

## INNOCENT ANGELS IN A DANGEROUS WORLD

As the industrial revolution separated dwelling and workplace in the 1800s, the home became a female-oriented sanctuary from the harsher masculine world of business and trade. Parents felt the need to protect their children from the world outside the home. Romantic ideas of innocence resulted in children being seen as "angelic," and great care was taken to shield them from the sinful, dangerous world. Charles Dickens' character Oliver Twist and Harriet Beecher Stowe's angelic Little Eva personified the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideal of the spiritually chaste child. Children did not always turn out so well, however. Even innocent babes could be tainted by any bad trait that had run in the family, even generations before. Children who were deformed, retarded, or who exhibited other socially unacceptable characteristics attributable to inheritance were often hidden from the world to maintain the family's reputation.

Parents' desire to maintain childhood innocence extended to ignoring physical gender differences for as long as possible. About 1830 androgynous clothing for young children became fashionable, and remained so until after 1900. Boys and girls wore a loose dress or belted smock to the knee and pantelettes (drawers) to the ankles. For boys, this replaced the tight little suit with pants and small jacket called the "skeleton suit." This was the first time girls wore a bifurcated garment (Pants!) and many adults thought it shocking. For the first time girls were able to play actively (and comfortably) alongside their brothers. For boys, this replaced the tight little suit with pants and small jacket called the "skeleton suit." This was the first time girls wore a bifurcated garment (Pants!) and many adults thought it shocking. For the first time girls were able to play actively (and comfortably) alongside their brothers.



"Jumping Rope" in Mrs. L. Maria Child, *The Girls' Own Book*,  
(New York: Clark Austin & Co., 1838, p. 103.)

Jumping rope became a game for girls in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. And though many toys remained gender-specific, lively girls did enter into active games. In her memoir noted above, Laura Russell remembered that her white drawers came down "to her heels," and complained that her slipper-like shoes did not hold up nearly as well as her older brother's sturdy ones during a game of football (played with a blown-up pig's bladder!).

Highchairs with trays, nurseries with cribs and other child-sized furniture became common after the 1860s. Life became a bit more comfortable as cold baths were discarded in favor of warm ones. Perambulators appeared with the increased incidence of paved sidewalks. These symbols of

contented domesticity provided occasions for family outings that served to display both baby and the family's prosperity.

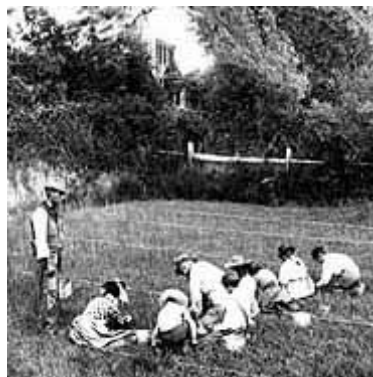
Material culture exploded in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. In almost every sphere of life, people simply had more "stuff" than ever before. Children's rooms and nurseries began to be filled with toys. Dolls continued to be imported from European porcelain factories but began to be made in the form of children and, later, babies, instead of the "lady" dolls of earlier days. Other inexpensive toys were imported from China. By the 1830s, however, the American toy industry was launched and began its tireless campaign to establish markets, especially for Christmas and New Year's toys and gifts. Paper dolls were popular, and in 1859, Godey's became the first magazine to publish paper dolls within its pages for its readers.



Paper doll with 25 costumes, *Boston Sunday Herald*, 1890-1900, polychrome paper, (h. 9 ½ in.), Gift of Marjorie Belcher, 1980 (PHM 1505).

**The paper doll in this set is a dark-haired adult dressed in an elegant black chemise. The doll was published in the Sunday edition of the paper with the promise of a new costume in every Sunday paper thereafter**

Though refined manners and social skills remained crucial in making one's way in life, organized public schools and academic subjects grew to be a larger part of more middle and upper class children's lives in the 1800s. Other young lives were spent in long hours of labor on farms or in urban factories. A few progressive states began to place some limits on child labor. Massachusetts passed legislation in 1842 that limited factory work for children less than twelve years of age to ten hours a day. As in 1620, 1730, (and still today) much depended on where you lived, and who your parents were.



Photograph, c.1900  
Picking Cranberries on Cape Cod,"  
Pilgrim Hall Museum Archives.  
Everyone is needed to bring in the harvest.