### (css: "color: #fffea8;")[Mabel]

* <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=4104>
* <http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=3826>

Mabel, the doll found during excavations of the historic West Circle Privy, came to CAP in pieces, but was carefully cleaned up and reconstructed by CAP fellows.

<https://i2.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/IMG_1674.jpg?resize=266%2C300>

Code:

### (css: "color: #fffea8;")[Mabel]

Mabel, the porcelain doll head found during excavations of the historic West Circle Privy, came to CAP in pieces, but was carefully cleaned up and reconstructed by CAP fellows. The doll dates to the 1860s and likely was used by someone on living on campus during the first decades of MSU’s history (Meyers-Emery 2015).

<div class="row">

<div class="column">

<img src= “<https://i0.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/all-parts.jpg>” alt= “Mabel in pieces” style="width:100%;">

<div class="center"> Mabel in pieces </div>

</div>

<div class="column">

<img src= "<https://i2.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/IMG_1674.jpg?resize=266%2C300>” alt= “Mabel Post-Reconstruction” style="width:100%;">

<div class="center"> Mabel Post-Reconstruction </div>

<br clear="all">

</div>

Mabel’s head, hands, and feet would have been made out of [[porcelain]], a hard, fine-grained, nonporous, translucent ceramic ware, while its chest, arms and legs would have been made out of cloth. The cloth body would have been attached to the head through the six holes at the base of the bust. Dolls of all kinds became more available to middle-class of Americans following the Civil War and cloth and porcelain dolls became children’s preferred type of doll as playing with dolls transitioned from training in //useful// tasks like sewing towards ideal of female socialization through play (Forman-Brunell 1993:9-14; 24-28).[[1]](#footnote-1)

<img src= <https://i1.wp.com/campusarch.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/il_570xN.867208992_2s7k.jpg> alt= “Complete doll from 1860s – Mabel would have been similar” style=”width:55%;>

<div class="center"> Complete doll from 1860s – Mabel would have been similar, <a href= “https://img0.etsystatic.com/117/0/7068780/il\_570xN.867208992\_2s7k.jpg”> Image Source</a> </div>

</div>

The figurine sports a hairstyle known as a “flat-top” which became popular during the Civil War days. We can reasonably assume that the doll originated during this period and so Lisa Bright, Campus Archaeologist, named the doll Mabel following a popular name of the 1860s. Dolls lack maker’s marks, so archaeologists, historians, and collectors typically date them through their hair styles, which makes sense considering how drastically popular hair styles differ, even between decades. It is also likely that this doll was imported from Germany, which led the production of porcelain dolls between 1840 and 1940 (Bright 2016)[[2]](#footnote-2).

So that’s the short story of Mabel the doll, what we do not know and cannot answer is how and why it ended up at the bottom of a privy, in the trash. Whether it was damaged, lost, or whomever it belonged to outgrew Mable, we cannot be certain. Regardless, CAP is happy to have found Mabel and to give the doll a second life at Michigan State, where it has been for over 150 years.

### <div class="center">[[Home|HomePage]]</div>

### <div class="center">[[References|Other References]]</div>

</div>

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margin-left: auto;

margin-right: auto;

}

</style>

<style>

.center {

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width: 60%;

border: 2px solid #865283;

<style>

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}

.column {

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width: 50%;

padding: 5px;

}

.row::before {

content: "";

clear: both;

display: table;

}

</style>

1. Forman-Brunell, Miriam, Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830–1930. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bright, Lisa (admin), 2016, “Mabel, Take a Bow: Piecing Together the Biography of a Doll”, Blog, March 20, 2016, http://campusarch.msu.edu/?p=4104 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)