presents until the fourteenth century and then not to children. By the sixteenth century they were fairly common, and now most parts of the world produce characteristic, charming puppets, from the corn-husk man of the American Indian to the fine-lady-dolls of Paris, and the super-realistic doll of American manufacture. Fashion dolls of the fourteenth century played a part in the development of costumes.

At Venice, a French doll dressed in the latest mode was annually exhibited on Ascension Day. The King of France sent to the Queen of England a doll made to her measure, with a full wardrobe made by court tailors. One Paris hairdresser held a show of 30 dolls displaying the latest hair styles, and dolls brought the styles to the American colonies.

By the 17th century dolls were sold in Paris for playthings for both boys and girls. By the 19th century their manufacture on a large scale had begun, Germany early became important, with the industry centered about Lüneburg. Paris was in the lead with the speaking, walking, shut-eye, real-hair type. Wood, china, papier mache, fine porcelain, wax, and bisque were successfully used, and rubber after the vulcanizing process became known.

Homemade dolls have always been important, and the beloved ragdoll has now evolved into a commercial product. Paper dolls have great variety and interest.

During the holiday season there is an interesting display of dolls at the Stevenson House on Houston Street in Monterey. There are china dolls, bisque dolls, rag dolls, and paper dolls in a special case — the display loaned by various families of the peninsula.

At the Old Custom House, although not dolls, there is a very special display depicting the manger scene at Bethlehem — with Mary, Joseph and the infant, Jesus — all the little figures coming from Mexico. The creche has been arranged in a sympathetic manner by Mrs. Mary Greene, the curator of the Custom House Museum.

Having just returned from Tucson, Arizona, we wish to include in this issue of the Diary a bit about the colorful Kachina dolls, which one sees all through the southwest.

We read somewhere and saved the clipping of the history of this attractive little doll of the Indians. "In a wash of the little Colorado of Arizona, a Hopi Indian — his banged, black hair, and red headband contrasting with the leather finish of his lined and wrinkled face — scrambles from stone to stone. He is on a quest as old as his people themselves, a quest for the cottonwood root from which he will design and carve a doll as a gift to his son.

"Later, his head covered with a green and white mask surmounted by an elaborate headdress, his body painted black with white half-moons, he will join in single file of dancers as they chant in the plaza of the pueblo. In solemn awe, his son will receive the gift, a symbol of the supernatural beings flitting through the half-light of the Hopi religion."

If you have ever traveled the highways of colorful Arizona and New Mexico, stopping at the Indian trading posts or gas station and store, you have seen these fascinating carved figures of Hopi Indian dolls lining the shelves. Primitive in line but elaborate in decoration, these Kachina dolls are splashes of color as bright and intense as a painted desert.

It is said that there is a meaning in each dot of black paint decorating the figures, in each feather, in each diagonal line of brilliant yellow. In their religious ceremonies the Indians in the winter, spring and summer months, with-masks and costumes, impersonate these tiny figures. It is in the likeness of the human impersonators that the Kachina dolls are carved, according to those who have made a study of the Hopi traditions.

The Kachinas, or masked impersonators, are to the Hopi children what Santa Claus is to us, with the delightful exception that the Kachinas make their appearance during the first half of the Hopi year, not once as does Santa Claus, but more than half a dozen times. The gifts they bear the children are the Kachina dolls — carved in their own likeness — fruits and sweets, and miniature bows and arrows. They are part of their religious training.