

TRENTON'S CHRISTMAS PAST:

Horsman Dolls, Inc.
Founding to it's Trenton Heyday



HORSMAN is the oldest name in American Dolls

The E.I. Horsman Company is founded in 1865

- Founded by 22 year old Edward Imeson Horsman (3rd generation of that name) in NYC



Image from The NYC Public Library
Digital Collections

- Company manufactured games and home amusements (particularly sporting goods)
Tennis, archery, croquet sets were early best sellers
- By the mid 1870's, the company was importing some of its inventory from Germany
Edward traveled there regularly to buy toys, fancy goods and novelties
- Originally a retail store, the company involves into an import and wholesale house and only later the manufacturer of dolls
- By the 1880's the company's catalog showed a wide variety of imported dolls in many sizes



E.I. the portal of a trans-Atlantic ship



Composition doll Billiken



German all bisque bald dolls

- In the early 1890's Horsman had cloth playthings made to their specifications by outside companies
- Dolls made up only a portion of Horsman's catalog, which also featured kites, cameras, jigsaw puzzles, tiddlywinks games, magic lanterns and tennis sets
- 1909 Horsman becomes the sole distributor of the perfected and patented virtually indestructible composition doll
- At about 1910, Horsman began to concentrate solely on dolls

E.I. Horsman (4th generation)

- Born in 1873, known as Junior
- Senior hoped Junior would enter the family business
Junior's interest was artistic and not mercantile
He loved music, composed songs and became the musical director for several NYC churches
- The young Junior Horsman was intrigued by these artistically new and more realistic dolls
After the company's success with the composition doll head "Billiken", Junior wanted to follow-up with a new line of American-made composition character dolls.



Helen Fox Trowbridge Sculpted Medallion

- 1909 Junior sees a display of sculpted medallions of children by Helen Fox Trowbridge
- She is hired by Horsman to capture the fresh new look of real American children in dolls
- She holds the position of chief designer for nearly a decade and a half, literally changing the face of American dolls

Horsman's Rise...

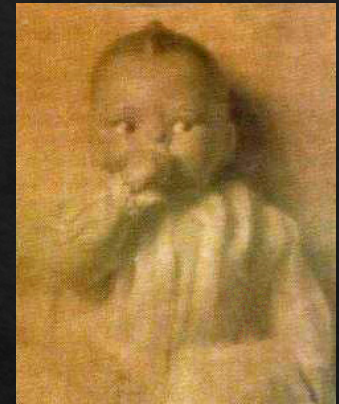


Helen Fox Trowbridge

- Starting in 1909, Trowbridge sculptured the immensely popular Campbell Kid doll head and countless others in her American Kids in Toyland series
- With Sr tending to the business details, by the start of WW1, the firm had grown into a major U.S. doll company



Trowbridge's
Campbell Kid



Trowbridge's
Suck A Thumb

...and Fall

- 1918 Junior dies from a major heart attack at 45 years old
- The company loses much of its creativity



Bernard Lipfert

- 1919 Horsman merges with the Aetna Doll Co to become E.I. Horsman and Aetna Doll Co, a clumsy and cumbersome name that lasted only 3 years
- The company would produce thousands of the popular 1920's mama dolls and the company would become one of the top three American doll makers
- Trowbridge departs in the early 1920's
- German-born sculptor Bernard Lipfert becomes the chief designer of Horsman's composition dolls
- Lipfert was anxious to make more than his Horsman wages and moonlights at home in the evening, designing dolls for other companies
- Horsman objected and files a lawsuit in 1927 and loses
- Lipfert is free to create doll prototypes for any and all doll companies. He becomes a freelancer and by the 1930's he was designing four out of five American dolls



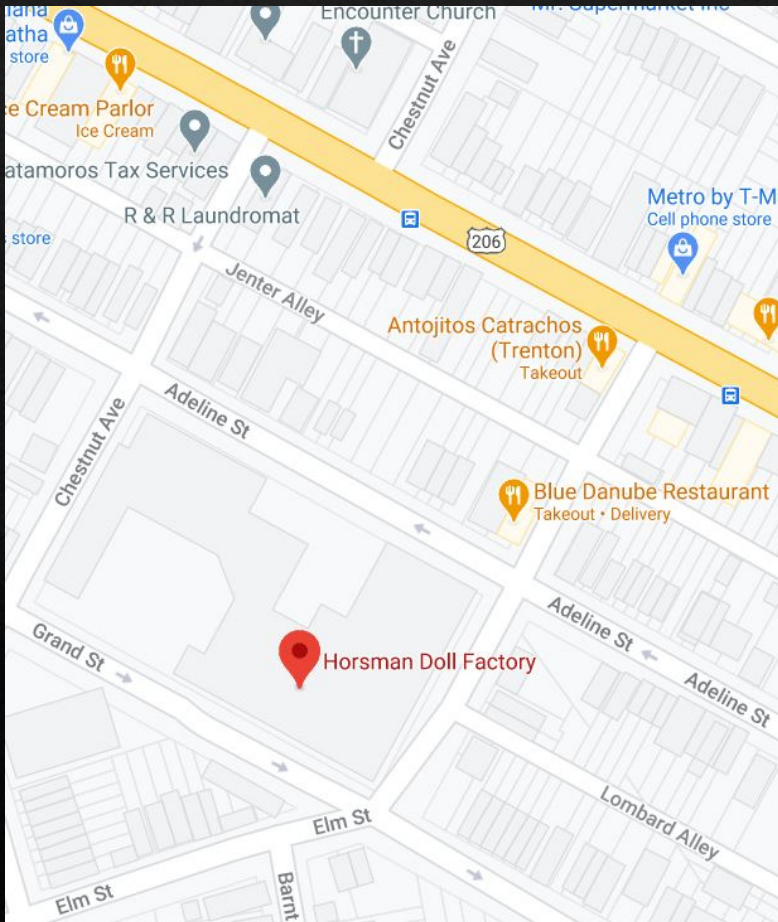
"Blink" designed by Bernard Lipfert, manufactured by Horsman, from Gene Carr's cartoon "Lady Bountiful." Original dressed as a soldier. Circa 1916.

- Only a few weeks after the Lipfert verdict in 1927, the 83 year-old Horsman senior dies
- His obituary in the NY Times called him “the dean of the American toy business”
- 67 days later, his friend and manufacturing expert Benjamin Goldberg dies
- A few days before the company’s sales manager L.C. Wittenberg passed away
- In just two months the E.I. Horsman Co. had lost its top leadership and the era had ended
- By 1932, with the Great Depression the company was bankrupt



Horsman's Baby Dimples Doll, c. 1927

Regal Doll Corporation



- Date of founding unknown, prior to WW1 known as German American Doll Company
- By 1930 Regal's Manhattan factory was no longer adequate for the growing business
- At the end of 1930, the Regal Doll Manufacturing Company purchased the former Taubel Hosiery Mill in Trenton from F. A. Straus & Company for around \$250,000.
- The plant, containing 82,500 square feet was bounded by Adeline Street, Chestnut Avenue, Elm and Grand Streets.

The World's Largest DOLL HOUSE



... comes to
TRENTON

HERE'S a business built upon the solid rock of human Nature, for it caters to an inborn trait that cannot be denied . . . the trait that makes every child supremely happy, playing in that magic Land of Make-believe.

Above we reproduce but one of the almost countless life-like dolls that owe their birth to the Regal Doll Company, whose recent establishment in Trenton brings us not only a new industry but a new honor, for in the Regal Doll Company we have here the largest manufacturers of Dolls in the World.

Briefly, here are some of the reasons why this concern chose Trenton for its complete manu-

facturing activities. 1st—Ideal Labor conditions; second to none. 2nd—All sources of supply within 24 hour delivery. 3rd—Shipping facilities equal if not superior to New York. 4th—Climatic conditions favorable. 5th—More factory space for less cost than other cities with equal facilities.

These advantages, voiced by Regal officials themselves indicate their satisfaction in the establishment of their business here. Anything that we, as business neighbors, can supply will be an extra help to their full success. In this respect, the First-Mechanics offers not only every financial service but extends the friendly grip of Welcome.

The **FIRST-MECHANICS NATIONAL BANK**



DEDICATED TO THE PROGRESS OF TRENTON

- Regal was interested in acquiring Horsman's strong brand identification
- In October 1933 the nearly bankrupt Horsman Company was purchased and became a subsidiary of the Regal Doll Manufacturing Company
- The Horsman brand became Regal's upscale line, paired with its own cheaper dolls
- A new philosophy emerges: selling a relatively few doll types and focusing on cuddly baby dolls with mama criers and that were well dressed in a wide range of well-styled, attractive outfits
- The typical Horsman doll had a certain look, a familiar dolly face that changed little from year to year.
- In 1940 the Regal name is dropped, the company realizing its strength and future promise lay with the Horsman name

Give . . . "GOTHAM"
Gold Stripe Hosiery

We carry the largest assortment of this famous hosiery in the city. Priced \$1, \$1.35 and \$1.65 pair.

Goldbergs

Broad and Front Streets, Trenton, N. J.

Phone 2-4111

Santa's . . . Surprise
Packages at . . . 25c

A surprise in every package for every boy and girl. With it Santa has a gift for all good children.

A Purchase! To Keep a Trenton Factory Busy! 1000 Doll and Trunk Outfits

The most sensational purchase of any one item ever made by any store in this city. This purchase is only a fraction of the business our firm has given The Regal Doll Company of Trenton. Goldberg's was responsible for placing the order of 5,000 dozen dolls made by our chain of stores. We have not only "Tried Trenton First" but we have communicated with our affiliated stores and had their orders placed with this Trenton manufacturer—KEEPING IDLE TRENTONIANS' HANDS BUSY.

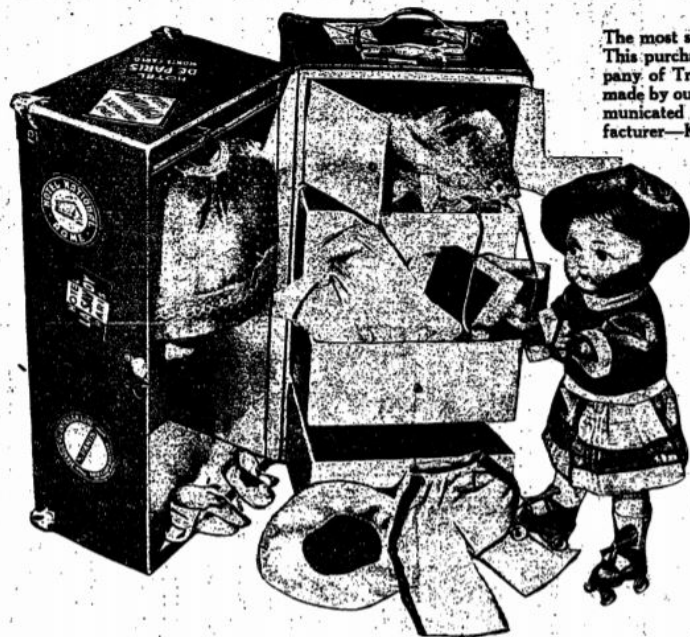
"Little Miss Muffit" Here

—in Person in Her Giant Size Trunk on Goldberg's Street Floor

Here's What You Get for

Lovely dollie that stands 12½ inches high. A real wardrobe trunk with three big drawers, a hat box and, honest-to-goodness hangers. It has steel corners and real hotel and steamship labels on it, just as if it had been to all points of the world. The wardrobe includes five changes of costumes—every doll has a pair of roller skates—Picture the delight of the little girl who gets one.

\$1.94
Complete
STREET FLOOR



Trenton Times, December 10, 1931

While Horsman dolls could be found in big city department stores and upscale toy stores, they were sold in greater numbers through local hardware stores, hometown drug stores and Sears/Montgomery Ward catalogs

BRING YOUR CHRISTMAS CLUB CHECKS
TO SWERN'S . . . WE'LL CASH THEM FOR YOU!



**HORSMAN
Mama-Papa Doll
4.50**

Pretty baby doll stands 17 inches tall. Dark-fringed blue eyes that open and close. In pink or blue bonnet and dress, white slip and pink 'snuggles', shoes and socks. Says 'Ma-Ma' and 'Pa-Pa'.

Toyland - Fourth Floor

Trenton Times, 1947

The War Years 1942-1945

Materials are hard to find:

- Doll's sleep eyes were made in part with metal – sheet metal was hard to find, being used for helmets and ammo boxes
- Scarce too were cloth and fibers for wigs
- Kapok, once used to stuff doll bodies was used during the war to fill life jackets
- The Trenton factory continued to turn out a limited number of dolls for the home-front market
- Late in the war, some Horsman technicians had experience molding prostheses for military amputees – they realize that the same elastic Vinylite used for lifelike artificial hands for veterans also could make amazingly realistic dolls





New Dolls for 1948...Twins...Plastic Dolls

- A** GIRL WITH PINKIE. Trinely dressed in blue and white striped cotton. Full skirted dress, matching open crown bonnet. Snap-closing purse of same material. Cotton construction underneath. White socks, blue slippers. Clothing fastens with buttons. Doll is all composition with jointed arms and legs, turning head. Sleeping glassine eyes, lashes. Blonde mohair wig. Wt. 2 lbs. 12 oz. 48 T 3837—Abt. 16 in. tall.... 4.79
- B** LITTLE GIRL DOLL in Organdy party dress with fancy attached shoulder straps and waist band. Trimmed in lace with ribbon sash. Fastens with buttons. Button holes. White cotton petticoat, panties, rayon socks. White slippers. Natural color straw hat. Composition doll, jointed arms and legs, turning head. Sleeping glassine eyes, lashes. Blonde mohair wig. Ship, wt. 3 lbs. 48 T 3856—Abt. 18 in. tall.... 8.75
- C** PINAFORE GIRL WITH PETALE. Cotton print dress with pinnies attached, foot binding trim. Matching bonnet with open crown and lace ruffle trim. Full organza pinnies with lace trim. White rayon socks, slippers. Doll is composition with jointed arms and legs, turning head. Glassine sleeping eyes, lashes. Mohair pigtail wig with tines in the back. Ship, wt. 3 lbs. 5 oz. 48 T 3860—About 19 in. tall.... 6.75
- D** BEAUTIFUL PLASTIC DOLL. Lightweight, hand-to-break... with lifelike features only possible in this material. Lovely Organdy dress, eyeliner bodice, lace trim. Cotton slip and panties, lace trimmed. Clothing has buttons, buttonholes. Slippers with straps that snap. Straw hat. Head turns, jointed arms and legs. Mohair wig. Glassine sleeping eyes, lashes. Ship, wt. 3 lbs. 48 T 4232—About 21 in. tall.... 9.75
- E** TWINS in GUY BOX. Plastic, nicely molded with separate fingers. Runts inside for tiny tiny older children like to drowse them. Jointed arms. Girl has mohair wig. Boy's hair pointed on. Painted features, shoes and socks. 48 T 3802—Abt. 6 in. tall. Ship, wt. 10 oz. Set..... 95¢
- F** TONNY BAY DOLL in cotton dress and diaper, cotton bonnet. Cute little pointed features. All composition with jointed arms, legs. Ship, wt. 12 oz. 48 T 3814—About 10½ inches tall..... 89¢
- G** PLASTIC MINIATURE BRIDAL PARTY DOLL. Your choice of Bride, Bridesmaid, Maid of Honor, Flower girl, ring bearer, groom. Each abt. 7½ in. tall. Wht. 10 oz. (52) 48 T 3858—Bride Doll in Rayon Satin dress, net ruffle, full veil. White undergarments..... 1.69 (56) 48 T 3859—Bridesmaid. Blue Rayon Tulle dress, net overskirt. White undergarments..... 1.69 (2) 48 T 3884—Maid of Honor. Pink Rayon Tulle dress, net overskirt. White undergarments..... 1.69
- H** BRIDE DOLL in RAYON SATEEN Dress. 2-inch lace at hem, lace and satin trim. Button closing. Full veil, lace trimmed headpiece. Rayon full-slip, undergarment. White shoes and socks. All composition, jointed arms, legs, turning head. Glassine sleeping eyes, lashes. Girl mohair wig with flowers in hair. Bouquet of lace with flowers in hair. Ship, wt. 2 lbs. 8 oz. 48 T 3858—About 13 in. tall.... 4.79

- Late in 1947, one to three years before their competitors, Horsman had a doll with vinyl arms and legs ready to sell, with a substantial number of them on the market in 1948
- The doll was called a Softee, a registered name that Horsman would use for one soft doll or another for more than 50 years



REG. 7.50 "SOFTEE" DOLL

Tremendous value. New life-like "softees" plastic legs, arms, hands with flexible fingers. Dressed prettily, has booties and socks, too. 23 inches.

6.49

Heads

- Doll heads continued to be made of composition until 1948 when hard plastic heads were developed
- By 1949 technicians had improved molding techniques and the soft plastic itself, producing a number of all-vinyl baby dolls with molded hair and soft heads, bodies and limbs
- Composition was phased out by 1950
- Hard plastic heads were gone by 1952 and its use for other body parts ended by 1954



Wigs

- Dolls had worn wigs since the beginning of doll history
- 1930's – 1940's many Horsman dolls wore wigs of mohair, the fine hair of the Angora goat, sewn to a cloth wig cap and stylized. The cap was then glued to the crown of a doll's head
- Horsman last used mohair wigs in 1951, when they began making wigs out of Dow Chemical's Saran
- In 1952 clumps of Saran fibers were rooted in the soft, pliable vinyl heads using a sewing machine like device

A little girl's Christmas dream...
 a **HORSMAN "SOFTEE" DOLL** with
SARAN HAIR...



*it washes
it waves
it combs
it curls*

The "Softee" Doll is
manufactured by
Horsman Dolls, Inc.,
Trenton, New Jersey

and **SARAN**
is a
favorite
for...

- The Softee doll is among the most realistic playthings ever made. Now, in addition to its lifelike eyes and soft, fleshlike plastic arms and legs it has saran hair which can be shampooed, waved, curled and combed over and over. Her saran hair has the sheen and beauty, the permanent color of real hair. The naturalness of her saran hair adds hours of play value to the Softee doll.

Saran is a favorite in the world of grown-ups, too, where it appears in an exciting array of colorful woven fabrics for auto seat covers, indoor and outdoor furniture, luggage and carpeting. You'll find saran everywhere—and everywhere you'll find its beauty is long lived and care-free!



outdoor
furniture

upholstery

carpets

window
screening

auto
seat
covers

SARAN
yarns

THE SARAN YARNS COMPANY
 Odenton, Maryland

- In 1952 other innovations were Walker dolls and a new, improved soft vinyl called Fairy Skin

Technically, the late 1940's and early 1950's had been an amazing time. And from a business sense, Horsman Dolls, Inc., was riding high



Imagine 12,000 Dolls Under Single Roof and You've Got An Idea of Horsman's Plant

Trenton Times, March 12, 1951

- During the peak months of August and September, as many as 12,000 dolls a day were manufactured by about 1,200 full and part-time workers
- It would take approximately three days to make a doll and package it
- Unlike other doll factories, Horsman made everything itself, from doll outfits to wigs, and even the boxes the dolls came in (the company had its own box factory in the building)



More Dolls Than She Ever Had As A Child



Heads and Faces

- 35 young ladies are employed as artists, placing the finishing touches on the heads
- It normally takes two or three minutes to paint a doll's face



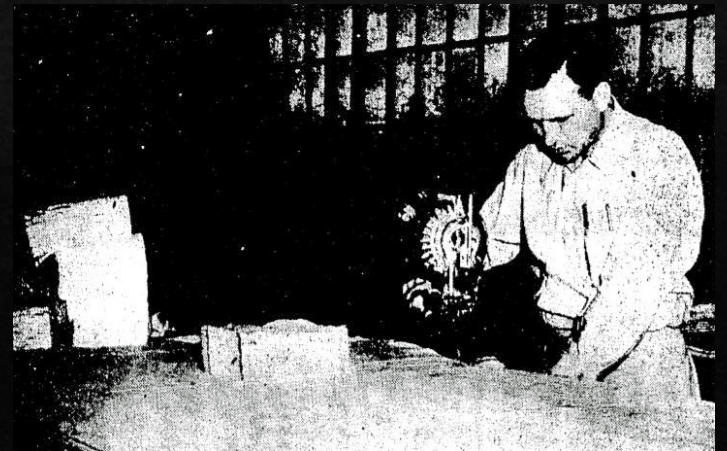
Wigmakers At Work On A Doll's Crowning Glory

- There were 60 or 70 wigmakers and this department was the only one of its kind in the country
- The company had its own training school
- To become a proficient wigmaker, an apprentice must put in a long period of time before she is proficient



A Million Dresses Are Turned Out Here Each Year

- From 250 to 300 women would operate the sewing machines making doll dresses and other clothing
- To keep the sewing machine operators busy, the men would cut 18 pieces of cloth at once with electric cutting devices



Eighteen Doll Dresses Are Cut In Single Operation

A Different Era

- Trenton's southeast side was an ethnic neighborhood that was mostly Polish and Italian
- Many families had lived there for two or three generations
- Mom and Pop businesses were on the corners – a family grocery store, perhaps a barbershop, or especially a neighborhood saloon
- It was an area where workers could walk to work
- A large, skilled and stable workforce was one of the company's greatest assets

OPERATORS—On Singer sewing power machines. Steady work. Horsman Dolls, Grand and Adeline Sts.

HOME WORKERS—Experienced operators to sew doll dresses. Can earn 50 cents per hour and up. Horsman Dolls, Inc., Grand and Elm Sts.

GIRLS—For dressing dolls. Good pay to beginners. Apply Horsman Dolls, Inc., Grand and Elm Sts.

EMBROIDERERS—To do simple work at attractive pay rates. Apply Mr. Ross, Horsman Dolls, Inc. Grand and Elm Sts.

CUTTER AND MARKER—Experienced, part time, to cut dolls' dresses. Opportunity to make extra pay to person without giving up present job. Horsman Dolls, Inc., Grand and Elm St.

PART TIME—Work and Summer vacation jobs for boys over 16. Good pay. Horsman Dolls, Grand and Elm Sts.

COLORED GIRLS—For general factory work. Opportunity for advancement for ambitious girls. Horsman Dolls, Inc., Grand and Elm Sts.

CUTTERS AND SPREADERS—Part time. Apply Horsman Dolls, Inc., Grand and Elm Sts., no phone calls.

DOLL PAINTERS—Experienced. Good salary, paid vacation and holidays. Full or part time. Horsman Doll, Grand & Elm Sts.

FORELADY—Final inspection of dolls. Permanent position. Annual wage, paid vacation and holidays. Horsman Doll, Grand & Elm Sts.



- Every employee was a member of the Amalgamated Metal, Machine and Novelty Workers Union, Local 225
- The employees worked hard and well
- The employees made good money
- But for management, that produced a major problem, since most doll companies had their manufacturing plant in New York City and they paid their workers a lot less
- Nine years later in 1960 Horsman Dolls Inc., would leave Trenton and open up operations in Caycee, South Carolina

Source: *Horsman Dolls, The Vinyl Era 1950 to Present* by Don Jenson
Dolls Face A New Look by the Cornwall, CT Historical Society
Imagine 12,000 Dolls Under Single Roof and You've Got An Idea of Horsman's Plant, Trenton Times, March 12, 1951