

The Scribe

HISTORY CENTER OF OLMSTED COUNTY

FALL 2020 Newsletter



HISTORY CENTER
OF OLMSTED COUNTY

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GRATITUDE

Perhaps, like me, you are feeling particularly grateful as we head towards the end of summer. Maybe you have reasons for gratitude, related to family, friends, or work. When we re-opened after the Stay-at-Home Order was lifted, every time a visitor walked through our doors, I expressed my gratitude with a hearty **"Welcome to the History Center!"**



Wayne Gannaway
Executive Director

Without question, all the staff and board of directors are grateful for the generosity shown by our members, donors, and business sponsors. We asked for your help shortly after the pandemic closed much of the state and you responded with financial support. When anonymous donors challenged us to raise a \$20,000 match, you responded again. Your generosity is especially impressive given our challenging times. We hope you've enjoyed the local history stories we've been posting on Facebook and Instagram as part of the History Mystery campaign. My favorite is the "Who Stole the Pickles?" Truth is stranger than fiction. Thank you to all who have given this year. We are grateful for your support.

We are also grateful for Pandemic Pictures for choosing us as the location to stage their Friday night drive-in theatre. The rental income from that enterprise has been especially welcomed this year. But more than that,

GRATITUDE - continued on page 3

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Christine Rule
President

While my descendants researching genealogy will probably know me as the Creepy Doll lady (yikes!), my interests and experience are focused around education, storytelling, strategy, community, and being a mom. Nothing teaches you more about the passage of time than being a parent. I have been involved at the History Center of Olmsted County (HCOB) for four years, and am continually amazed by the passion and dedication of our staff, volunteers, and members. It is an honor to serve you as President of the HCOB Board for the next two years.

I am proud to report that the HCOB Board spent the last 12 months focused on improving our financial stewardship. We contracted Smith Schafer to help us create a new accounting system and financial reporting structure. This was accomplished through many hours of work by board members, staff, and Smith Schafer representatives over the winter months. Thank you! This allowed us to quickly respond to the financial effects of the pandemic by identifying impacted areas, monitoring of monthly cashflow, and obtaining a PPP loan.

Success requires playing both defense and offense well. We must find new ways to serve our community and generate revenue. Fortunately, we already have that playbook in our Strategic Plan.

The board has developed new committees around the three strategic aims: Expanding our Foundation, Extending Our Reach, and Upholding Our Legacy. Committees re-prioritized their objectives based on the ability to both generate revenue and be safely implemented during the pandemic. We are:

- Expanding Our Foundations through partnerships, increasing board engagement in governance and development, and testing new fundraising concepts.
- Extending Our Reach through partnerships, improving use of digital platforms, and Covid-friendly programming.
- Upholding Our Legacy by improving the visibility of the collection, care of our historic buildings, and collecting important stories and artifacts related to the pandemic and local businesses.

Partnerships appear twice in the list above because HCOB belongs to all of us: county residents, visitors, cities, townships, businesses, farms, and YOU. I look forward to seeing you at the History Center soon!



it's great to see so many movie-goers coming to the HCOC property to simply enjoy a movie and popcorn on a summer evening. A shout out is also owed to the Roosters vintage base ball team. The pandemic ended their entire season, yet they were okay with hundreds of cars parking on their field. We're all looking forward to next season.

Our gratitude should be extended to our ancestors. We all should be thankful for the generations of women who fought for the 19th Amendment, giving the right to vote to women. This is our common civic heritage. If you haven't yet, I urge you to see our newest exhibit, "The Onward March of Suffrage."

As we head into autumn, we're continuing with the theme of fun with the Creepy Doll Contest 2020. Do you remember the Creepy Dolls? The nine dolls from our collection that rocked the internet! Those dolls have passed the baton to nine new dolls and we have a lot more Creepy Doll fun on tap—find the details in this edition of *The Scribe*.

I hope to see you on Facebook or, better yet, at the History Center.

Speaking of gratitude, **THANK YOU** History Mystery donors!



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THE \$20,000**

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FROM IDOL TO PLAYTHING: A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOLLS

By Krista Lewis, Archivist, CA

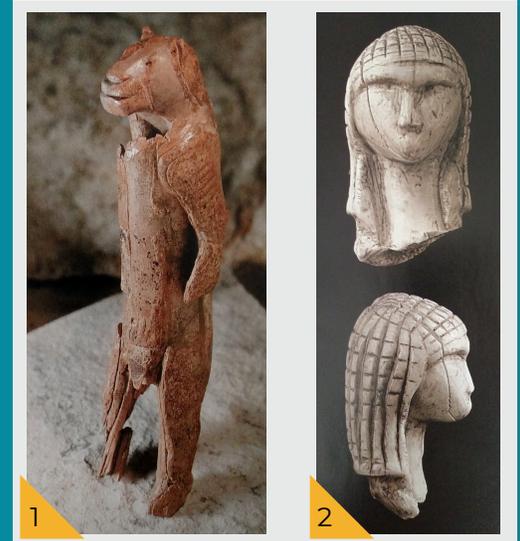
These days there are a mind-boggling variety of children's toys, but a mainstay across time and place has been the doll. In fact, it may be the oldest type of toy and it is one found in nearly every culture. Looking at the archaeological record, our prehistoric ancestors fashioned figurines as early as 40,000 BCE (Before the Common Era). While not exactly dolls in the sense of the word we use today, these figurines share similarities to today's dolls, making them a sort of precursor.

The most obvious similarity is their size. Since people were nomadic hunter-gatherers when these figurines were created, their possessions had to be portable. Dolls as we know them, as with most toys, are also small. They are sized to their intended audience (children) and designed to be physically handled. Another similarity is that they are modeled on the human form. Though ancient figurines are not often true-to-life renderings, they are representative of the natural world. Dolls today still represent the human form. And just like their ancient predecessors, their proportions are not always scaled to reality.

Perhaps the similarity most important, yet hardest to understand because of its intangibility, is that we imbue them with meaning. We cannot be certain why most ancient figurines were crafted. Perhaps they were a form of creative expression crafted during spare moments of inactivity, much like a whittler would do today. Some have theorized that they were crafted for spiritual, ritual, or magical purposes, and in that way took on symbolic meaning, perhaps to do with fertility or successful hunting. On the surface, toys are not objects of deep meaning or enduring value. Yet most of us can look back fondly on a favorite toy, dolls among them. It is the intangible memories and associations we link to dolls that gives them personal meaning and value, that turns them into symbols of our childhood.

While human figurines date back tens of thousands of years, the doll as a toy is relatively newer. Evidence of an alabaster doll was found at a Babylonian site and wood paddle dolls with flowing hair were found in Egyptian graves dating to 3000-2000 BCE. Ancient Greeks and Romans used dolls, often in religious ceremonies. Dolls with movable limbs, articulated joints, and removable clothing appeared near the beginning of the Common Era. Cultures throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas used dolls as toys, as well as devices for teaching and ritual.

The modern manufacture of toy dolls began as early as 1413 CE with doll makers based in Nürnberg, Germany. In fact, Germany led the world in doll production from the 16th to the 18th century. Paris was another center for doll making, though largely focused on fashion dolls.



▲ 1. Hybrid figure with a human body and feline head, Germany, ca. 40,000-28,000 BCE. Mammoth ivory, height 11".

2. "Dame a la Capuche (Woman from Brassempouy)", France, ca. 22,000 BCE. Ivory, height 1.5".



▲ 3. *Boy on a toad, China, Late Zhou period (mid-900s CE). Bronze, height 4".*

4. *Shirley Temple with a doll in her likeness, ca. 1930s.*

The 19th century introduced ceramic doll heads to the world, as well as socket joints, movable eyes, and talking dolls. Shortly after the American Civil War the United States developed its own robust doll making industry. During this industrial age of the 19th century, doll production truly became mass-produced. The introduction of plastic in the 20th century, with its durability and easy, economical production, took this to new heights. As celebrities and pop culture characters grew in popularity in the early 20th century, so too did their representation in doll form, a trend that has persisted to this day. And since its introduction in 1959, the biggest doll of them all – Barbie – has dominated the doll market. While dolls remain popular as children’s playthings, adults now seek them out as collector items. The reasons for collecting dolls are many, and it is reasonable to think the root of it may reside in that intangible connection we have to them from our childhood.

The dolls held in the History Center’s collection represent roughly the last 150 years of doll manufacture, and the oldest ones are showing their age. Limbs are missing, paint is worn off,

faces are scuffed and scratched, eyes are stuck in a half open position, clothing is stained. Arguably these are signs that the dolls were well-loved. The children who owned them used them as the interactive toys they were meant to be. The damage inflicted during their period of play may have been minor, but factors of time and decay have exaggerated that. Their resulting appearance is both familiar and unfamiliar, and this dissonance induces a feeling of “creepiness”. A recent study about creepiness concluded that the feeling centers on uncertainty and ambivalence. Dolls, especially the more lifelike ones, fit neatly into this realm of uncertainty because while we know they are not human, they are made to look human. The contradiction is unsettling to our instincts. The decay of an already lifelike doll adds to the creep factor. Oddly enough, (certain) things that seem repellent are also things that can generate the most interest. And thus the popularity of the History Center’s creepy doll contest. (For more on that story, see the article titled "Creepy Doll Contest: The Little Idea with Big Results".)

The history of dolls, of how they were made and how they were used, is a long and complex one that we can only touch the surface of here. What is clear is that people have an affinity with dolls, whether they were hand-crafted from stone millennia ago or made of molded plastic on an assembly line last week.

So long as dolls remain a part of our human story, they will be collected and shared by museums and history centers like ours.

FROM IDOL TO PLAYTHING - continued

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A FEW TIPS ON PROPER DOLL CARE

By Melissa Amundsen, Asst. Preventive Conservator
Midwest Art Conservation Center
www.preserveart.org

Dolls are complex artifacts made of many different materials depending on style and age. Common materials include: plastic or vinyl, matte bisque, shiny china, painted compressed board, and wood or plant fibers. Materials used in the body, head, and internal structure may differ from one another. Because of this, components of the same doll may respond differently to fluctuations in temperature and humidity which can cause damage like cracking and breakage. Therefore, it is a good idea to store dolls in the main area of the house as opposed to an attic or basement where there are extremes in humidity and temperature.

Storing dolls face down is best. This is especially important with sleep eye dolls, since eyes are controlled by a weight mechanism which can weaken and detach, damaging the dolls head, or lead to deformation from pressure of the weight. Stationary eyes can be vulnerable to gravity in storage and may become detached if stored face-up. Face down is also beneficial as it reduces matting and flattening of the doll's hair.



High-quality storage materials are recommended. Acid-free boxes and tissue can be purchased from craft and art supply stores. Tissue can be used to support the dolls' clothing while stored to prevent them from creasing and folding. Polyester batting wrapped in washed cotton fabric can support the face and body.

Doll clothing and other doll parts may be vulnerable to common household pests such as clothes moths. Keeping the dolls free of dust with the use of a soft brush or gentle vacuuming will help, however do not dust a doll that has actively flaking paint.

When displaying or storing the dolls, it is important to keep them out of direct sunlight to reduce risk of fading, especially the clothing. If a doll has broken components, distortion, flaking paint, or heavily soiled textiles, it is recommended that you reach out to a professional conservator. Misguided repairs with improper materials could cause more harm than good and result in irreversible damage.

CREEPY DOLL CONTEST: THE LITTLE IDEA WITH BIG RESULTS

By Dan Nowakowski, Curator

Last year while looking through our museum collection for an artifact to promote collection awareness, we settled on dolls. After some brainstorming, we decided to create a simple contest around the dolls that looked particularly creepy. The contest, which began in September and ran until Halloween, consisted of letting the public vote through social media on nine dolls we picked from the collection. The doll with the most votes, or "likes", was announced on Halloween. Little did we know what we had started.

Not long after the first post on Facebook, Minnesota Public Radio contacted us wanting to run a story about the contest. Soon after their story ran, other media outlets started contacting us, including the AP, which spread the story further. Eventually, CNN approached us about running a story. Right away we noticed more views on our website and Facebook, along with an increase in votes for the dolls. People started leaving comments and asked about the history of the dolls. Some even offered their own dolls for the contest. The new posts gained a significant following. A big surprise and highlight for us was when original *Star Trek* cast member George Takei tweeted about our contest. This subsequently brought interest from international news and radio stations. Outlets in Canada, Japan, and England reached out to us for interviews and permission to post about our contest. Suddenly, we had international fame!



Interest in the contest and dolls was so strong we decided to bring the dolls offline and create an exhibit, which brought us a burst of foot traffic. We certainly succeeded in bringing greater awareness to our collection, and hope to build on that this year with another contest and expanded activities.



IT'S BAAACK: CREEPY DOLL CONTEST 2020

The History Center has chosen nine new dolls from its collections to be contestants in the 2020 Creepy Doll Contest. Voting will run on Facebook and Instagram on October 14-28. Motivated fans can see them "live" at the History Center and cast an in-person vote beginning October 1st. Staff will announce the winning Creepy Doll on Halloween night at the virtual Creepy Doll Cocktail Party.



Last year's winner.

It's true, a cocktail party! Because of COVID-19, the History Center is inviting fans and followers to join in crowning the winning Creepy Doll virtually. The night will feature a live band and a special cocktail for each doll.

But that's not all! There will also be a Creepy Doll Costume Pageant. Yes, you read that right. We're inviting fans at home to create a costume inspired by the creepy dolls in our collection for a chance to win a one-of-a-kind prize. Submissions are due by October 28th.

To join us and our squad of Creepy Dolls for a virtual Trick-or-Treat celebration unlike any other, visit olmstedhistory.com.

The History Center's newest exhibit, "The Onward March of Suffrage," examines the history of the suffrage movement leading to the 19th Amendment from the national to the local level. Visit the exhibit to learn how several local women were part of gaining the right to vote and helped bring suffrage to Olmsted County.

VOTES FOR WOMEN: OLMSTED COUNTY'S SUFFRAGE ACTIVISTS

By Amy Hahn, Researcher

Newspaper publisher Joseph Alexander Leonard and suffrage activist Sarah Burger Stearns brought the suffrage struggle to Rochester during the 1860s. Articles praising suffrage and criticizing legislative suffrage failures filled Leonard's *Rochester Post*. Stearns so impressed Leonard with her intelligence, charisma, and eloquence that he asked her to be a contributing writer. She wrote about suffrage and other social issues for the next six years before moving to Duluth where she became one of Minnesota's most notable suffrage leaders.

Pioneer Marion Sloan and Edith Graham Mayo, Mayo Clinic's first nurse anesthetist, also advocated for suffrage. Sloan attended Susan B. Anthony's 1877 Rochester speech, and served as Minnesota Woman's Suffrage Association Vice President and chair of Olmsted County's first Republican women's organization. The National American Woman Suffrage Association bestowed her a certificate of recognition, and Sloan voted for the first time in 1920 at age 74. Graham Mayo served as 1910 president of the Women's Civic League,



▲ L: Certificate presented to Marion Sloan
R: Sarah Berger Stearns, date unknown

and was a member of the organization when the first woman was elected to the school board and the first policewoman was hired. In 1920, she served as the first chair of the Olmsted County's League of Women Voters. As a teenager, Graham Mayo wrote, "all women have as good a right to vote as men...if everything was as it should be they would vote" in an essay titled "Woman's Rights."

Additional local women involved in suffrage organizations included Sarah Wright Clark and Julia Cutshall. Wright, a respectable corset designer and store owner, was vice president of the Rochester Woman Suffrage Association in 1869, and Cutshall was Olmsted County Equal Suffrage Association's first president in 1899. Newspapers gave glowing reviews of Cutshall's speech, "Do Women Know Enough to Vote?" The *Olmsted County Democrat* declared her arguments proved women were well qualified to vote and the *Record & Union* stated she proved "that if women could vote, politics would be thereby purified."



The exhibit's name is from a paper presented at the 1916 district convention of southeast Minnesota Woman's Christian Temperance Union chapters.

MAYOWOOD MANSION: "THE STORY LIVES ON"

By Kathy Dahl, Mayowood Tour Manager

With Mayowood Mansion closed until the end of the year, the Mayowood story lives on with exhibits at the History Center. Currently, an exhibit featuring artifacts from the Mayowood Dining Room is on display. Chuck and Alice Mayo's children have shared many stories about guests and celebrations that took place in this room and these stories are also highlighted in the exhibit. In November and December we will change the exhibit to instead feature Alice's Sitting Room, also known as the Christmas Room.



▲ Mayowood dining room.

Our 2020 Christmas Tour theme "Puttin' On The Ritz" will instead be offered in 2021. This should be a very fun 1920s theme boasting lots of "Glitz & Glamour" to be sure. At this time we are also hopeful that our regular season tours can begin in mid-March of 2021.

As always, we appreciate your support of Mayowood programs and activities.

FOLLOW US: SOCIAL DISTANCING WITH

By Darla Buss, Member Services Coordinator

You may have noticed that the History Center's social media presence has increased significantly this past year. This is partly due to the incredible work done during our First Annual Creepy Doll Contest in 2019, which brought worldwide viral fame that increased our Facebook followers from 3,674 in September of 2019 to 4,708 in November of 2019. That platform continues to thrive today with followers totaling 5,500. The other significant factor to our increased social media presence is of course the COVID-19 pandemic.

With closures and health safety concerns dramatically reducing visits to the History Center, we have made a concerted effort since March to remain connected to you, the local community, and the world at large virtually through our social media platforms. Our daily posts on Facebook and Instagram include an array of historical, educational, and experiential information relevant to not only the History Center and its events but to today's culture and how it relates to the rich past of Olmsted County.

On our newest platform, YouTube, you will find whimsical, historical, and fact based videos posted by staff and volunteers alike. Children can enjoy books read by volunteers with our "Hooray for History! Story Telling" series, while adults can learn about local history books from the authors themselves in our "In the Author's Own Words" series. Other videos highlight archival finds and exhibits.

There's truly something for everyone.



◀ Curator Dan "Sherlock Holmes" Nowakowski solving a History Mystery with his assistant Watson on YouTube.

WE'RE STILL COLLECTING COVID STORIES.

HAVE YOU TOLD US YOURS?

It has been one rollercoaster of a year so far. Locally, nationally, and globally we have had to confront challenges on many fronts. How we respond to those challenges and why are an important part of our historical record, of the story of us. As home to the stories of Olmsted County, it is the History Center's duty to keep a record of the events surrounding this outbreak and other events as we experience them here.

That's why it's so important we hear from you!

Please take a few minutes to tell us the story of your experience. There's no time like the present, and we guarantee you future generations will be appreciative.

Stories from Our Community

“

Today is my 48th birthday! We will be celebrating at home by ourselves having take out on the deck for dinner instead of getting together with friends or family and going out to eat. A small sacrifice in the scheme of things.

”

Visit our website to learn how to share your story

www.olmstedhistory.com

DRESSED UP AND DRESSED DOWN:

A TALE OF TWO LIFESTYLES

In February we began what was meant to be a short-lived exhibit called "Dressing the Abbey", which featured costumes from the Downton Abbey television series. We paired the costumes with clothing, furniture, and accessories from our own collection that fit the elegant and fashionable lifestyle of the 1920s. The display was scheduled to come down in early April, but then a major pandemic changed everyone's plans.

Since the Abbey will be with us for the foreseeable future, we thought it was time we highlighted the lifestyle of average Olmsted County residents.

"Dressing the Farm" juxtaposes rural life with wealthy urban life, showing visitors that the 1920s were not all glitz and glamour.



Be sure to swing by the History Center to check out our latest exhibit, "Dressing the Farm".



THE 46TH ANNUAL DAYS OF YESTERYEAR: A COVID-19 CASUALTY

By Ted Kueker, MHRT Historian

▲ *MHRT threshing grain, July 2020.*

The agricultural preparation for the 46th Annual Days of Yesteryear had an early and promising start with the April seeding of the oats and an ideal growing season, resulting in a good crop that was ready for harvesting on July 20. Though the show had been canceled, the crop was there to be harvested and a stalwart crew of Mechanical History Roundtable members took to the task. The MHRT crew adhered to the tradition of performing the harvest with farm equipment from the days of yesteryear. The traditional Parade of Power during which as many as a hundred units have been exhibited was reduced to the number of tractors needed to power the harvesting implements. Typically, as many as a thousand people have been on the grounds, but this year's number was considerably less. A Bible scribe writing about another situation once said, "...the harvest was plenteous, but the laborers were few."

So on July 20 Irv Plitzuweit drove Dave Schmitt's 1956 Oliver Super88 tractor which powered the John Deere binder which was manned by Tom Strain. The binder, which probably dates back to the 1940s, successfully tied all but two or three of the bundles. The bundles became sheaves of golden grain that created an idyllic setting comparable to the scenes from the Stoppel farms in the days of yesteryear.

Before the threshing could be done the four acres of hay needed to be mowed, and Dave Schmitt took on that task with a Massey Ferguson mower powered by a Ferguson T035 tractor, from the 1960s. A mechanical failure made it necessary to adapt the mower to John Koenig's 1957 John Deere tractor. The hay crimper was powered by Tom Strain's 1952 IH MD tractor. The hay was raked and eventually baled with John Koenig's 1950s John Deere Baler powered by his 1957 JD 6520 tractor. This part of the harvest yielded 189 bales of hay.

July 30-31 were the threshing days when the grain was separated from the straw by an Avery Thresher powered by a 1948 Minneapolis Moline tractor – these are MHRT owned implements. Since Minneapolis Moline was to have been the featured line at this year's show, it was fitting to have this tractor and Marlys Ohnstad's 1953 MM R tractor involved in the harvest. The oat straw was baled with the same equipment that baled the hay. The oat grain was sold to the Dee family, probably for livestock feed, and the straw to various parties for miscellaneous uses.

After the work had been done the threshing crew sat in a circle in the shade having lunch, as was done in The Days of Yesteryear.



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