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Raggedy Ann and More: Johnny Gruelle's Dolls and Merchandise
Patricia Hall
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Arguably one of the most famous dolls in history, yarn-haired Raggedy Ann has been around for forty years longer than the overly fashion-conscious Barbie. When the Malibu princess debuted in the late 1950s, eventually becoming the biggest selling doll in history, the cloth-bodied, apron-clad, decidedly unglamorous Raggedy settled to the bottom of the toy box, but only temporarily. Almost never out of production for the past seventy years, the beloved doll created by illustrator Johnny Gruelle spawned a collection of assorted merchandise the likes of which tends to mark the release these days of an animated Disney film.

This is good news for collectors hoping to dig for gold in Grandma's attic. The bad news is that Raggedy Ann and Andy and Gruelle's other characters and merchandise have been through so many permutations and manufacturers (both licensed and unlicensed) over the years that collectors need quite a bit of detailed information to figure out if their attic find is worth five dollars or $500. Enter Hall, who provides the expert guidance needed to sort through Gruelle's extensive portfolio. Hall is a lifelong collector of Gruelle's books and dolls and the author of Johnny Gruelle, Creator of Raggedy Ann and Andy (Pelican). In 1990 and 1991, she was curator of the Indiana State Museum's Johnny Gruelle and Raggedy Ann exhibit.

Hall begins the doll's history with its forerunner, Gruelle's Twee Deedle doll produced in 1911 by A. Steinhardt & Bro. As authorized by of the New York Herald, where Gruelle worked as a cartoonist. In 1915, Gruelle received a patent for his Raggedy Ann doll, which he apparently produced himself in enough quantity to secure his trademark. The first commercial production of the doll was as a retail display prop to promote Gruelle's book of stories about the character, setting up a link between the literary character and the merchandise that was to continue throughout Gruelle's career.

Hall deals entirely with the first four decades of the doll's history when the design and manufacture were directly connected to Gruelle. She ends the saga in 1963, when the Knickerbocker Toy Company became the sole authorized manufacturer of the dolls and "inaugurated the beginning for Gruelle's characters of a new, more broadly based commercial

life, one driven by expanded product lines, multi-venue marketing, overseas manufacturing, and myriad re-interpretations of the Raggedys' design."

The author's account is lively and accompanied by lavish charts and illustrations, many from her own personal collection. This is sure to be an indispensable guide for Raggedy fans, antique dealers and collectors.

Sharon Flesher