At the turn of the century, Pierre Imans of Paris was the leading manufacturer of wax mannequins for department stores and boutiques, worldwide. The loveliness of this wax mannequin with inserted human hair should help explain that fact. A totally fashion-fueled business, Pierre Imans consistently captured early twentieth-century elegance. Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop Archives.

On occasion, in the doll and antique collecting world, we collectors blindly use popular phrases to refer to certain dolls, even though the phrase may incorrectly describe the doll. For instance, some collectors refer to wooden dolls as “Queen Annes”, even though Queen Anne had been dead for years when the dolls were initially produced. English woodens are a type of doll made over a long period of time, just not that early. I am not thrilled with inaccuracies, but on the other hand, the term does allow communication among doll collectors.

It seems that in my small world of antiques and art, names of British royalty are used to identify more epochs and objects than does any other method. William and Mary, Georgian, William IV, and the biggie – Victorian – all are monarch-inspired names that conjure mental images and if the terms are used correctly, mental images of English things.
should be appearing in our heads. Americans have even jumped on the Victorian bandwagon, as in the Victorian house, Victorian furniture, Victorian silver-plate, Victorian morals, although referring to American products and ideals. Technically, if one is to use the term “Victorian chair”, you should be referring to an English chair. What is so interesting, is that at the same time Queen Victoria reigned, Abraham Lincoln was President of the United States, but we don’t call items from that era “Lincolnian” and the reason is, in my opinion, that our national leaders are not given the same hereditary passions such as Victoria, whose reign lasted sixty-four years...perhaps if our presidents served that long...

I find as a collector of antique dolls, it is impossible to separate them from their country of origins and its history, people, inventions, fashion sense, industry, social customs, religion, politics – all of those things that, on the surface, don’t seem to have anything to do with our dolls, in fact, really do. They absolutely mirror the societies of their times.

If you don’t believe me, go to your local toy store and you will experience today’s reality and its effects on playthings. The shelves will be stocked with very few dolls, but in their places you will find an abundance of brightly colored, electronic toys and games. There are very few things that require imagination – the unreal, reality of today.

Surf through the channels on television and you will see one dose of reality after another. One recent, pleasant, exception, a diamond in the sea of rhinestones of television programming, was a British “reality” show entitled Manor House Rules. Set in turn of the century England, it offered an intimate glimpse into the running of an upper-class household – from top to bottom – gritty to glorious and glorious is definitely better. All that was missing from the program was a little girl running around with a lovely doll under her arm, which reminds me of another pet peeve – filmmakers just don’t ever manage to get the dolls right.

Anyway, it was that excellent program which renewed my interest in a special, yet brief period known as the Edwardian Era: really just a flash in history, but very important to our modern world. Named after King Edward VII of England, whose reign lasted from 1901–1910, Edward succeeded his mother, Queen Victoria. King Edward’s years on the throne seemed to illuminate, to emphasize, the previous blackness of the later years of the Victorian era, giving way to a bright, gay and bubbly first decade of the twentieth-century. The King had waited a very long while for his turn at the throne, actually spending more time as heir apparent than anyone in British history! His and his Queen’s influence on the era cannot be over estimated and, for the British Empire, it was a great time, economically.

“She was taller than other women currently seen in the pages of magazines...” It’s as if Kestner had used Charles Dana Gibson’s, Gibson Girl, as a model for their kid body. Note the elongated limbs and the specially modeled arms. There is also extra padding in the chest, suggesting a bosom. Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop Archives.
Above, larger-sized S & H 1159 models have a much different look than their smaller sisters. This twenty-four inch size bears molded eyebrows, a feature not found on the more diminutive models. A silver, leaf-form tiara and ostrich plumes crown this Gibson Girl’s classic coif. Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop Archives.

Top right, petite in stature, but grand in style, is this Edwardian ingénue by Cuno and Otto Dressel. The most outstanding feature of this little beauty is the fact that her production continued into the “roaring twenties” when she was utilized as a flapper doll in that new age. Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop.

Right, at over thirty-inches, this Edwardian lady is among the largest we’ve seen. A product of Simon & Halbig, her mark is 1199, an extremely rare mold. Her French papier-mâché body is remarkable for its molded breasts and shapely limbs. Due to her large size, one could wonder if she was intended as an exhibition model, as opposed to a play doll. Marvelous just the same! Collection of Julie Blewis. Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop.
A truly remarkable wardrobe doll from the early years of the twentieth-century is this S & H 1159 on a marked Jumeau body. Although a very lovely doll in her own right, her most unusual feature is her original and extensive Paris-made trousseau of teenage fashions, including oversized hats for each and every costume. Remember, many colorful bird species were driven into extinction by the strong demand for millinery extravaganzas during these years.

Photos Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop Archives.

His beautiful wife, Queen Alexandra, of Danish birth and royal, yet humble beginnings, was widely loved by the English people, and considered quite down to earth, yet somewhat paradoxically, a fashion plate. Her ultimate influence on the doll world cannot be ignored, because after forty years of a Queen in black mourning attire, this lovely lady with a classic figure, who sported the latest fashions, had to have been a great inspiration to doll makers in Germany, France and England. If Queen Alexandra wore a diamond choker, so did all of the fine society ladies, from London to even Cincinnati, Ohio. If she walked with a limp, so did the other ladies of British high society.

The King was on the throne during a time when upper class Americans and the newly rich sent their daughters in droves to England to improve their family lots. However, with titles such as Lady, Duchess and Countess, came the most memorable title of all – the “Dollar Princesses”, who made news in America and of course, greatly influenced the era through fashion, as well.

Interestingly enough, one of the most influential ladies of the Edwardian era wasn’t even a real person. She was a fanciful creation – a cartoon, although an exceedingly lovely one! She was taller than other women currently seen in the pages of magazines, infinitely more spirited and independent, yet altogether feminine. She appeared in a stiff shirtwaist, her soft hair piled into a chignon, topped by a big plumed hat. Her flowing skirt was hiked up in back with just a hint of a bustle. She was poised and patrician. Though always well bred, there often lurked a flash of mischief in her eyes. She was not however, by my aforementioned strict standards, an Edwardian, because she was as American as apple pie. She was the Gibson Girl.

This pen and ink vision of loveliness was the creation of Charles Dana Gibson, an American illustrator for popular magazines of his day. He said of his girl, “she was the American girl for the whole world”. The antics of the Gibson Girl were taken right out of the daily newspapers and her style out of the fashion magazines of the day. Her popularity was soon reflected in the doll world and before long, toy store shelves were filled with lady dolls that emulated the youthful style of the Gibson Girl.

One of Charles Dana Gibson’s models for the Gibson Girl
Dazzling is the word that comes to mind when one sees this doll in life. At first glance, you’re dazzled by her wide smile, and then further drawn under her spell by her warm personality and overall beauty. A Simon & Halbig character lady, she is marked 1388. Rosalie Whyel Museum of Doll Art. Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop Archives.

was the stunningly beautiful Evelyn Nesbit, known in New York as “the girl in the red velvet swing”. Evelyn Nesbit started out as a Floradora girl in the Broadway show of the same name (the next time you see a doll with a Floradora label on her chest, you will remember that she is named after New York’s most beautiful woman) and posed for many illustrators of the day including Gibson. However, none of their illustrations brought her fame like her participation in the Stanford White murder trial – eventually known as “the trial of the century”. Evelyn’s husband publicly shot White dead at a popular New York restaurant – all quite shocking, even by today’s standards. Surely, after the sordid event, Mr. Gibson was left to question the wholesomeness of the inspiration for his creation, but by that time the “Gibson Girl” had already taken on a life of her own.

Like the vast majority of their dolls, Kestner’s Gibson Girl is always of the highest quality and can be found in sizes from 10 to 21 inches. The smaller sized dolls are typically on combination cloth and leather bodies with molded boots, which to me stylistically appear as if they belong on dolls of an earlier time, but are indeed, correct. The larger sized dolls possess the patented Kestner body that is similar to the riveted, jointed-leather body that was used on their child dolls, although with a slight modification. Dolls have also been found in various body combinations incorporating leather and cloth.

Today, doll collectors are left with solid evidence of that slice in time, as just about every doll-making firm immortalized the Gibson Girl. The most well known must be the Kestner model #172 and she is in my opinion, the Gibson Girl “with an attitude”. She’s the only model of a lady doll that I know of that is sometimes marked with the words “Gibson Girl” incorporated in the paper label on her chest. However, many times she will simply bear the Kestner crown mark that helps collectors date the doll after 1911, when that mark was initially used by the Kestner firm.

There is no doubt that Mr. Gibson could look for further inspiration in the joyful, yet unpredictable goings on at the White House with President Theodore Roosevelt’s family under its roof. The antics of the president’s oldest daughter, Alice, drove him to say, “it is easier to run the country than to manage my daughter Alice!”

Continued on page 55
A 21-inch Pierotti wax doll of King Edward VII dressed for his coronation. He appears incredibly lifelike testifying to the genius of Pierotti. Human hair was inserted into the head and face. He has a muslin body, wooden lower legs and feet. Lynda and John Christian Collection.

Photo John Christian.

English doll makers celebrated the crowning of their long-awaited King and Queen with gusto, producing many portrait dolls of the extended royal family members. Shown here is one of those models – a rare and lovely portrait wax with the unusual feature of a realistically bent arm. Her trained court presentation gown is both original and spectacular.

Lynda and John Christian Collection.

Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop Archives.

Both glass sleep eyes and set eyes have been found, but all were originally fitted with plaster pates. All of the Kestner Gibson Girl models that we have handled were born with stationary necks. That being said, I have heard accounts of the classic Kestner Gibson Girl possessing a swivel neck feature. I know of no photo of this doll, but she must be waiting for a collector to discover her and that lucky collector will truly have found a prize!

Kestner is responsible for another version of an Edwardian lady and that is the model #162. On a composition lady body, she is not really a portrait of anyone in particular. Basically, she is a very high quality girl doll face, on a lady-type body of the highest quality and an excellent model for costumers that are interested in dressing dolls in the Edwardian style.

When one looks at the vast Kestner production during the “bisque era” with the hundreds of different models of children that were produced, noting that among them there is really only one true lady, the #172, one must realize both how rare they truly are and that they should be absolutely appreciated.

Displaying them can be a bit of a challenge. Because of their unique qualities, they can be difficult to mix with other dolls. One collector I am acquainted with has come up with a fabulous way of displaying them and that is in a group, sort of like a Gibson Girl convention. There is nothing that compares to the sight of a gaggle of Kestner 172 Gibson Girls all holding their heads high!

The Simon and Halbig firm of Walterhausen, Germany, created some of the most choice Edwardian era lady dolls. The S & H firm also supplied the French conglomerate, SFBJ, (the former Jumeau, Bru, et cetera) with heads and that is why collectors will find dolls such as the lovely Simon and Halbig mould #1159 on marked Jumeau bodies.

I repeat, Simon and Halbig created some of the most stunning Edwardian era lady dolls – period. The most beautiful to me is the rare mold #152.

Continued from page 23.

The Princess of Wales, the future Queen of Edward VII, photographed circa 1883.

Portrait painters of her day stated that Alexandra possessed the most beautiful shoulders and bosom. Although to us, the jewelry may seem excessive, the Princess considered the amount worn here “light”.

The Princess of Wales, the future Queen of Edward VII, photographed circa 1883.
A delightful character who loved her pets and always seemed to have an ample supply, Queen Alexandra was loved by her country, loved by her family, and was responsible for spoiling her grandchildren. In fact, it is reported that her highly indulged grandchildren were the first to utter the phrase “but Granny – Queen said I could”.

I personally believe that particular mold was intended to be a portrait of Queen Alexandra. Since the 152 head has been found on both German-style bodies and those of French manufacture, we can suppose that the dolls were not only available as whole dolls in Germany, but also exported to France for assembly and marketing in that country. So far, the 152 has been found with painted intaglio eyes, exclusively. The Simon and Halbig 152 is an Edwardian lady of the highest class.

Simon and Halbig created several other lady doll models during that period in time. There are dolls with open/closed mouths with full smiles showing dazzling teeth, (also found on all combinations of French and German bodies) and, unlike the Kestner ladies, they all have pierced ears, which lends a sense of maturity and sophistication to the dolls.

Many of the smaller German firms produced lady dolls in the first decade of the twentieth-century as well. Cuno and Otto Dressel, one of the oldest recorded doll makers, assembled the first teenage lady of the Edwardian era. Simon and Halbig supplied C.O.D. with the heads that are marked either C.O.D., 1468 or 1469. They are exemplified by a lovely face with a closed mouth and glass eyes, accompanied by an outstanding composition body, made by the C.O.D. firm. The body bears an unusual feature – feet sculpted in such a way that would require them to wear high-heeled shoes. If you’re of the lucky sort, your doll will have retained its original heeled slippers!

It is important for the modern collector to realize that the primary goal of any doll company was to turn a profit and they all followed market and fashion trends. While true that the production of these lady dolls consisted of a small fraction of a company’s total output, today’s savvy collector, with a bit of searching, still has the opportunity to add an outstanding Edwardian era lady to their collection.

It is probably safe to say that most collectors of lady dolls are primarily interested in French Fashion examples. Although an admirer of fashion dolls myself, I do feel the German lady dolls in bisque are undervalued both historically...
and economically. Somewhat disappointing, the French version of the lady doll of the Edwardian era is simply the Tete Jumeau, open or closed mouth model, (marked Tete Jumeau) placed on a composition lady body with details such as elongated limbs and molded breasts. Although generally a lovely doll, the overall effect is neither indicative of, nor inclusive of the classic touches that would define the Edwardian style. To me, she is stylistically part of another, earlier, era.

Where doll collectors can see a pure vision of Edwardian style is in the world of the dollhouse doll. In a turn of the century dollhouse, surrounded by accurately scaled and styled furnishings, the Gibson Girl is truly at home, pun intended, classic hairstyle and all.

After the ascension of Edward VII to the throne, English doll makers celebrated the new King and Queen with a plethora of wax dolls in their likenesses. Even extended family members were immortalized in doll form and unfortunately, few have survived. Many were surely the victims of changing tastes, so they were robbed of their original clothing or their clothing was “Victorian-ized” when doll collecting was in its infancy. Remember, older is not always better, or even correct! So, a doll in any original clothing should be extremely gratifying to find in today’s market.

It is quite the coincidence that it is the May issue of Antique Doll Collector that sheds some soft, springtime light on these lovely dolls, as the celebrations surrounding May Day were a pet project of Queen Alexandra’s. At this moment in time, many of these remarkable dolls will be celebrating their centennial birthdays and it is my hope that the images included here will inspire you to take a loving look at dolls who are three-dimensional artifacts from a very brief moment in time – the Edwardian Era.

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Pretty in pink is this Simon & Halbig 1159. This doll must have been intended for the French market due to details such as a lovely jointed French lady body, set paperweight eyes with mohair lashes and a lovely, commercially-made ensemble. Photo Courtesy of Carmel Doll Shop

House of Worth, the world-renowned Paris-based fashion atelier was certainly responsible for dressing a host of American “Dollar Princesses”. This lovely titled lady is shown wearing Jean-Philippe Worth’s “peacock” dress, a sumptuous gown ornamented with emeralds and the wings of iridescent beetles.