

# The Legend of Huguette Clark



A photograph of Huguette Clark as a child, in pensive mood as she studied the book in her hands, graces the cover of the book *The Doll Collection of Huguette Clark*.

**D**olls were, always, the life nexus of the dreamy-eyed second daughter from the second family of William A. Clark, America's 19<sup>th</sup> century copper baron. Huguette Clark was her name. She was born in Paris in 1906 and spent the first five years of her life living in gilded luxury in that splendid city. Violin lessons, travels to historic chateaux outside of Paris and a taste for delicious fresh brioche from Paris boulangerie highlighted her life in those early years and became the genesis of her collecting. But, mostly, it was her daily walks to that Parisian paradise of childhood treasures, Au Nain Bleu.

From that shop came her love of beautiful dolls, and while most of the dolls and automata that she collected during later years, came from an earlier era, she always recalled Au Nain Bleu as her inspirational source for the love of these classic French treasures. Too, it must be more

## Doll Connoisseur Extraordinaire

By Florence Theriault



Very young Huguette Clark seated on the front steps of her Butte, Montana home with her childhood dolls. Although the photograph shows her early love of dolls, none of these dolls exist in her collection today.

than coincidental that 1905, a year before her birth, saw the introduction of *Bleuette* and the children's journal, *La Semaine de Suzette*, for which the later grown-up Huguette began a decades long quest.

Huguette Clark lived a long life of 105 years. She was a connoisseur of beauty and art, and she was a dedicated scholar. She was the last remaining child of William A. Clark, born in 1839, a magnate of unimaginable wealth from copper mining and railroads. Together their lives spanned 172 years of American history, from a decade before the Civil War to the presidency of Barack Obama. That captivating story has been well told in the New York Times best-seller, *Empty Mansions*, by Bill Dedman and Paul Clark Newell, Jr.

What is of most interest to doll collectors is her amazing collection of antique dolls, dollhouses and automata.



## The French Dolls

It was clearly the beautiful *bebes* of Jumeau that struck the fancy of Huguette Clark, and it is in her remarkable collection of these dolls that today's collector finds evidence of her connoisseur's eye. From the early portrait *bebes* to the later models marked Tete, she sought examples of the highest order of beauty. It immediately strikes one's eye in viewing these dolls that she had no patience for ordinary examples, but sought those with splendid eyes, soft delicacy of complexion, and those which are commonly referred to as "first from the mold" for the clarity and precision of their sculpting.

Notably, she sought the *Bebe Triste*, that wistful-faced doll sculpted by Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, under commission from Emile Jumeau. It may simply be the artistic beauty of the face which drew her toward this model, or perhaps, learning of the Carrier-Belleuse connection to Jumeau, she remembered seeing the Carrier-Belleuse *torcheres* at the base of the Palais Garnier grand staircase during her early childhood visits to the Paris Opera, and wished a connection with that childhood memory. Whichever the reason, her collection offers seven stunningly beautiful examples including sizes 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 16.

Intriguing, also, was her fascination with the *Bebe Phonographe* presented by Emile Jumeau in conjunction with the French pioneer phonograph inventory, Lioret.



Collectors have long known and admired this *Bebe Triste* by Jumeau, originally sold by Theriault's in 1980 from the Helen Jo Payne Collection. Only now has the very small incised letter "N" near the crown rim been noted, perhaps indicating the word "nouveau", thus indicating this to be a very early production model.



Proudly, the E.J. *bebe* shows off his *Marquis* costume created for Huguette Clark by Christian Dior as a special commission. The extra jacket was included and the costume bears the Christian Dior cloth label along with correspondence concerning the costume which was described as "Petit Prince".



From Jumeau's "Series Fantastique" is this very rare model incised 225, at a grand 26" size, with original couturier costume and uniquely labeled Jumeau box.





As original as it could possibly be, the 12" petite Bebe Jumeau wears luxury couturier costume from the Ernestine Jumeau atelier, with matching bonnet and gilt-signed matching shoes. On her arm is the original Bebe Jumeau gilt lettered band, so very rarely found.



Bebe Triste by Jumeau in the rare smallest size 9, with especially charming embroidered silk Marquis costume with tricorne hat.



Christian Dior named this costume "Cantatrice" (the French word for singer) as they were commissioned to design a front-opening gown to accommodate the unique torso design of the Bebe Phonographe. Huguette Clark also requested this particular shade of blue, according to the correspondence which accompanied the labeled Dior costume.

For many decades, Huguette Clark was on the search for every known disc, including elusive recordings in the Russian language, of which most people denied their existence. But a study of her collection now proves that she was right all along. For the back panel of one original box lists all recordings "existant actuellement" including four recordings in Russian. Her collection includes rare Bebes Phonographe in original couturiere dress with unique construction for the mechanism.

Surely an early Bleuette had been in the childhood collection of Huguette Clark, although her present collection does not include that model. It does, however, offer seven Bleuettes from the 1940s/1950s era with a grand bounty of costumes and accessories, in pristine condition.

There are more than 60 Bebes Jumeau in the collection, including a remarkable number in original couturier costumes from the workshops of Ernestine Jumeau, and with luxury original Jumeau mohair wigs and shoes, ranging from tiny size 1 to grand size 16. There is, too, a doll from Jumeau's "Series Fantastique", the rare model 225, of which few are known to exist, in original couturier costume. Other French dolls include beautiful bebes by Andre Thuillier and Jules Steiner, and a wonderful group of wooden-bodied poupees.



Huguette Clark recognized the beauty of French bebes by Andre Thuillier, the petite 9" model, rare size #1, standing alongside her 15" sister.





A gentle-faced Bebe Triste by Emile Jumeau, one of the favorite models of Huguette Clark, in superb antique costume.



Three examples of the Bebe Phonograph, the two flanking dolls with specially constructed costumes designed to flap open at the front for access to the removable speaker plate and internal works (as seen in the center example).



A few of the Bleuette family dolls from the Huguette Clark collection along with an original trunk with Au Nain Bleu label and a bounty of original Gautier-Langereau costumes.



The French poupee models from the Clark Collection have articulated and shapely wooden bodies as shown in this photograph showing only six of those examples.



A small selection of the French bebes by Jumeau in original couturier costumes.



## The French Automata

At an early age, Huguette Clark studied the violin, her mother was an acclaimed harpist, and the entire family were avid supporters of the opera. Little wonder, then, that Huguette turned to the motions, music and fancy of the French 19<sup>th</sup> century automata as nostalgic reminders of her childhood. Elegant fashionista ladies, likely on their way to important society affairs or reclining elegantly on velvet recamiers while music plays in the background, graceful ballerinas and troubadours with violins or guitars are included in her collection from the workshops of Vichy and Lambert.

Automata recalling scenes of childhood are in abundance. There is the child crying over her toy Polichinelle, dainty children with fans and hankies, and a laughing child in baker's costume offering a bounty of her favorite childhood food, brioche. Portrait bisque ladies, in original Shepherdess costume recalling the 18<sup>th</sup> century, hold baskets with hidden surprises, while exotic bisque Chinese ladies serve tea or fan themselves. A rare model of a child seated on a high stool has a special surprise which is a hidden phonograph mechanism by Lioret, of which few examples are known to exist.

There are more than 35 automata from the golden age in the Huguette Clark collection.

Above: The music, motion and fancy of French 19<sup>th</sup> century automata recalled to Huguette Clark the elegance of her early life in Paris, and the quest to find rare examples of this automata continued throughout her collecting years.

Right: Imperiously awaiting the attentions of her visitors, the portrait Jumeau lady, posed upon a velvet recamier, languidly fans herself, and, alternately gazes through her lorgnette, while raising and lowering her body and turning side to side. Leopold Lambert, circa 1885.





## The Japanese Dolls

Although Huguette Clark had never visited Japan, she was intrigued with the art and culture of its society. This may have originated during her childhood immersion into her father's extraordinary collection of Asian art. At any rate, during the 1930s she made a connection with the G.T. Marsh and Co. of California, an importer of Asian art and antiques, and began to assemble a collection of Japanese dolls in traditional costume, some of which were used as models for her paintings which were later exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington.

Huguette Clark was an avid scholar and reader. Becoming intrigued by the first Japanese novel, *The Tales of Genji*, written in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, she commissioned a series of elaborately costumed Japanese portrait dolls based upon the characters in that novel. Each is still preserved today in its original box upon which is written in Japanese lettering "Mrs. Huguette Clark" and the name of the character.

Too, she collected the beloved Ichimatsu or play dolls in their colorful costumes with meaningful symbols and authentic details of construction, as well as portrait dolls of elegant ladies, those Eastern echoes of French fashion ladies from an earlier epoch, as well as ceremonial dolls and accessories known as hina-matsuri.

## The Dollhouses and Dollhouse People

From early childhood, Huguette Clark was fascinated with dollhouses in their ability to capture a miniature version of reality, as well as inspire an imaginative fancy. To that end, from the 1930s onward, she commissioned a number of miniature houses ranging from wooden fairytale cottages from Edith Von Arps of BAPS to grand chateaux from Au Nain Bleu of Paris to Japanese castles commissioned from the G.T. Marsh firm and made by master craftsman Saburo Kawakami. The book, *Empty Mansions*, relates the extraordinary Clark-Kawakami story in detail. Along with the dollhouses are, of course, the miniature people who inhabited these homes, highlighted by an exceptional collection of BAPS dolls in every theme, and including theatres and props.

## The Dolls by Madame Alexander

Curious to find in the collection are five extraordinary dolls from the Madame Alexander Mystery Portrait Series of 1952. Yet, perhaps not so strange, for the 1950s was the very time that Huguette Clark and Beatrice Alexander were both involved in fashion and society in New York city, and it is not unlikely that their paths crossed. Always with an eye for beauty, Huguette would have recognized the artistry of this series and chosen those that spoke to



Five from the collection of fifteen Ichimatsu Japanese child dolls, early 20th century, in sizes from 15"-23", in original lavish costumes.



Exquisite and rare portrait dolls from the Madame Alexander studios, c. 1950 are preserved in pristine condition.

her imagination. At any rate, she preserved them in such superb original presentation as to be nearly unimaginable. And, of course, continued to choose other dolls by the firm, all preserved in pristine condition.

The collection of Huguette Clark is presented in a 200 page book available December 15, and the dolls will come to auction by Theriault's on January 11, 2020 in Santa Barbara, California, nearby Bellosguardo, the famous former Clark estate. The collection is being offered to benefit the arts and culture programs of the Bellosguardo Foundation.