

Frozen Charlottes



Frozen Charlotte dolls on display at the Dana House Museum.

Frozen Charlottes are unjointed china dolls manufactured in the US between the 1860s and 1900. They range in size from one to four inches and are most commonly white porcelain (glazed only on one side) with black hair, though some had brown or red hair. They were unclothed. The name came from a very popular ballad of the day (known across the USA at the time) called “Fair Charlotte” written by William Lorenzo Carter of Benson, Vermont. His ballad simply put music to a poem written about 1843 by Seba Smith, a newspaperman from Maine. His poem, “A Corpse Going to a Ball,” written as a cautionary tale, was based on a newspaper story in which a beautiful young woman named Charlotte set out with her beau, Charles, in a sleigh on a bitterly cold New Year’s Eve to attend a ball. Although her parents admonished her to wear warmer clothing and take blankets, she did not wish to wrinkle her gown and so froze to death.

Frozen Charlottes were also called “penny” dolls or babies and were quite popular because they could be purchased for one cent and many children had them. It is said they were used at ladies’ tea parties to stir tea to cool it down quickly. Once used, the doll would be given to a well-behaved young girl. Later, smaller versions were even baked into cakes or used as cupcake toppers.

Written by Rose Mroszczyk
July, 2008