

Donation of the Month

J.D. Kestner Doll
2009.30.1

Donor: Janet Chappelle Henderson





Almost every child has that one favorite toy they take everywhere. More often than not the toy doesn't last very long. However, there are a select few who survive the destructive little hands of the one who loves it so much. As favorite toys go, a baby doll is quite often a girl's most favorite possession and often there is more than one. Some girls never outgrow their attachment to dolls, surrounding their adult lives with life-like porcelain or vinyl dolls of all shapes and sizes. This life-like large size doll was the favorite of Charlotte Montez Buttry Chappelle. Born in 1905 Montez received her doll early in life and treasured it.

This wonderful doll was made by the J.D. Kestner Company of Waltershausen, Germany between 1910 and 1920. On the back of her neck is stamped JDK Made in 18 Germany. The company was started in the early 1800s by Johann Daniel Kestner Jr. (JDK). The first dolls made had paper mache heads with wooden bodies. In 1860 he purchased a porcelain factory in order to produce his own bisque and glazed heads. By 1900 Kestner was possibly the only doll maker in Germany who made the entire doll in his factory. Often doll makers produced either the body or the head and acquired the other parts from other manufacturers. He made many dolls for the American market with the most popular being the Kewpie doll and Bye-Lo Baby. The company continued to make dolls until 1938.

Considered a character baby doll this doll was molded with a sweet expression and wide blue glass sleepy eyes. While the doll no longer retains her original clothing, her beautiful full expressional face and open mouth have kept their original hand painted color. Her composition body has kept its original color in most cases; however, some wear and discoloration to her hands and feet show that she was played with. She is fully articulated at the neck, shoulders and hips, with slightly bent legs and arms allowing her to sit unaided.

Thanks to a master of his craft and the care of a child this doll has survived the destructive little hands and the passage of time. Donations such as this remind one of the innocents of childhood and the joy of roll play. We can imagine the fun had and stories told to and about the child and her constant companion. We outgrow this period in our lives, and some no longer have the time or desire to revisit this innocent period in their lives. However, this doll will bring out the child in all who are near her.

“Dolls in the Looking Glass: the Joy E. Orozco Collection”, Waltershausen--Kämmer & Reinhardt-J.D. Kestner, featured on <http://www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/changing/orozco/waltershausen.html>

“J.D. Kestner Jr. Co. – Dolls 1820-1938 Germany”, Doll Reference, featured on http://www.dollreference.com/jd_kestner.html