

Doll collecting isn't just for kids anymore

By JIM GERSBACH
Of the Emerald

Baby-blue eyes stare fixedly out of decapitated heads as crowds mill about stacks of naked bodies and assorted limbs.

A well-dressed woman picks up a child's foot and asks, "How much is this?"

Such body trading was a featured attraction when Eugene-area doll clubs recently held their sixth annual Doll and Toy Festival at the Lane County Fairgrounds.

Doll festivals bring together

dollmakers and collectors from around the West Coast to buy and sell dolls, doll accessories and toys of all sorts.

Dolls are one of mankind's oldest toys. Prehistoric Indian girls played with dolls made from cornhusks.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, dolls and dollhouses were considered fine art, and girls received elaborate dolls dressed in the fashions of the time.

The Eugene doll convention, however, caters to the adult who collects dolls.

"The doll thing is very underground," says Susan Denham, a dollmaker from Cottage Grove who has made porcelain dolls for four years.

"It's a quiet thing. Dolls are sold from one person to the other with no advertisements in the paper."

Denham says doll collectors range from those who buy dolls ready-made to those who purchase only the finished body and make all the clothes themselves.

Like most dollmakers, Denham purchases molds of antique dolls from companies in the Southern and Eastern United States. She then makes replicas to paint and dress according to her clients' whims.

Most buyers choose dolls with the same hair and eye color as their family members, Denham says.

Prior to World War I dolls were numbered, Denham says. And beginning in the 1920s they were given names.

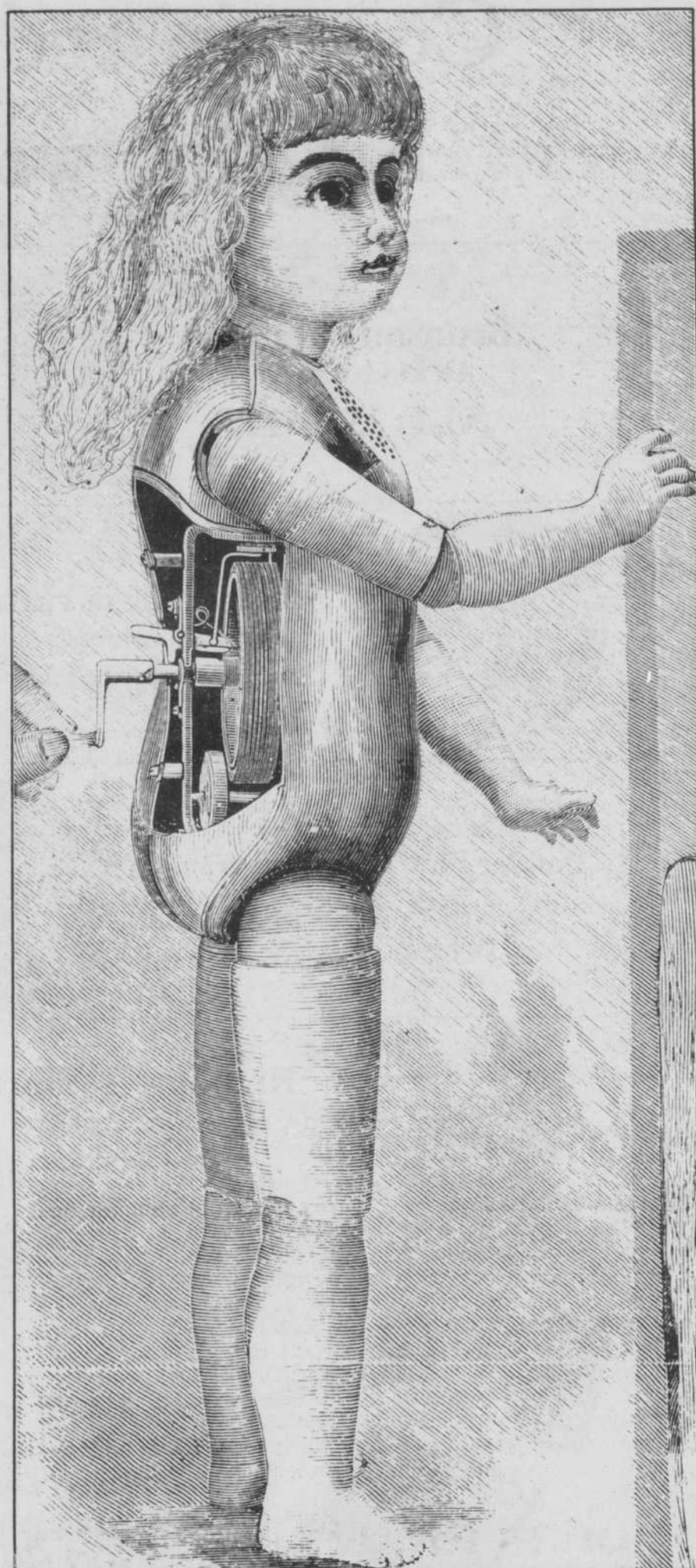
"They found out that dolls with names sold better so naturally they began naming them, Denham explains.

Another dollmaker at the festival specializes in dolls with personalities. Sharon Hays, from Joseph in eastern Oregon, makes dolls out of fresh Red Delicious apples that shrink to the size of a walnut when dried.

She peels them with a household paring knife, carves out a face, dips them in salt water and dries them for a week. After molding the shrunken and wrinkled face into its final shape, Hays inserts wooden beads for eyes, tints the apple faces with watercolors to add a life-like hue and sprays them with acrylic to preserve them.

Hays says she finds most of the characters for her apple art in the cowboys, farm wives, ranchers, trappers and Indians of eastern Oregon.

One is an old school marm reciting from a book. Her eyes peer sternly over the tops of her spectacles. A bright red apple stands on her miniature desk, a present from an unseen student.



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