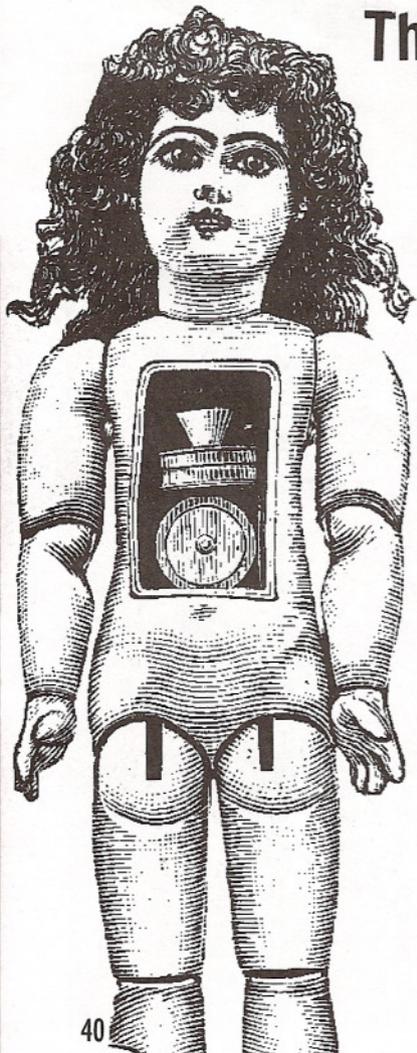


The Doll House of Salem Street



Dolls really freak some people out. I'm one of those people.

There's just something that is not right with dolls. They're such cold-skinned lifeless little things. The worst have beady little eyes that blink unseeing when you tip them up and down, back and forth...

This is why I've never understood people who collect dolls. Not people with one or two; I'm talking about people who collect dozens, no—hundreds of dolls. Do they really enjoy having all those lifeless little eyes staring at them all of the time? I guess some people do. And some people like to share that experience with everyone else!

Salem Street is located in northwestern NJ. It connects downtown Dover with Route 10, and a lot of commuters use it as convenient shortcut. A community of small homes neatly lines its sides. One of these homes is just like any of the other homes surrounding it today. This was not always the case. Once there was the Doll House of Salem Street.

I first saw this house when I was a kid, riding shotgun with my Mom on the way to K-mart. The entire front porch was covered with dolls. They seemed to be the kind of dolls that you win at carnivals, with beady, blinking eyes, tacky dresses, and a plastic sheet covering their faces. Now when I say the front porch was covered with dolls, I don't mean that they were arranged like there was a tea party going on. They lined the porch and the front door like a nightmarish made-in-Taiwan kind of insulation. Somebody had nailed, stapled or bolted them right on to the siding, placed so that they could silently watch the street with their dead little stares. Every time I went past there, I felt a chill. Who would be

into that? Wouldn't a few garden gnomes suffice?

The dolls were never brought in due to inclement weather. The covered front porch did not offer much in the way of protection, so over the years the dolls slowly degenerated from exposure to extreme heat and cold, rain, snow, and whatever other meteorological phenomena occurred on Salem Street. This just added to the overall effect. Decrepit looking dolls stuck to the side of a house are a whole lot creepier than new dolls stuck to the side of a house.

I had no intention of pulling up to the curb and getting out of my car to get a closer look. I was afraid that if I looked into the eyes of the dolls, I'd see the captured souls of lost UPS drivers and meter-readers softly howling "join usss...join usss on the walllll..." Then I'd feel a blow to the back of my head, and I'd wake up nailed to the wall too, dressed in poufy taffeta and left to stare with lifeless eyes at the cars going by on Salem Street while the rain poured down on me. Or maybe I was just afraid of getting yelled at for trespassing.

I never saw who lived in the house, and I never saw anyone sticking dolls to it. One day not too long ago, I drove by and noticed that the dolls were gone. The Doll House of Salem Street now looks like every other house in the community. I still look at it every time I drive by, and if I see even one doll there, I'll freak.

I wonder how many commuters passed the Doll House, unaware of its existence. Maybe they felt that they were being watched, not knowing that it was by hundreds of little plastic eyes. It's too late for picture proof, but I'm sure somebody else can back me up on this story.

by Joanne Austin