

Vintage Sewing Sets with *Dress Me Dolls*

by Donna W. Brown

During colonial times little girls were given a needle and thread as soon as they could hold them in their tiny hands and were expected to learn to repair laundry and darn socks. There were skills to be learned, but in their spare time girls were given lessons on how to embroider linens and crochet lace for table clothes and dresses.

During the Victorian Era many companies began manufacturing sewing sets to both entertain little girls and train them in household duties. Many of these sewing sets came in wooden boxes or cardboard suitcases and contained not only thread, fabric, notions but a doll, often called dress me dolls. The first were bisque

dolls made in France or Germany. A 1910 sewing set by Armand Marseille had a doll marked made in Germany. The 6 ¼ inch doll with a mohair wig, glass eyes and jointed neck, arms and legs was very typical of dolls to be dressed in the early 1900s.

U.S. companies began manufacturing sewing sets with dolls in the 1930s. Doll House Dress Shop, by the Transogram Company, came in a box shaped like the front a building with the inner box forming the back and sides. Under the tray was a roof and cardboard furniture including a fireplace, bookshelf, chair, radio and davenport. The 7-inch bisque doll was made in Japan and the set came with thread, scissors, fabric, clothes hanger and needle.



LEFT: Bridal Party Sewing Kit cover by Hassenfeld Bros., 1957. This set came in two sizes with either 3 or 4 dolls. **RIGHT:** Contents of Hassenfeld's Bridal Party Sewing Kit which included 4 hard plastic dolls and sewing supplies.

A more economical variation of the typical sewing set had cardboard paper dolls in place of an actual doll. Little Ladies Sewing Set by Rosebud Art and Little Travelers Sewing Kit by Transogram Company both had cardboard paper dolls and precut fabric dresses.

Standard Toy Craft Products made several versions of Jean Darling and Her Sewing Outfits during the 1930s and 1940s. Jean Darling was an American child actress who was a regular in the Our Gang short films from 1927-29. The Jean doll was originally a 4 ½ inch doll and later was 5 ½ inches. Both were chubby toddlers with molded hair and made of bisque. The boxes in the 1930s looked like houses with cellophane windows and had precut outfits, scissors, thread and needles. By 1947 the set came in a suitcase with a composition Jean Darling doll.

In 1935, J. Pressman and Company marketed a Little Orphan Annie sewing set with a doll that resembled the Jean Darling doll. The J. Pressman Company in 1936 picked up on the fame of the Dionne Quintuplets and sold a sewing set of five bisque toddler dolls with precut dresses to sew.

Many of the sewing kits in the late 1930s replaced the bisque dolls with composition dolls. They had painted eyes, molded hair, stationary legs with painted on shoes and socks. Some of the sets included hats to decorate or embroidery to complete. In 1935, the Victor Eckhard



Jean Darling and Her Sewing Outfit, 1934, bisque doll was made in Japan and the set came with 7 printed dresses, scissors, thimble, needle and thread.



Priscilla Doll Sewing Set by Standard Toycoft, 1955 which included a 5-inch plastic doll with precut dresses.



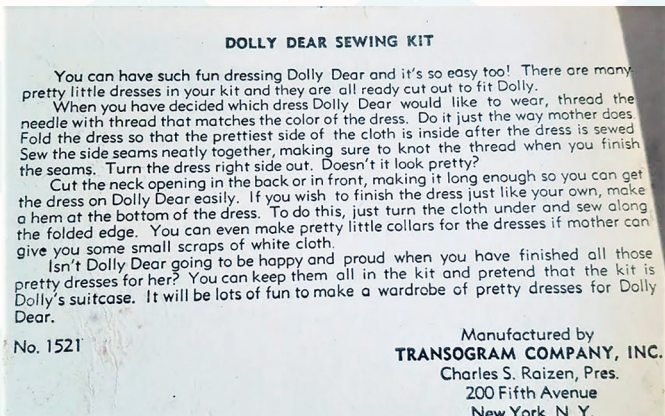
Little Travelers Sewing Kit, 1940, by Transogram Company had cardboard paper dolls to dress with precut dresses. There were several variations of this set.

Manufacturing Company offered a sewing set with a 6 ½ inch composition baby doll.

The Miss Deb Sewing Kit by Pressman, early 1940s, is an example of the usual cardboard latched suitcase containing precut dresses and hats. Post-World War II manufacturers gave little girls a chance to express their sewing talents through sets with working sewing machines and more elaborate themes. The Little Traveler's Sewing Kit, 1947, by the Transogram Company had a 6 ½ inch hard plastic doll called Betty Dress Up.

Disney gave licensing to both the Pressman Toy Company and Transogram to make Disney sewing kits. An Alice in Wonderland Sewing Kit came with a red plastic sewing machine and a hard-plastic doll. Disney's Annie Oakley Sewing Set had only one dress to make, but had a gun, holster, rope and embroidery piece that said, "Home Sweet Home."

Many companies offered inexpensive dress me dolls that were sold in 5 and 10 cent stores without sewing kits.



Dolly Dear sewing instructions printed on inside lid of the case that held a composition doll with precut dresses, by Transogram.



Little Ladies Sewing Set, 1930s, by Rosebud Art. A small kit, it contained 2 cardboard paper dolls, precut fabric dresses, thread and a needle.



Top: Interior of Jean Darling 1949 sewing kit with composition doll, dresses and notions. Not shown are 4 handkerchiefs and supplies for embroidery.

Bottom: Jean Darling Luggage Doll Sewing Kit, front view of suitcase by Standard Toycraft, 1949.



Miss Deb Sewing Kit cardboard case by Pressman Toys contained a very minimal sewing set and hard plastic doll.



Right: Pressman Toys small sewing set in a round case decorated in "Bon Voyage" and travel pictures. It came with a 7-inch hard plastic doll, instructions for a bridal gown and materials to complete the outfit.



Two sewing kits without dolls, Kitty Button Sew on Cards and Four Sewing Cards, that were used to teach sewing skills.

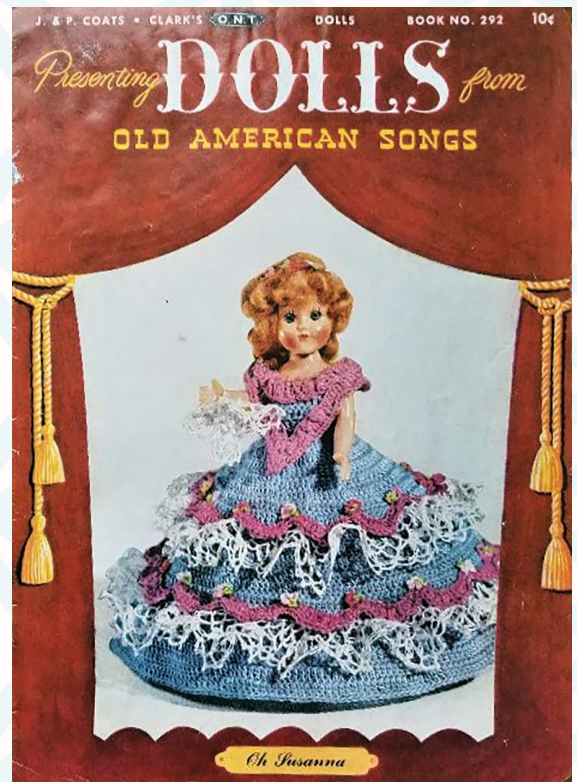


Doll Collection Featuring Lingerie Lou sewing pattern booklet, Coats and Clark, 1952.

Magazines frequently offered patterns for these dolls. Some were crocheted outfits; others were made of fabric. An unusual doll was one with a crocheted gown to match the bathroom tiles and was used to cover a roll of toilet paper.

The most famous solitary dress me doll was Lingerie Lou who was introduced in 1949 through an issue of Playthings Magazine. She was manufactured by Doll Bodies, Inc. and while most dress me dolls came nude, Lingerie Lou wore removable plastic panties and bra. She sold for 49 cents and was instantly in demand. Soon numerous costume patterns for her became available and in 1956 Doll Bodies Inc. offered a \$2,500 prize for the best original outfit for Lingerie Lou. Every dressed doll entered in the contest was donated to the March of Dimes to benefit their cause.

Little girls would not only learn to sew by using sewing sets with dress me dolls, but they could use their creativity, along with scraps of fabric and bits of lace, to create wardrobes for their charming little dolls. What more can we ask of a doll than it inspire and nurture the imagination of a child?



Left: Bridal Party Doll sewing patterns from Lingerie Lou booklet.

Above: Presenting Dolls from Old American Songs crochet pattern booklet, Coats and Clark, 1952.



Betsy from Pike

Chlo-e

Clementine

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sc in next loop. Repeat from * around armhole. **2nd to 12th rnds incl:** * Ch 3, sc in next loop. Repeat from * around. Join and break off at end of 12th rnd. Complete other sleeve the same way. Sew snap fasteners to back opening. With Brown make a chain 8 inches long. Tie around waist.

BOLERO . . . Starting at bottom with Yellow and No. 7 hook, ch 33. **1st row:** Sc in 2nd ch from hook and in each ch across. Ch 1, turn. **2nd to 5th rows incl:** Sc in each sc across. Ch 1, turn.

To Shape Front: 6th row: Sc in first 6 sc. Ch 1, turn. **7th to 10th rows incl:** Sc in each sc across. Ch 1, turn.

To Shape Shoulder: Sc in first 3 sc. Break off. Attach thread to end of last complete row and work other front the same way.

BACK . . . 1st row: Leaving 3 sc free on last complete row attach thread to

next sc, sc in each sc across to within last 3 sc. Ch 1, turn. **2nd to 5th rows incl:** Sc in each sc across. Ch 1, turn.

To Shape Shoulders: Sc in first 3 sc. Break off. Attach thread to other end of row and sc in last 3 sc. Break off. Sew up shoulder seams. With Yellow, sc closely around armhole openings and neck. With Brown make a piece of fringe 4 inches long. Sew to bottom of bolero.

TRIM (Make 2) . . . With Brown, ch 4, 4 dc in 4th ch from hook. Break off. Sew a piece to each side of Bolero, embroidering chain sts with White sewing thread.

HAT . . . Starting at center with Brown, ch 2. **1st rnd:** 10 sc in 2nd ch from hook. **2nd rnd:** 2 sc in each sc around. **3rd rnd:** * 2 sc in next sc (1 sc increased), sc in next sc. Repeat from * around. **4th rnd:** * 2 sc in next sc, sc in next 2 sc. Repeat from * around. **5th to 12th rnds incl:** Sc in each sc around. **13th rnd:** 2 sc in each

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sc around. **14th to 18th rnds incl:** Sc in each sc around. Break off at end of 18th rnd.

With White and No. 10 hook, ch 4, dc in 4th ch from hook, ch 3, sl st in same ch, (ch 3, dc in same ch, ch 3, sl st in same ch) 4 times. Join and break off. Sew to front of hat with Yellow French knot. Attach Brown to brim of hat and make a chain 4 inches long. Break off. Make a chain the same way on other side.

PANTIES . . . Cut organdy panties knee length. Make a narrow hem around each leg. **1st rnd:** Attach White to leg, sc closely around. Join. **2nd rnd:** Ch 4, dc in back loop of next sc, * ch 1, skip 1 sc, dc in back loop of next sc. Repeat from * around. Join. **3rd and 4th rnds:** Ch 4, * dc in back loop of next dc, ch 1. Repeat from * around. Join.

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Crocheted doll clothes from Coats and Clark pattern booklet, 1952.



Separately sold 11-inch Dress Me Dolls. Center doll is by Grants Plastic Inc. and came in sizes 6 to 20 inches.

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