

Dolls as a Hobby

By HAZEL STOTTS

JUST CAN'T REMEMBER when I was not interested in dolls. The first doll I remember as a child was my own yellow haired china. Those that followed grew into a lively collection that now numbers 200. I have had them on display at church bazaars, Women's Institute meetings and District Annuals, in private homes and in my own home for weeks at a time. I have been invited to fall fairs but have hesitated because of the poor facilities. My husband is just as interested as I am and does all the carpentry work on my display cases. I never accept any money at all.

I have repaired and dressed dolls that were precious to someone, possibly because the doll had belonged to her mother and she did not want to part with it. Friends have bestowed on me the family dolls that have lain in the attic for years — each with its own story; and ladies have given me all sorts of lovely material for dolls' clothes, such as pieces left over from their daughters' wedding gowns. Without the gift of being able to sew one should never try collecting dolls.

Perhaps the most charming, dignified and unusual dolls are the wax dolls moulded over porcelain. I have an Anne Rutledge with the wonderfully modelled head and, like her little mistress, the most expressive dark brown eyes. But if one looks closely she resembles a grown-up lady. A heavy braid crosses her forehead and a wire goes right through the head for ear rings. Her new gown is made of gold lamé with short cape all trimmed with jet beads, styled in the 1800's. After a trip to the repair box she will last another hundred years.

Dolls unerringly reflect the life around them. Years ago mothers handmade their children's clothes and also the children's dolls' clothes.



In this group the doll dressed as a boy on the right is fifty years old, the two at the left are around thirty years old. The others are bisque dolls of the early 1900s.



Walking dolls, two made in Canada, one in England in the middle 1900s.

Today's mothers can purchase these ready-made.

Blonde Paddy, pipe in hat, came from Ireland over sixty years ago, as a gift to a sister sailing for a new life in Canada, with the wish that she find herself a good Irish husband. She found a husband but not Irish. Paddy has been sleeping in a cardboard box almost all those years, while the moths nearly devoured his curly hair. Now he is as good as new and smiles his way into your heart.

Enquiries have led to many interesting contacts and many amusing incidents. Tiny tots ring my door bell, dragging a doll by the leg with no clothes and much the worse for wear, and they ask if I want to buy a doll. They really don't want to sell their dolls; it's gum or candy they are after, and their chatter is priceless.

Some dolls have a tragic history. A mother dressed her own beautiful doll as a surprise for her daughter's birthday, but the daughter hated the doll and would have nothing to do with it. Many years later the mother became senile and bedfast and, reliving her childhood over again, her doll became her constant companion to the end of her days. Many people cherish old dolls' heads when the body disintegrates and hands and feet are broken. My repair box resembles a sixteenth century beheading centre with headless bodies, odd arms, legs and wigs, begging to be united with their heads. This is more easily wished for than done, as it may take years to find the matching parts.

Character and rag dolls are an entirely different story. There are dolls a good needlewoman can make — a rag doll with embroidered and modelled face or a felt character doll, with the face made by adding extra felt and