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Classic American Dolls
Alabama Baby Doll & Doll by Martha Chase
Scott #3151a
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Designed by Derry Noyes

This stamp depicting an *Alabama Indestructible Doll* on the left and a doll by Martha Chase on the right is part of a series celebrating *Classic American Dolls*.

Until the late seventies, there were few if any commercially manufactured African American dolls. For the most part, African American children grew up with the images of white dolls to compare with their own experience. There was an experiment conducted several years ago in which a group of African American children were shown a selection of dolls and asked which they preferred. Almost all of the children picked the white dolls over the black ones.

The doll depicted to the left on this issue was originally sold as *The Alabama Indestructible Doll*. The *Alabama Baby*, as it came to be known, had its beginnings when Ella Smith repaired a bisque doll for a neighbor's child and realized the need for a doll that was unbreakable. It was even claimed that a delivery truck ran over one of her cloth dolls and never even cracked the paint.

Made with soft cloth bodies, the dolls had stiffened fabric heads with molded and painted features. Early *Alabama Babies* were originally marked on the stomach with the firm's name and the date and/or number. Since these dolls were stuffed from the top of their heads, they can be easily distinguished by their stitched circular crowns. Ella Smith's dolls were not only durable, but were very popular.

Black Alabama Babies, such as the one shown on this stamp are extremely rare and valuable. Black models of the dolls were occasionally produced for Black children, but most of these black featured dolls were sold to White children.

The Doll on the right is by Martha Chase who began producing her cloth dolls in 1889. Martha Chase died in 1925, however family members continued the company until it was sold in 1981

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NOTE: Early African American dolls such as the two depicted on this issue had

distinctly Caucasian features with black paint added.

Sources:

Rosalie Whyel Museum of Doll Art

Mystic Stamp Company