

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA ANALYSIS FOR THE TOYS FOUND DURING THE 1987 AND 1990 EXCAVATIONS AT THE LOS PEÑASQUITOS RANCH HOUSE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

Christina L. Mirsky
Department of Anthropology
San Diego State University
San Diego, CA 92182

ABSTRACT

Historic documentation of family activity at the Los Peñasquitos Ranch House noted children of many ages. The presence of toys deposited both in garbage areas and as a result of a fire pictures a changing toy culture and offers some tantalizing questions. If historic period toys were often curated and passed down from child to child or from parent to child, then why do dolls dominate the refuse until the advent of plastic? Possibilities will be proposed as to the presence of dolls and doll parts.

OBJECTIVES

The Los Peñasquitos Ranch House, designated as an historical landmark, is located approximately 15 miles north of downtown San Diego in Peñasquitos Canyon, just a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. Construction of the ranch house began in 1824, and was a part of a working ranch from then until the early 1900s. The objective of the analysis of the toys found during the 1987 and 1990 excavations of the Los Peñasquitos Ranch House Archaeological Project was to identify the toys and develop hypotheses about their use.

For example, the discovery of 1 complete doll and parts of other dolls dated to the late 1800s supports the theory that a female child lived at the ranch house near the turn of the century. Analysis of the toys of the Los Peñasquitos Ranch House has added to knowledge of life on the ranch during the early part of the Euro-American Period, from 1850 to 1912 when a fire destroyed the ranch house. The fire was apparently started by 2 cooks. At that time the ranch was owned by Charles Mohnike. Mohnike had 3 daughters and 5 sons living on the ranch, according to Evangeline Mohnike Heisig (personal communication, 1991), the young-

est of the daughters. Two questions are raised by this study:

1. How did the children living on the ranch during this period of time affect the overall lifestyle there?
2. What were these children's lives like growing up on a working ranch?

METHODOLOGY

The artifacts researched came from 2 different excavations, 1 in 1987 and 1 in 1990. Before classifying the artifacts into subgroups, all the artifacts were classified in the same manner that Stephen Van Wormer used for the artifacts found during the Home Avenue Project of the San Diego City Dump. Van Wormer (1988) classified the artifacts according to the cultural function of each object, thus giving a better overall view of cultural norms rather than material types. The methodology, with a few minor changes, was used on the 1987 and 1990 artifacts and was based on 4 operations -- identification, evaluation of qualitative standards, cultural analysis, and interpretation -- and 5 basic properties -- history, material type, construction, design, and function.

First, each object was classified based on function. The classifications included doll parts, car parts, and other. After the initial classification was done, each item was described in detail, including drawings to make it easy to determine style, shape, and dimension of each artifact. The height, width, depth, and weight were determined, along with the material type, design, color, and construction of the piece. After this was completed, the history of each piece was defined, and the typology was narrowed according to whether the artifact was or was not from a later time period than that being studied. If it was from a later time period than the fire, it was considered intrusive. This was significant in that it saved time and effort allowing for concentrated research on the objects of the time period being studied.

Secondly, each piece was evaluated by the workmanship, use of materials, construction, and design, as compared with similar objects of the same time period.

The third operation was to determine the cultural significance of each artifact in the target time period. Since the function had already been determined by classifying the artifacts as "toys", the importance and meaning to the culture was determined historically. The cultural significance was determined by the price of the object, the uniqueness of the object, the role of the object, and the function of the object.

Finally, the raw data were interpreted through the relevance of the artifact, its meaning and significance within the culture.

The methodology used seemed to be the best suited for this activity group. Operations in other methodologies such as interviews and questionnaires did not seem suited to the need of the artifacts. Most of the research took place in the library; however, the laboratory and computer work contributed a significant part.

1987 EXCAVATION FINDINGS

Dr. Susan Hector, adjunct history professor at San Diego State University, performed the 1987 excavation of the garbage

dump at the ranch. This excavation produced a collection of artifacts from the 1950s, '60s and '70s. The summary of the unit findings are as follows:

Unit 7: 1 clay dog head
 1 metal gun

Unit 12: 1 plastic car wheel

Non-Euro-American Period Artifacts

Doll Parts. No doll parts were found during the 1987 excavation.

Car Parts. In Unit 12 was found a black plastic car wheel, catalog number 1987-12-21. This artifact was found at level 0 to 10 cm and weighs 2.1 g. The diameter of the wheel is 11 mm with a width of 1 mm (Figure 1). This black plastic car wheel was similar in size and style to ones manufactured by Barclay in the late 1960s and early 1970s (O'Brien 1990).

Other Items. A terra-cotta dog's head, catalog number 1987-7-201, was found in Unit 7 at level 20 to 30 cm. The head weighed 2.7 g, measured 24 mm tall, 8 mm wide, and 13 mm thick (Figure 2). Exhaustive research was done on this terra-cotta dog's head, but it could not be determined whether it was a toy.

Also found in Unit 7, at 0 to 10 cm, was a metal toy gun, catalog number 1987-7-7. The gun weighs 36.6 g, and when standing on its handle is 46 mm high, 60 mm long, and 11 mm wide (Figure 3). This metal toy gun is similar to the ones made by the Hubley Company in 1955; however, many metal guns were made during the 1950s by several companies (O'Brien 1990).

1990 EXCAVATION FINDINGS

In 1990 there was an excavation of remains of the ranch house's kitchen from the fire of 1912 by Dr. Lynne Christenson of San Diego State University. Figure 4 shows the units and the sewer trench that were excavated in 1990.

Many of the toys found during the 1990 excavation were also dated more recently

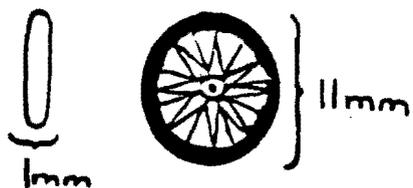


Figure 1. Black plastic toy car wheel.

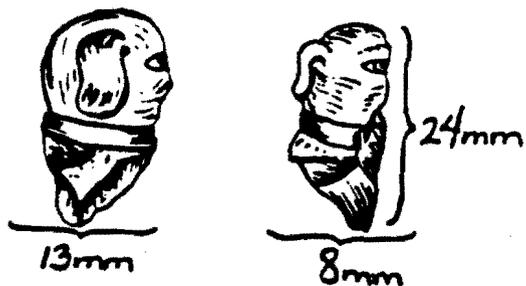


Figure 2. Terra-cotta dog's head.

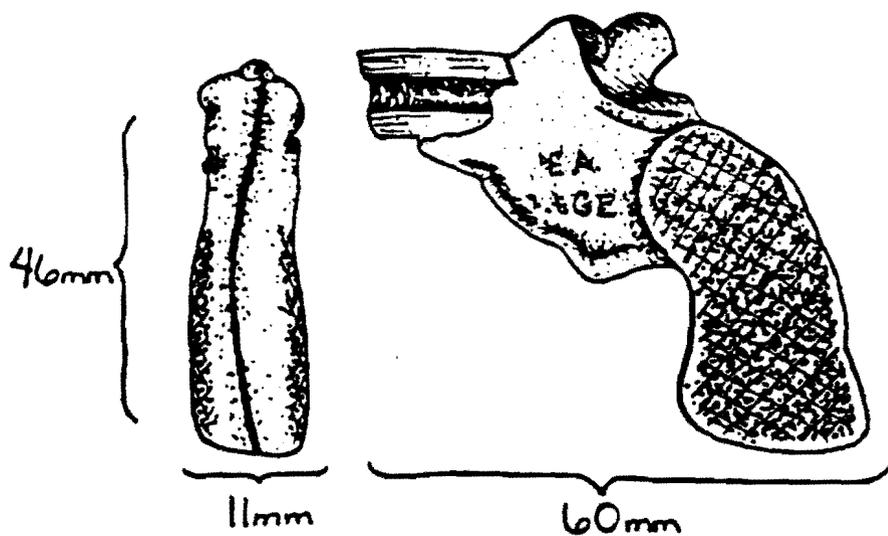


Figure 3. Metal toy gun.

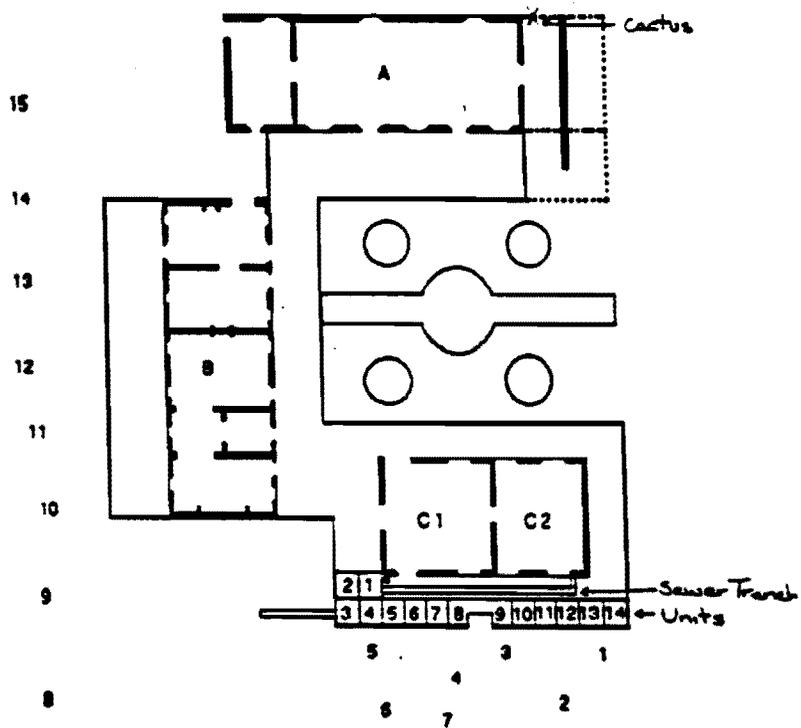


Figure 4. Units excavated in 1990 (after an original drawn by Susan M. Hector).

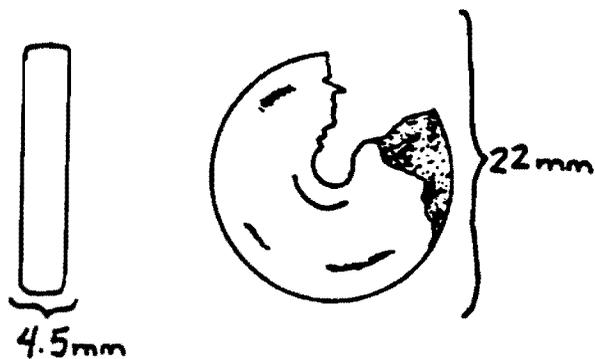


Figure 5. Rubber toy car wheel.



Figure 6. Miniature license plate.

than 1912. The summary of unit findings is as follows:

- Unit 1: 1 china doll
- Unit 3: 1 rubber car wheel
1 plastic toy head
1 miniature license plate
1 plastic car wheel
1 glass marble
- Unit 6: 1 clay marble
- Sewer Trench:
1 bisque doll foot
1 bisque doll hip

Doll Parts. All of the doll parts found during the 1990 excavation dated to the pre-1912 period.

Car Parts. A white rubber toy wheel was found nearly intact in Unit 3 at level 20 to 30 cm. The wheel, catalog number 1990-555, weighs 3.2 g and is 22 mm in diameter and 4.5 mm thick (Figure 5). The tire is remarkably similar to the tires found on a toy race car made by Auburn Rubber in the 1930s.

Also found in Unit 3, at 0 to 10 cm, was a miniature license plate. This artifact is black on a yellow background and is catalog number 1990-399. The plate weighs 2.2 g and measures 14 mm by 22 mm by 1.5 mm (Figure 6). The plate is a replica of a 1956 California license plate. The license plate is not actually a toy. These miniature plates are called "Ident-O-Tags" and were mailed out annually as fund raisers by the Disabled American Veterans (Collie Matfield, Disabled American Veterans, personal communication, 1992).

With the license plate was found a black plastic toy car wheel. The wheel, catalog number 1990-399.1, is small, weighing 0.6 g, with a diameter of 16 mm and a thickness of 1 mm (Figure 7). The wheel is very similar in size, shape, and design to those on toy cars still used today as party favors.

Other Toys. A rusty brown plastic toy man's head weighing 0.5 g was found in Unit 3 at

level 20 to 30 cm. This artifact, catalog number 1990-416.1, measures 8.5 mm in height, 7 mm wide, and 6 mm thick (Figure 8). Though extensive research produced no conclusive results, the style of the molded hair is similar to styles of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Such a small head could have belonged to a car driver or perhaps a man in a set of toys, like a toy soldier.

A little more than half of a blue glass marble was recovered in Unit 3 at level 0 to 10 cm. The marble has a diameter of 15 mm (Figure 9). Because the marble is translucent, it can be dated to the 1920s and 1930s. It was during this time period that translucent marbles were patented and popular (Randall and Webb 1988).

Euro-American Period Toys

Toys presented in the following sections belong to the period between 1850 and the fire in 1912, and are the focus of this study.

Found in Unit 6, at level 30 to 40 cm, was a clay marble. The circumference of this white marble, catalog number 1990-613, is 18 mm, with a weight of 7.3 g (Figure 10). The marble is pitted but otherwise intact. Clay marbles such as this one were most common in the late part of the 19th century when they were mass produced (Randall and Webb 1988).

Doll Parts. A hollow, white, porcelain bisque doll leg was found in 2 pieces in a sewer trench. One piece was from the hip to the knee; the other was from the knee to the foot. The hip piece weighs 6.6 g, with a height of 32 mm, a width of 15 mm, and a thickness of 19 mm (Figure 11). The foot piece weighs 5.3 g, with a height of 30 mm, a width of 13 mm, and a thickness of 22 mm (Figure 12).

A small hole in the center of the thigh may have been used to attach the limb to the torso with string, wire, elastic, or cord. The leg lacked markings that would indicate it was mass produced.

The pieces of the leg are striking because of their chubbiness. The doll may have been similar to an elastic jointed baby doll produced by Kammer and Reinhardt

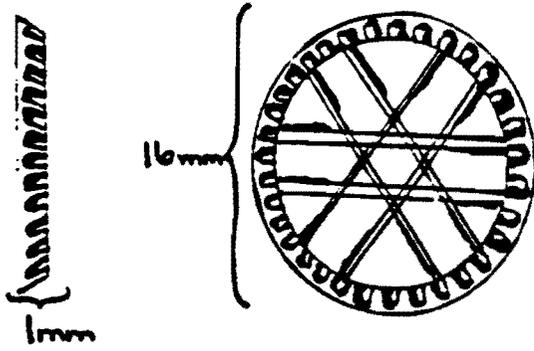


Figure 7. Plastic toy car wheel.

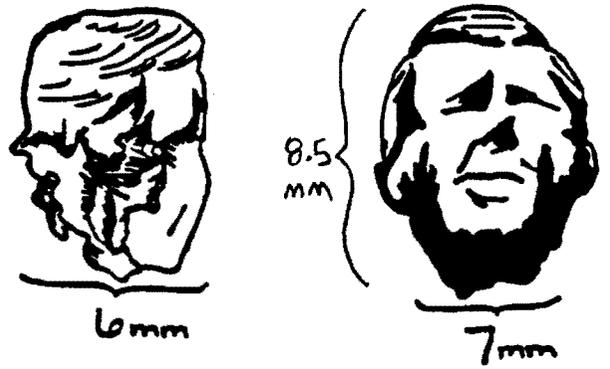


Figure 8. Plastic toy man's head.

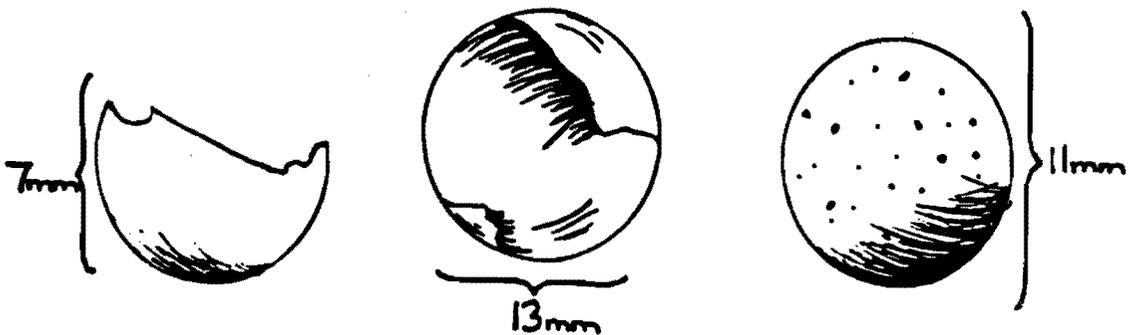


Figure 9. Glass marble.

Figure 10. Clay marble.

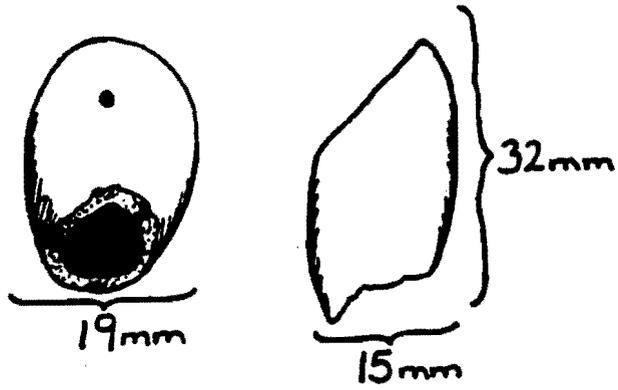


Figure 11. Bisque doll leg, hip to knee.

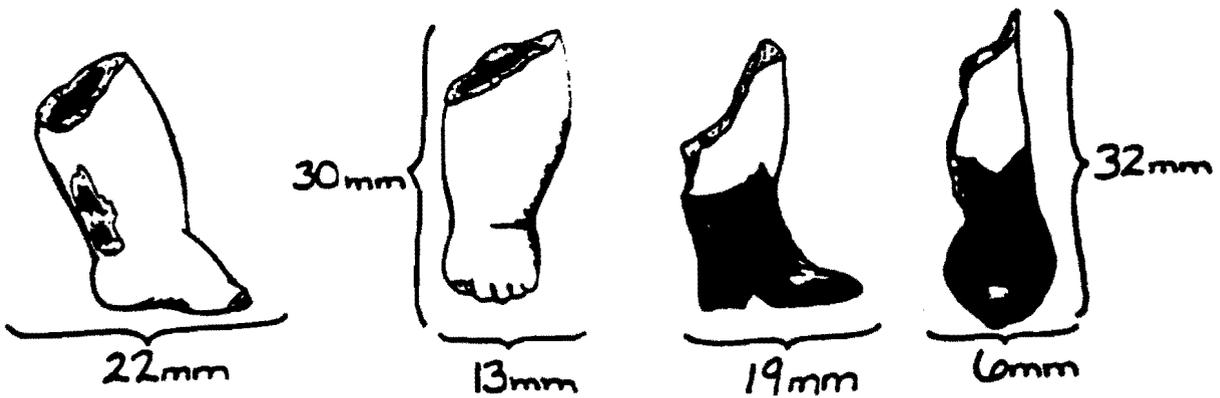


Figure 12. Bisque doll leg, knee to foot.

Figure 13. Doll limb broken at mid-calf.

(Coleman et al. 1968).

An artifact that has not been cataloged with either excavation was a doll foot, found after a heavy rainstorm. It is included in this report because it is also of white porcelain bisque. This doll limb was broken at mid-calf, and almost three-quarters of the leg is missing. The doll limb weighs 3.5 g, with a height of 32 mm, a width of 6 mm, and a thickness of 19 mm (Figure 13). At the bottom of the leg is a black boot with a leather colored fore-sole. The type of doll from which the foot came could not be identified, although porcelain bisque was a very popular material for making dolls at the turn of the 20th century.

A china doll was found inside a rusted kitchen pipe and, with the exception of being chipped, was completely intact. The white china doll was well constructed, and a seam in the doll indicates that it may have been mass produced.

The doll weighs 12.2 g, with a height of 50 mm, a width of 20 mm, and a thickness of 11 mm (Figure 14). Feminine features were painted on the doll. The hair, eyebrows, and eyes were painted black and the lips were a peachy-pink color. However, the lip color changed to green after the doll was cleaned with vinegar.

Research revealed that the doll was of a type known as a "Frozen Charlotte" in the United States. Frozen Charlotte was a song written by William Lorenzo Carter, a wandering troubadour (Young 1967). The song recounts the story of a beautiful but vain girl who froze to death on an icy sleigh ride because she chose to show off her beautiful silk dress rather than wear a blanket:

Why sit you like a monument,
That has no power to stir?
He asked her once, he asked her twice,
But she answered not a word.
Then quickly to the lighted hall,
Her lifeless form he bore,
Fair Charlotte was a frozen corpse,
That never could speak more.

Frozen Charlottes were made between 1850 and 1914 and were also known as pillar

dolls, bathing babies, solid china dolls, or Frozen Charlies, which were the male version. They ranged in size from 1 to 8 inches, the smallest ones used as favors on cakes or in puddings. They often represented babies and were carried in the arms of larger dolls. The Frozen Charlotte may have been a baby for the larger doll whose leg was found in the sewer trench.

PROBLEMS

Knowledge of children's toys in the American West during the late 19th century is limited. Dolls and doll collecting have been well documented by Dorothy Coleman, Mary Hillier (1968), and others; however, other toys have not been as well documented. The study of toys and art work is remarkably similar in developing a cultural analysis. The artwork of a culture has a tendency to show what the group wants to see. Similarly, their toys suggest what the group wishes to become. People teach their children right and wrong according to their cultural norms. The theory of acculturation is, in part, that toys or objects given to children help teach them those cultural norms.

For example, according to Dr. Janet Esser of the San Diego State University Art History Department (personal communication 1991), the Kachina Dolls of the Hopi teach the young girls about the attributes of spirits so that they learn which Kachina can help or hinder them. Children are the hope of the people and they are taught, either wittingly or unwittingly, through play with toys.

The more that is discovered about what the children were taught, the more will be learned about the culture on a ranch at the turn of the 20th century. A number of questions were raised during the analysis and will require further investigation. How many dolls did a girl usually own? How old were girls when they stopped playing with dolls? Were only boys allowed to play with marbles? The toys obviously do not give the whole story of the children at the ranch.

There is no evidence from the toys that the family occupying the Los Peñasquitos

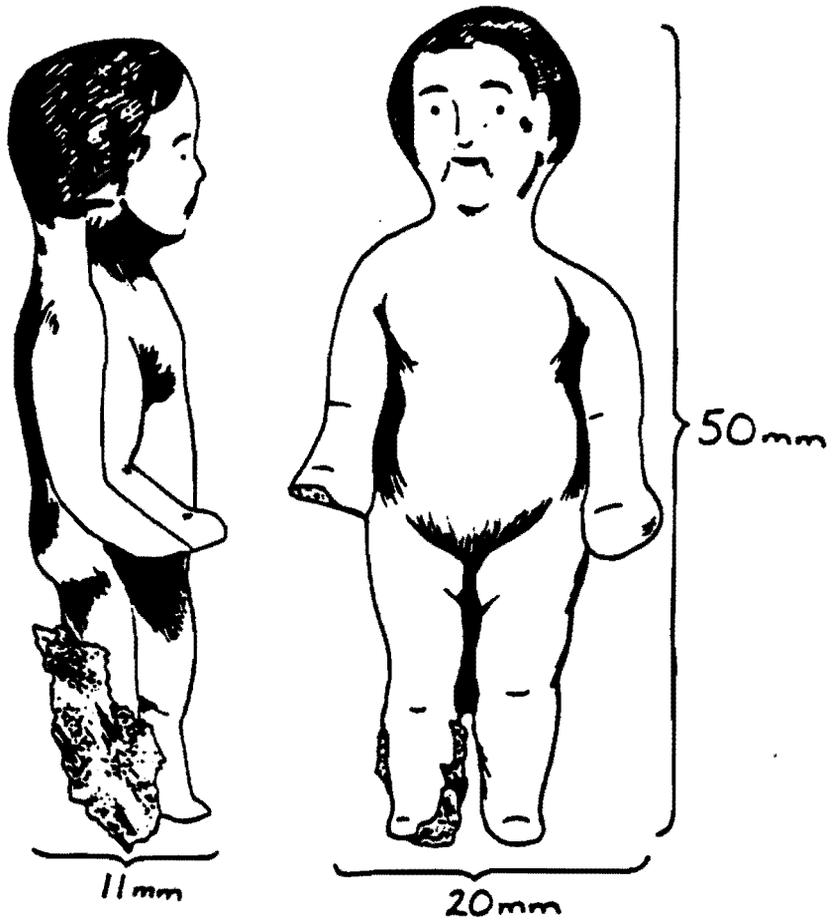


Figure 14. Frozen Charlotte.

Ranch House at the time of the 1912 fire was Japanese, as suggested by Evangeline Mohnike Heisig (personal communication, 1991). Because the dolls found had Euro-American features, and no Japanese ceramics were found, the children were most likely not Japanese. Each of these issues could be a subject for further research.

SIGNIFICANCE

The type and location of the doll artifacts found suggest the possibility that a girl, or several girls, lived at the adobe and may have helped in the kitchen.

The kitchen is where the girls learned their adult responsibilities. The dolls were used to imitate life and to teach the girl to be a "Mommy". This construct requires much more evidence to be substantiated; however, acculturation of children is well documented.

The fact that there was only 1 unisex toy, the marble, leads to several theories: There were no boys living at the ranch; the boys were over the age of 4 and were at work instead of with the women in the kitchen; the boys' toys were made of wood and deteriorated; or the toys were longer lasting and were taken along when the family moved.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Evangeline Mohnike Heisig (personal communication, 1991), identified earlier as the youngest of the daughters who lived at the ranch house at the time of the fire in 1912, the children never had time to play during their summers at the ranch. They worked with the adults all day and did not have dolls or toys of any kind. She suggested that the toys must have belonged to 1 of the 2 Spanish families that lived there before and after the Mohnikes.

A series of conclusions have been drawn from the evidence put forth. The time frame in which the dolls were manufactured suggests that they belonged to the occupants of the ranch house before the fire rath-

er than after the fire. Because 2 dolls and the Frozen Charlotte were found, at least 2 girls may have lived at the ranch house. The porcelain bisque dolls could easily break and harm a toddler, so it is likely that the girls were older. Despite the marble, it is unlikely that there were young boys living at the ranch house before the fire. The marbles could have been used in games, such as Chinese Checkers, or for other unisex purposes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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