

Columbian Dolls

By Joy V. Bliss and G. L. Dybwad (#1926)
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Columbian Dolls and chair, 1993 UFDC Convention, Chicago, Illinois

Because of our long-standing interest in the World's Columbian Exposition (WCE), imagine our delight at finding a display of what first appeared to be pristine Columbian dolls and Columbian memorabilia at the Doll Museum in a most unlikely place—Albuquerque. On closer inspection, the display actually consisted of Columbian doll replicas and souvenirs from the 44th annual United Federation of Doll Collectors



An Original Columbian Doll from 1893

(UFDC) convention held in Chicago in 1993, the Columbian centennial year.

Our curiosity aroused, we made an appointment to visit the owner, Rosalie Purvis. For our meeting, she had removed the display from its locked case for photographs and had invited Leslee Ann Harrison, former Region 3 director (Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico) of the UFDC, who had attended the convention in Chicago with her. From Ms. Harrison, we learned about the 18,000-member UFDC. About 1600 members attend the national convention each year. Upon registration in 1993, each attendee received a female Columbian doll replica; about half of the attendees purchased the male “companion doll.” The wooden chair was made by one member’s husband and given to all conventioners.



Rosalie Purvis and Leslee Harrison with 1993 UFDC Memorabilia, Albuquerque Doll Museum

The 1993 convention booklet, *The World's Columbian Exposition Revisited*, referred to as the “journal,” is a beautifully illustrated book, 28 x 21½ cm, 104 pages in tan wrappers. In her introduction, the convention coordinator wrote: “This beautiful journal is your introduction to a week spent revisiting the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.” The front cover by artist Karen Prince shows “Florence” holding her Columbian doll. A real Florence visited the Exposition, and in 1944 her granddaughter,

a UFDC member, was presented with an unpublished book, “Florence Goes to the Fair,” made by her grandparents, recounting her grandmother’s experience.

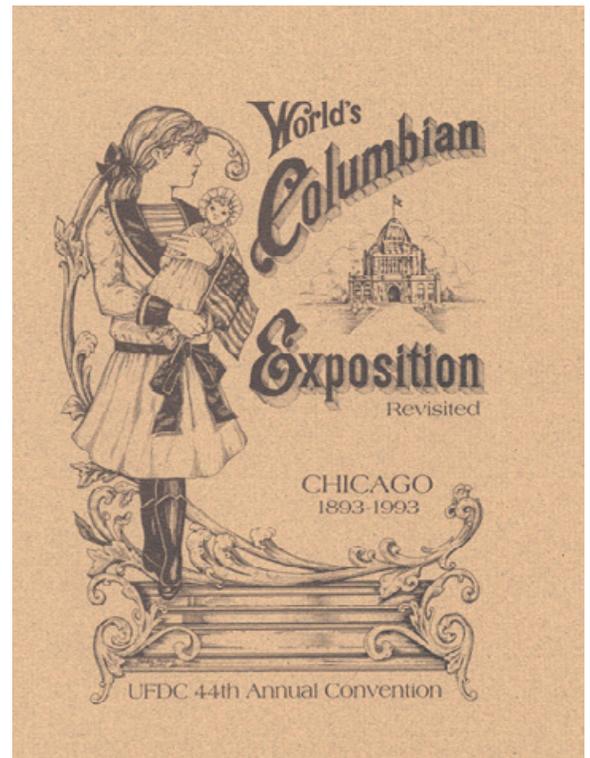
Each page of the journal has a decorative border and a vignette of a WCE exhibit or building. Postcards, tickets, advertising pieces, building and grounds, scattered throughout the book are in both black and white and color, and two pages are devoted to great photographs of a WCE pop-up book. John Axe wrote a fine eight-page illustrated summary of the WCE. This is followed by an informative six-page illustrated biography, “The Palmers,” by Faye S. Wetherhold, which recounts Potter and Bertha Honoré Palmer’s early lives, marriage, and their involvement in the WCE—he as the vice president of the first board of local directors of the Exposition and she as president of the National Board of Lady Managers. Other beautifully illustrated articles are about the Ferris wheel, Columbian half-dollar, Columbian airship—a Christmas ornament doubling as a fire extinguisher for trees lit by candles, Columbian Exposition spoons, and American dolls of the late 19th century.

The “Columbian Doll” originated in 1892 with Emma E. Adams of Oswego, New York. In her article in the journal, “The Columbian Dolls and Gems of the Columbian Exposition,” Mary Lou Ratcliff wrote: “Emma was known for her portraits and floral painting done on canvas, china, and three-panel screens.” In 1891 Emma visited her sister Marietta in Chicago. Because of her artistic talent, a friend encouraged her to make a cloth doll much like the one the friend had purchased at Marshall Field’s and to paint its face. In the process, Emma redesigned the doll, took a sample to Marshall Field and Company, and received an order from them. Back in New York, the doll business became a family enterprise with the help of Emma’s parents and Marietta, who moved back home to become Emma’s business agent and designer of doll clothing. Marietta’s advertised that the dolls were painted in oil by experts and the clothes were removable, “the same as a child’s.” Bodies were made of firm unbleached muslin stuffed with fine excelsior, and faces were of white sateen. Cloth was introduced between the muslin and excelsior to give a smooth surface, and seams and darts were placed to yield lifelike flexibility. After stuffing arms and legs with cotton, the fingers and toes were carefully stitched. Sizing was applied and the limbs painted pink. Emma hand-painted all the faces with rosy cheeks, brown or blue eyes, a heart-shaped nose, and brown or blond painted curls and waves. A final coat of shellac was applied so the faces, hands, and feet could be easily washed. Boy, girl, and baby dolls were made, as well as a few rare black dolls.

It was Mrs. Potter Palmer who encouraged Emma Adams to display her dolls at the Exposition. Emma named them “Columbian Dolls” at that time. Approximately 100 dolls were entered and sold, and she received a Diploma of Honorable Mention after the Exposition closed. This diploma is at the Oswego County Historical Society and is reproduced in the journal.

Emma, who died at age 42 in 1900, never copyrighted her dolls. Marietta continued the business; her daughter, Esther Ruttan Doyle, documented firsthand all the information from her mother. Had it not been for Esther’s interest, the history of “The Columbian Doll” would never have been recorded.

Charity Smith, artist, and Celia Hazlitt Smith of Ithaca, New York, also designed stuffed dolls. In 1892, they patented their commercial print cloth dolls and novelty toy animals. Celia sold thousands of yards of their most popular dolls and animal novelties at the Exposition and to Marshall Field and Company. In September, 1992, Arnold Print purchased two painted designs of a sailor boy from Celia. The boy was a flat doll designed in two pieces with outstretched arms and legs apart. His printed costume was detailed with a jacket and short striped trousers in bright blue, red, and gold and with brown leggings. He was completed in time for the WCE and was named “The Columbian Sailor.”



UFDC Journal Cover, 1993 © Karen Prince

At the UFDC in Chicago, the WCE related programs were “Chicago Past,” “Welcome to the Exposition,” “American Cloth Dolls, and “Columbian Baby,” as well as a workshop on the “Columbian Cone Puppet” and two luncheons: one featuring Chicago fashions of 1893 and the other, the ever-popular Paper Doll luncheon. In addition, field trips took participants to centennial exhibits and Chicago areas related to the WCE. One of the things Leslee Harrison remembers most from her time at the 1993 convention was the big exhibit of early cloth dolls.

The 1993 Paper Doll Luncheon chairman, John Axe, and three other artists created a beautiful 30½ x 22½ cm., seven-page souvenir paper doll booklet on stiff stock. It features clothing of the Gay 90s, five national costumes for “Florence” from countries that participated in the Exposition, and a Bertha Palmer paper doll with her costume on the back cover.

Although we are acquainted with many WCE books, we find there is very little written about dolls at the WCE. Bertha Palmer originally conceived of the Children’s Building as an educational exhibit, and among items such as books, the Board of Lady Managers requested donations from toy manufactures all over the world. Emma Adams probably received her invitation in this manner. The response was not as great as they would have liked. In *Book of the Fair*, Hubert Howe Bancroft briefly mentioned dolls from France being exhibited in the Children’s Building. In *The Fair Women*, Jeanne Madaline Weimann gave a lengthy description of the building but just noted there was an alcove on the second floor for an exhibit of toys and games; dolls are not named, but they certainly could have been included. In discussing the profits of the building, Weimann wrote: souvenir spoons, children’s books, “and other items” were sold at the Children’s Building. “Other items” could refer to sales such as Emma’s.

“The Columbian Doll” lives on. “Miss Columbia,” the doll that from 1899 and 1902 traveled around the world raising money for children’s charities, has frequent visitors at the Wenham Museum in Wenham, Massachusetts, and on July 28, 1997, the United States Postal Service issued “The Columbian Doll” stamp as one of twelve dolls featured on a commemorative sheet, “Classic American Dolls.”



“The Columbian Sailor,”
1893 By Celia Smith



“Columbian Exposition
Sailor Boy, 1993” By
Madam Alexander



“The Columbian
Doll” Stamp, 1997



Tour Doll, “Miss Columbia”

Doll Museum and Shoppe, owned by Rosalie Purvis, is located at 5201 Constitution NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87110.

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G. L. Dybwad and Joy V. Bliss frequently contribute World’s Columbian Exposition articles to the *Fair News* and wrote the books *Annotated Bibliography: World’s Exposition and Chicago Day at the World’s Columbian Exposition*. The Book Stops Here, 1108 Rocky Point Ct. NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87123. E-mail: gldybwad@comcast.net Visit our website at www.bookstopshere.com and view our Columbian Exposition publications.

