

Contemporary Collectibles: Frozen Charlottes charm collectors

by *Linda_Rosenkrantz*

The name Frozen Charlotte may sound like a delicious new dessert, but anyone in the doll world will tell you that it is in fact a kind of charming porcelain doll made primarily in Germany from about 1860 to 1940, and a favorite of collectors today.

Known in Germany as Baderkinder, or Bathing Dolls (as they could be played with in water, either at the beach or at home, in the bathtub or a pail of water), and also as pillar dolls and solid-china dolls here, there are several explanations for the Frozen Charlotte appellation. The most widely accepted is that it derives from an old American pre-Civil War ballad attributed to William Lorenzo Carter about a girl named Charlotte who set out in a sleigh with her lover Charles on a bitterly cold Vermont night in a flimsy dress and promptly froze to death just before they reached the ball. It ends with the moral:

"Now, ladies, when you hear of this

Think of that dreadful sight,

And never venture so thinly clad,

On such a winter's night."

Frozen Charlottes are completely unjointed one-piece molded dolls. They are made of china, though some are crude bisque, were usually undressed (which some Victorians found immoral), displayed clenched fists and bent elbows, and had molded or painted black or blond hair (and occasionally molded bonnets or hair ribbons, despite their nudity), and some had painted-on boots, shoes and socks.

Varying greatly in size, they ranged from 1 inch to almost 20, with the majority 1 to 4 inches. Pudgy nudes of unspecified sex, most of them are considered to be female because of their various feminine hairstyles, though through most of the 19th century male and female children were often dressed and coiffed alike.

Some collectors identify Charlottes they consider to be male as Frozen Charlies. The bathing doll was a staple of the German porcelain factories for at least 60 years, but the majority are unmarked, so that the individual factories responsible for them are unknown and identification is almost impossible. Two factories known to have made them are Conta & Bohme and Kling & Co.

Since the small dolls were so cheap, little girls would form a collection of several of them. They were sometimes called "teacup dolls," because they were sometimes placed in teacups to cool the beverage off at tea parties, then given as party favors for the guests to take home. Another tradition that grew up around the dolls was having them tied onto ribbons, baked into birthday cakes or puddings, then pulled out by the girl guests when they were served their portions, and again taking them home as keepsakes.

The smallest, cheapest Charlottes retailed for one cent when they were made (in fact they were commonly referred to as "penny dolls"); the larger, better-decorated dolls were, of course, considerably more expensive.

Here's how the different types and sizes are valued today, according to the latest edition of "Doll Values, Antique to Modern" by Linda Edward. It should be noted that the highest prices are for those with unusual hairdos - particularly "Alice"-type hair, a short bob with a molded ribbon - molded eyelids or molded-on clothing. And also note that in 1976 a large number of reproduction 15- to 16-inch "Charlie" figures were made in Germany, and are impossible to tell apart from the originals.

- All china, 2-3 inches - \$150-200; 14-15 inches - \$500-\$575.

- Black china, 5-6 inches - \$190-\$250.

- Blond hair, flesh tones, 9-12 inches - \$500-\$800, 14-15 inches - \$800-\$1,000. With molded clothes or hats, 3 inches - \$250-\$375; 8 inches - \$425-\$475.

- Bisque with fancy hair and molded boots, 4-5 inches - \$275-\$300.

- Stone bisque, one piece with molded hair, 3 inches - \$18-25, 6 inches - \$30-\$40.

Linda Rosenkrantz has edited Auction magazine and authored 15 books, including "The Baby Name Bible" (St. Martin's Press; www.babynamebible.com). She cannot answer letters personally.

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