



P.D. Smith Dolls... ...Wonderful and Rare!

By Susan Foreman

Even in 1948 dolls by the Smith family were considered rare. To quote Eleanor St. George from her 1948 book *The Dolls of Yesterday*:

“Only a few fortunate collectors, chiefly in California, where the dolls were made, possess examples of the charming infant dolls created by the Smith Family of Santa Cruz.”

Thus, I feel privileged to have four dolls in my collection, all individually unique and decidedly different from one another. While we now know that much of the information about Mr. and Mrs. P.D. Smith in Eleanor St. George’s book is inaccurate, this statement about rarity holds true to this day.

Being California born and raised I have always been interested in dolls created here in California. The Smith family, in particular, piqued my interest in that they eventually ended up working less than 30 miles from where I live - of course that was 100 years ago.

The first P.D. Smith doll I acquired was at an auction about 35 or 40 years ago. The 24” doll has a composition head, set eyes, and is on a jointed composition body. At the time the doll maker was unknown. It was assumed by both the auction house and respected doll dealers that the doll was of German manufacture. For some reason it just did not seem like the German dolls I had seen. So I started at “A” in the *Coleman’s Collectors Encyclopedia of Dolls*, determined to find an answer. Finally, in volume 2, under “S”, I found a doll with a similar smile - P.D. Smith. And here is what I found, and what started me on the quest for more information about this obscure maker.



24” on compo body,



22" on cloth body with patented flirty/sleep eyes, bent limb baby on marked cloth body with patented flirty/sleep eyes.

"Smith, Mr. & Mrs. Putnam David (Mabel) 1913-22, Santa Cruz. Mrs. P.D. Smith, a portrait painter, and her daughter Margaret, modeled the heads for dolls. Their composition heads and arms were put on cloth bodies or old German composition bodies with the help of Mr. P.D. Smith. Most of the heads had glass eyes and many of them had dimples. The P.D. Smith dolls came in black as well as white versions and in various sizes from small dolls to life-size display dolls. Prices ranged from \$5 to \$8. The dolls were distributed by George C. Salch Co. of San Francisco.

1918: George Salch built a \$100,000 factory to increase the business and produce more cheaply the P.D. Smith "Santa Cruz Dolls". But when the factory took over the business the dolls became inferior and demand declined."

I then returned to Volume 1 of the Encyclopedia and found the following additional, although limited, information:

"Smith, Mr. & Mrs. Putnam David (1913-1922) Santa Cruz, CA. Assisted by their daughter, Margaret Smith, they designed and made dolls. These dolls are often referred to as P.D. Smith or Mabel P. Smith dolls. Most of them were of a wood-pulp composition; some have eyes that move from side to side as well as sleep. Some of the baby dolls have cloth bodies. Baby Beautiful, Pollyanna, and Laughing Sonny Boy were among the dolls made by the family. The dolls were artistic but expensive.



1918: Margaret W. Smith obtained a copyright for "Clara" a figurine of a Red Cross nurse.

1919: Mabel P. Smith designed "Duck Me", a figurine of a child in a bathing suit, copyrighted by Lloyd W. Stetson. Margaret Smith designed "Doughboy's Doughgirl", a figurine of a girl with doughnuts in her hands, copyrighted by Lloyd W. Stetson. (wonder who Lloyd W Stetson is?)



1922: Margaret Smith designed two oriental figurines and an oriental head, which may have been used on a doll. These were copyrighted by Carmalet Waldo Webb. The head was named Yat Quong.” (and who is this Carmalet Webb?)

Where to begin. When I first started this research there was no “google” so I turned to the few books I had that included information about P.D. Smith.

In addition to Eleanor St. George’s book (with what turns out to be a great deal of misinformation) I also found references in Janet Johl’s 1952 book *Your Dolls and Mine...a Collector’s Handbook*. This book, too, seems to have much misinformation including quoting misinformation from Ms. St. George’s book. But Janet Johl did add an interesting connection between Emma Clear and the Smith Family.

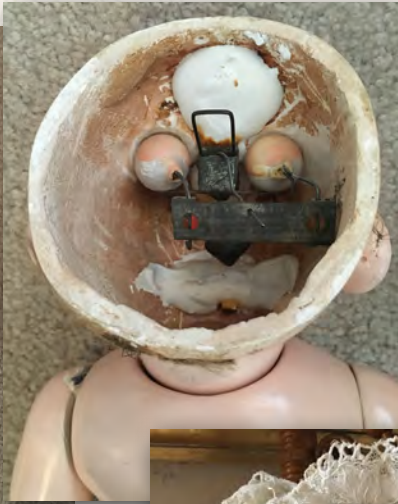
“Mrs. Emma C. Clear reported a doll made in Los Angeles during the first World War by a talented young girl who worked at the Humpty Dumpty Hospital during one Christmas season. She did the modeling for the doll heads, and her parents, who were elderly to have so young a daughter, did the doll bodies.” These first two sentences make no sense as the Smiths were living in Santa Cruz and daughter Margaret would only have been about twelve years old.

Ms. Johl continues to quote Mrs. Clear: “These heads were used during the war period as replacements for German bisque doll heads which could no longer be imported. The German doll body was copied so that the Smith head is the only really original part of the doll, but this head is a true specimen of Americana.”

2452A & B. All-composition doll made by P.D. Smith has a wig, sleeping and flirting blue glass eyes, dimples and an open-closed mouth with six teeth. The socket head is on a composition shoulder plate that extends below the arms. The torso is flannel and there are composition arms and composition legs. The shoulders and hips have diagonal joints while the upper legs end in balls that fit into the sockets at the top of the lower legs. The knees and hands are dimpled and the fingernails are molded. Original clothes. Mark on head Ill. 2453. Stamp on body is a © within another circle and some words between the circles. H. 21½ in. (54.5 cm.). *Courtesy of the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum. Photo by Harry Bickelhaupt.*



This is the Coleman Encyclopedia photo that propelled me forward in my research.



The American Doll Artist, written in 1965 by Helen Bullard also mentions the Smith dolls:

“Success is not always the reward of even the talented doll artist. One of the most discouraging stories is that of Mrs. P.D. Smith of Santa Cruz. Just before World War I, Mabel Smith began studying the German-made play dolls distributed in this country and decided that they were lifeless and unreal. She was sure she could do better, and she tried. The fresh, alive faces and attitudes which after much experiment she modeled were obviously more attractive and more American than the play dolls of the period. WWI had begun by this time and the importation of dolls and toys had ground to a halt. Mrs. Smith and her husband decided that the moment was ripe to launch her doll designs.”

“First, though, her husband decided they needed a ‘gimmick’ to help them meet the inevitable competition, and he developed – after much trial and error struggling – a double motion arrangement for the eyes. This might have done the trick, except that it had already been invented and was on the market.



Above and Left: Smiling baby with painted eyes.

Below: Sleeping baby from Grovian Museum (all others are from my collection)



Painting the Dooley Dolls, Atascadero Doll Factory.

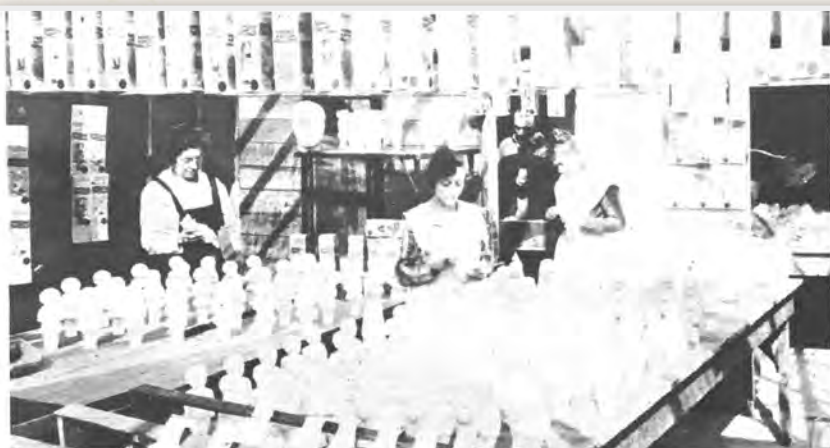
This photo shows Margaret at left and Mabel at right painting dolls.

The Full Page series of photos shown in the Atascadero newspaper and mentioned in the Santa Cruz Article.



Preparing a mould for casting.

This photo shows Mabel (Mrs. P.D.) preparing a mold for one of the chalk figures.

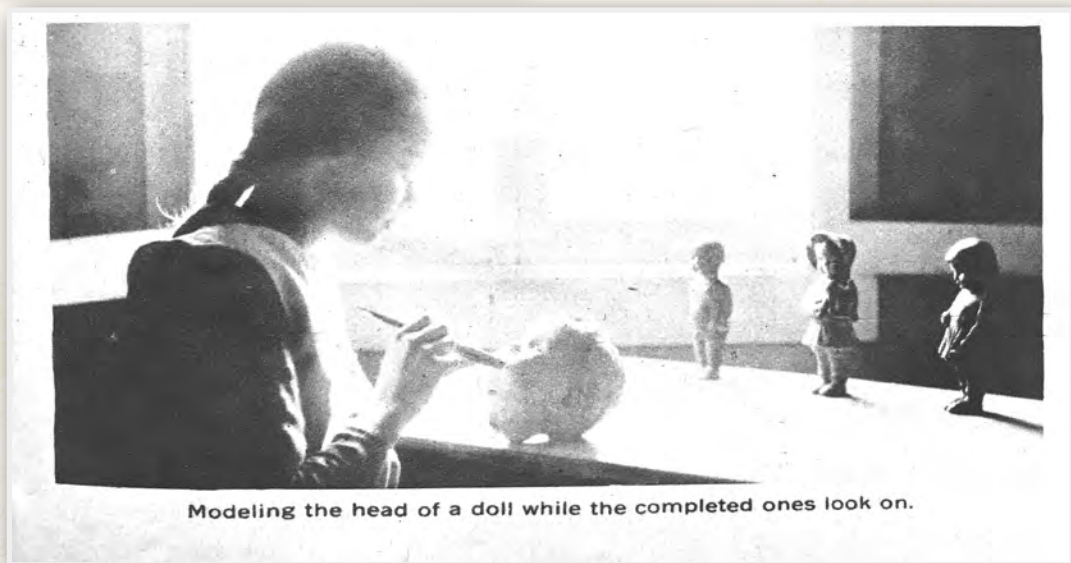


Packing room of the Atascadero Doll and Toy Factory, where the finished dolls are each packed in its separate carton. Atascadero dolls are made from diatomaceous earth found on the Atascadero Estates, which makes a very light but almost indestructible doll, superior to porcelain. The first order received was for 250,000 dolls. This industry, besides employing many talented women, will help make Atascadero famous.

Above: This photo shows the chalk figures being produced.

Right: This photo is of daughter Margaret. Note that she is working on a large head while the Chalk figures look on.

SMITHS HAVE DOLL FACTORY AT ATASCADERO
 The P. D. Smiths, who resided for a time on Otis street and who exhibited dolls of their own make, at one of the industrial fairs, now have a doll factory at Atascadero, Calif.
 The Illustrated Review for December devotes one whole page of photographs showing the family and their helpers at work on their first order of a quarter of a million of "Dolly Dolls," as they are called, for a company in Oakland. The many friends of the Smiths will be pleased to know that success has at last crowned their persevering efforts.



Modeling the head of a doll while the completed ones look on.

Such unawareness and lack of experience in production and marketing as well as lack of capital proved their undoing. Although the doll designs were excellent, the effort to reproduce them and put them on the market (at \$5 to \$8, high for a play doll at that time) was almost ludicrous in its ineptitude. Ignorance of the toy market, high-priced and inexperienced labor and competition from cheap imports, compounded by financing troubles, ended the doll producing venture."

"The Smiths then tried to produce life-size child dolls for display figures in department stores. Although this doll, called the 'most beautiful display doll in the world', was successful, it could not be produced profitably because of the large amount of handwork required. Quite a few were produced before this effort, too, was abandoned. *Even this was not all; molds of the original dolls and of lovely little figurines which their daughter Margaret had made were stolen from storage. Designs were pirated and the market was flooded with cheap copies of the fine Smith dolls. Mr. Smith died and both Mable and her daughter, completely discouraged, turned to other work."

*In these last three sentences in particular, Helen Bullard continued to report the inaccurate information provided by Eleanor St. George and quoted nearly word for word various sentences from Janet Johl's book of 1952.

With this limited bit of information I turned to newspapers of the era. And then by chance a fellow collector, Elaine Jaworski, contacted me in 2009, She too was researching PD Smith and had seen photos of two of my dolls in Ursula Mertz's book *Collectors Encyclopedia of American Composition Dolls*, Volume 1. More and more of the story came together.

TO SUM UP MY FINDINGS TO DATE:

Putnam David Smith was born in Wisconsin on August 11, 1857. Mabel Prescott was born in Iowa on March 1, 1872. How they met is unknown, however it is known that they married in 1897. In the 1900 Census they are living in Waterloo, Iowa with Mabel's brother Justin, a piano tuner. The Census shows both Putnam and Mabel as portrait painters. They are still living in Waterloo when their daughter Margaret was born on September 28, 1902. However, by 1910 they had relocated to Oakland, California and were living with another of Mabel's brothers, Llewellyn Prescott, a machinist at a planning mill. The 1910 Census lists Mabel as an artist and shows that Putnam is working for the planning mill. How and when they ended up in Santa Cruz is unknown.

However, according to early historians and newspaper articles it appears that Mabel and Putnam started their doll business in 1913, working out of their home. By 1914 their twelve-year-old daughter Margaret was sculpting small plaster figures with names reflecting World War I themes such as "Doughnut girl" (aka "Doughboy's Doughgirl" and "Salvation Lassie"), "Red Cross Nurse" (later known as "Clara") and "Bathing Girl (later known as "Duck Me").



P. D. Smith dolls. Courtesy of Mrs. P. D. Smith, now Mrs. Liddle, Los Angeles, California.



P. D. Smith doll. Collection of Mrs. Gurth Ritter, Torrance, California.



Figurines by Margaret Smith, 1918.

Above: PD Smith dolls shown in Eleanor St. George's 1948 book *The Dolls of Yesterday*.

Below: Mr. Putnam David Smith, date of photo unknown.





Atascadero's December 1919 "The Illustrated Review" mentioned in Santa Cruz Article

The "Dooley Dolls" of Atascadero
Made from diatomaceous earth—light as a feather and indestructible

No. 1 Bathing Doll No. 2 Red Cross Doll No. 3 Salvation Lassie

These dolls are nine inches high and made of diatomaceous earth—light as a feather and indestructible. They are the daintiest, cleverest dolls you have ever seen. We have arranged with the factory here at Atascadero, to let The Illustrated Review have several thousand of them for its readers, although the factory is working on a single order of a quarter million dolls for a company in Oakland, California, the heads of which have given permission to supply to The Illustrated Review a few thousand of the first dolls, for Christmas, in advance of their own order.

We will send one of these dolls (any one of the three) to each of our readers, all charges prepaid, and carefully packed, who sends us five one-year subscriptions to The Illustrated Review at 50c per year each. What nicer Christmas gifts could you make than five subscriptions to The Illustrated Review to older people and the doll to some little one.

You will not be able to obtain these dolls for Christmas in any other way. Send in your five new subscribers to The Illustrated Review, writing the names and addresses clearly, and also be sure to state which doll you wish and who you want the doll sent to. We will enclose your Christmas card if you send it with the subscriptions, and get it off in the mails in time for Christmas. If the subscriptions are gifts be sure to say so.

Address THE ILLUSTRATED REVIEW

Doll Department **Atascadero, California**

NOTE—Where subscriptions to The Illustrated Review are given as Christmas gifts, if you state so, we will send a nice Christmas receipt card, advising the recipient that the year's subscription is a Christmas gift from you. You could not make nicer gifts than subscriptions to The Illustrated Review. Your friends will appreciate the gift every month for a year to come, and we will appreciate your help in building up The Illustrated Review. We are sure some little one will appreciate the "Dooley Dolls." One doll will be given for each five subscriptions you send us.

Mabel had been studying the German-made play dolls for several years prior to WWI and was not pleased with what she saw. She applied her sculpting and portrait painting talents to create fresh, character type faces more in keeping with the American child. With the advent of WWI and the halting of German doll imports, the Smith family decided it was the perfect time to introduce their doll. Sadly they lacked money and also they lacked knowledge of the doll industry. They did not understand distribution. And while people admired the dolls for their superior quality of sculpting and painting, the high prices charged for the dolls (\$5 to \$8) created a limited market and the ultimate demise of the Smith venture.

The heads were initially placed on either existing cloth bodies with composition limbs or German jointed bodies. Later bodies had more uniformity. Some dolls featured the Smith's 1919 patented sleep/flirt eye mechanism. When filing for the patent, Mr. Putnam stated that he was the owner of "The American Beauty Doll Company"; apparently the name they gave their venture. The cloth body of the character baby in my collection is stamped with the patent date of April 1, 1919.

A March 27, 1917 article in the Santa Cruz Evening News, entitled "Smiths As Doll Makers....A New Industry By People With Genius". This short article stated: "Mr. and Mrs. P.D. Smith of Otis Street have been showing some very natural-like dolls, homemade, and most natural, showing genius and talent on the part of the makers, the Smiths and W.A. Montague (whomever that is) and have applied for a patent. The natural-like

faces attracted the attention of all who passed the Howe window. It is marvelous the way the eyes move, not only in closing as if in sleep or when they move back and forth. There are Jap, Negro, Chinese, Dutch and faces of all nationalities (now that's interesting?) and all are of indestructible material and colored most naturally. "

In 1918, in order to increase production and distribution, the Smiths connected with the George C. Salch Co., of San Francisco. However, by 1919, according to census data, the Smiths had moved to Atascadero, California to join forces with Mr. Edmond T. Dooley and his newly formed Atascadero Doll & Toy Factory.

The George C. Salch Co. apparently continued to produce P.D. Smith dolls, but as to whether the Smiths were still involved is unknown. Due to decreased quality, high price, and growing competition the company closed in 1922.

The December 7, 1919, Santa Cruz Evening News reported: "Smiths Have Doll Factory At Atascadero" and the article goes on to state: "The P.D. Smiths, who resided for a time on Otis street and who exhibited dolls of their own make, at one of the industrial fairs, now have a doll factory at Atascadero, Calif. The Illustrated Review for December devotes one whole page of photographs showing the family and their helpers at work on their first order of a quarter of a million of "Dolly Dolls" as they are called, for a company in Oakland. The many friends of the Smiths will be pleased to know that success has at last crowned their persevering efforts." This would imply that the Smith's owned the Atascadero factory, which they did not. It was Mr. Dooley that owned the doll making enterprise in Atascadero as noted in the July 11, 1919 edition of The Atascadero News. That article announced that Mr. Dooley and his family had just moved to Atascadero from San Francisco and that he owned patents for P.D. Smith Dolls. This was front page news as it offered some encouraging economic news that coincided with Atascadero's early economic depression. Atascadero at this point was still very young. E.G. Lewis purchased 23,000 acres in 1913 for about \$1 million envisioning it as a veritable paradise with spacious rolling hills. People did not start arriving until 1915, with

the first homes being completed in early 1916. A building boom began in late 1919...people came, jobs followed. The Atascadero Historical Society commented that the "earliest industry was the Printery, the E.T. Dooley Doll Factory, and poultry farming". The Smith family, having relocated to Atascadero in 1919, implies that they had a working relationship with Mr. Dooley and that the Smith doll molds had not been stolen as reported by Eleanor St. George.

And while Eleanor St. George stated in 1948 that "it was heartbreaking to artistic souls to see their creations cheapened and discredited, Mr. and Mrs. Smith fell ill and Mr. Smith died." This is certainly wrong as Mr. Smith and family had, as mentioned previously, moved to Atascadero in 1919 and in the 1920 census were living on Traffic Way in Atascadero with Mabel's brother Herbert Prescott, a laborer at the doll factory.

From 1919 to 1925 there continued to be newspaper articles regarding Dooley and the P.D. Smith dolls. Yet in all accounts it appears that while the chalk figures were being produced, the much talked about "moving eye" dolls were not. Were the traditional dolls ever produced in Atascadero? In the December 1919 issue of *The Illustrated Review* there is a photo of daughter Margaret cleaning a large doll head. All other photos show the chalk figures only. The newspapers reported in 1925 that Dooley had left town.

Shortly thereafter, according to census data, the Smiths relocated to Los Angeles where they were living with another of Mabel's brother, Alfred Prescott. It appears that it was during their time in Los Angeles that they attempted to market their large dolls as department store mannequins as referenced in Helen Bullard's book. Although well received, this venture also failed due to the high cost of the dolls and marketing naiveté. Putnam died at the age of 77 in Los Angeles on November 17, 1933. In the early 1940s Mabel married Edward S. Liddle and lived in Pasadena until her death on January 5, 1956.

Elaine Jaworski also discovered that Margaret (PD and Mabel's daughter) married Francisco Tapia in 1922. Following their marriage they moved to Bolivia where Mr. Tapia worked at the American Embassy. Their seven children were born in Bolivia where they lived for thirty years. Upon returning to America they chose Pasadena, California as home. Margaret died in 1982. Elaine was able to meet five of the surviving children. Apparently they remember one family doll and hopefully will one day provide her with some photos which are in an attic somewhere. By 2013 she had received no additional information from the family.

Elaine provided the following information based on her research. Between 2009 and 2016 she has been able to

document just 16 dolls in collections and museums hence making them extremely rare.

With the addition of my new bent limb baby doll purchased in 2017 that would be 17. Then in January 2018 Michael and David of the Carmel Doll Shop discovered two babies...one of which I'm happy to say is now mine while the other will be in the Grovian Museum thus bringing the number to 19. I'm sure there are many more out there and would love to hear from anyone that has an example.

I've included photos of the four dolls in my collection and the sleeping baby in the Grovian Doll Museum collection to give an idea of the variety. The first one is a 24" doll on a jointed composition body and has sleep eyes. The second is 22" tall on a cloth body with composition limbs and has flirty/sleep eyes. The third is a baby on a cloth body marked with a C in a circle and the patent date of April 1, 1919. The baby also has the patented flirty/sleep eye mechanism which surprisingly still functions well. The fourth doll in my collection is a large painted eye, smiling baby. The Grovian's doll is a sleeping baby of the same size as my smiling baby.

It is sad to think that Mrs. Smith was still alive when Janet Johl and Eleanor St. George were writing their books...if only they had taken time to interview Mrs. Smith we may have had more, not to mention more accurate, information about this short lived doll making enterprise.



Chalk figure with original box (courtesy: Atascadero Historical Society)