

Mom's Joy Room

2964 Fairmont Road • Morgantown, West Virginia 26501 • (304) 282-3671

Antique Hand-Carved Wooden Doll

Mid-19th Century • 16 Inches • Original Gingham Dress & Pantaloons

ESTIMATED WORTH

\$300 – \$600



Hand-painted face with dark blue eyes and faded rose lips



Original red-and-white gingham dress with ruffled pantaloons



Cloth body with wooden shoulder plate and attachment points

History

Wooden dolls are the oldest of all play dolls, and for centuries they were the only dolls most children ever held. The great carved wooden dolls of the 17th and 18th centuries — the famed English wooden dolls with gessoed and painted faces — stand today among the most prized possessions in all of doll collecting; extraordinary examples have crossed the auction block at Theriault's for six figures. By the 19th century, wooden dolls reached children of ordinary means through two routes. The first was the lathe-turned *peg wooden* doll of the Grödnertal region of Saxony (today's Groden Valley in South Tyrol) — simple jointed figures with tuck-comb hair, made by the tens of thousands. The second, rarer route was the hand-carved doll: a head and limbs shaped with knife and chisel by a craftsman or even a family member, each one unique.

This doll belongs to that second, rarer tradition. Her head is genuinely carved rather than turned — the facial planes are sculpted, the painted features laid on by hand (dark blue eyes, thin arched brows, a faded rose mouth), and her black hair is molded with fine etched stroke lines to suggest combed strands. She was built the classic way: a wooden shoulder plate pierced with attachment holes, a soft cotton body, and carved wooden lower arms and legs. Her center-back dress opening, gathered neckline, and matching ruffled pantaloons are period construction, and the red-and-white gingham she wears appears to be her original costume.

Carved wooden dolls of the mid-1800s predate the bisque revolution that swept the doll world after 1870, when fired

porcelain heads from France and Germany made wooden dolls old-fashioned overnight. Survivors like this one are pieces of pre-industrial childhood — made before the factories, when a doll's face was only as good as the hand that shaped it. The deep vertical crack running through her face is the honest signature of age: carved wood shrinks and splits over a century and a half of dry winters and humid summers, and this kind of grain fracture is one of the most common and most forgivable condition issues in early wooden dolls.

"Before the factories made dolls by the thousand, somebody sat by a window and carved this face by hand. She was a child's whole world once."

Features & Description

- Mid-19th century hand-carved wooden doll, 16 inches tall
- Carved wooden head with sculpted facial planes (not lathe-turned)
- Hand-painted features: dark blue eyes, arched brows, faded rose lips
- Black-painted molded hair with fine etched stroke detail
- Cloth body with pierced wooden shoulder plate; carved wooden lower arms and legs
- Original red-and-white gingham dress, gathered neckline, center-back opening
- White ruffled pantaloons with gathered hems
- Deep vertical grain crack through face — age-consistent, stable condition

Collector's Notes

Attribution is stylistic: the doll is unmarked, as nearly all hand-carved dolls of this era are, and her carving is consistent with American or Northern European small-shop or home workshop work of the mid-19th century. The facial crack keeps her value toward the middle of the range, but her complete original costume and untouched painted face are genuine plusses — early wooden dolls are rarely found with both dress and pantaloons intact. Display away from direct heat, sunlight, and wide humidity swings; do not attempt to fill or seal the facial crack, as collectors prefer honest, untouched surfaces.

Mom's Joy Room — *Where Obsolescence Ends and Wonder Begins*
Sandy Wade, Proprietor