

Contemporary Collectibles: Bogart's mom - Maud Humphrey, children's book illustrator

by *Linda_Rosenkrantz*

There are some famous old ads for Mellin's baby food showing a chubby and adorable rosy-cheeked baby. Who would possibly guess by looking at them that the model for those illustrations would grow up to be cynical tough-guy actor Humphrey Bogart? And that they were drawn by his mother, the successful and well-known commercial artist Maud Humphrey?

Born March 30, 1868, to a prosperous family in Rochester, N.Y., Maud Humphrey displayed an early talent for drawing. She began taking evening art classes at the age of 12, and became one of the founding members of the Rochester Art Club, soon settling on her chosen medium: watercolor. While still in her teens, she landed commissions for black-and-white illustrations in children's magazines.

In 1886, at the age of 18, she made her way to New York City to study at the recently founded Art Students League, doing the full course of drawing instruction and painting from casts and live models. From there she made the requisite voyage to Paris for further study at the Julian Academy.

Upon returning to America, having perfected her distinctive dry watercolor technique, her career really took off. This was a propitious time to enter the field, as it coincided with a boom in illustrated books made possible by newly developed printing techniques, high-speed presses and innovative four-color printing processes.

Humphrey began creating illustrations for magazines and children's books, specializing in idealized depictions of babies and children. She preferred to sketch them from life while they were at play, often dressing them in elaborate dresses and hats. These sketches were in great demand by advertisers of such products as baby food (including the depiction of baby Bogey, whom she didn't hesitate to costume in Victorian girls' clothes) and Ivory soap, and were also seen frequently on greeting cards, calendars and sold as prints.

Humphrey married Dr. Belmont De Forest Bogart in 1898, the same year she designed her one baby book, "Baby Records," published in 1898 by Frederick A. Stokes Co. It is a profusely illustrated volume highly sought after by collectors as most representative of her work. Available with a choice of one color, six color or 12 color illustrations, as well as with different covers. It depicted elaborate, if typically sentimental, scenes – including a baby strewing rose petals, a little boy watching his baby sister in a her pram, a child taking its first steps, another holding a stocking in front of a Christmas tree, a first birthday celebration, a child saying her prayers with angelic mother looking on, another opening a valentine card – all executed in a soft, pastel-toned palette.

Many of Humphrey's most popular books were published by Stokes, which at one time controlled the rights to reproduction of her watercolors. For Stokes, she collaborated with her sister Mabel on two books,

"Little Heroes and Heroines" and "Children of the Revolution." Later, she worked with noted Boston chromolithographer Louis Prang, who popularized the Christmas card in America. Humphrey also worked with Grey Lithographic Co. in New York, for whom she did frameable prints called "yardlongs" as they were 36 inches long.

By this time, her drawings had made her name a household word. Humphrey was one of several highly successful, highly paid women artists (also including Jessie Wilcox Smith, Bessie Pease Gutmann, Queen Holden, Frances Brundage and others) of the late 19th and early 20 the century. They earned as much as \$50,000 a year at a time when the average illustrator was making about \$4,000.

At a certain point, though, Humphrey turned away from painting curly-headed cherubs to do more sophisticated work. She became art director of the prestigious The Delineator magazine, and did more fashion illustration, both for magazines and for pattern companies.

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