

Byers' Choice® Ltd.

CAROLER CHRONICLE

SPRING 1989



Volume II, Edition 1



MOTHERS' DAY 1989

We are happy to announce a special piece for Mothers' Day 1989. Our Victorian mother is dressed in a pale blue satin dress with leg-o-mutton sleeves, a lace bodice, cuffs, and flounce around her skirt. She wears a cameo at her neck and a large lace trimmed hat. She is pushing her young child dressed in white eyelet, snuggled under a hand crocheted coverlet in an antique stroller. Only 3,000 numbered and signed pieces of this design will be created.

The first Mothers' Day pieces were designed in 1987 especially for Bob and Joyce's mothers. Our employees liked them so much, that the decision was made to test market about 100 pieces that year. These pieces became the prototype of those produced in 1988.

The many heart warming letters we have received from mothers across the country have inspired us in creating the 1989 piece. We hope it will also be loved.

JOYCE BYERS REMEMBERS. . .

Dear Friends,

I wish to welcome all of you. This newsletter was conceived with the intention of sharing with our many friends news about Byers' Choice. Over the years we have received numerous questions about the history of various pieces, the history of the company and the methods and materials of construction. It has become increasingly difficult to answer each question individually, consequently the idea of a newsletter arose.



To our surprise it has been very well received. In less than six months, we have received requests for the newsletter from approximately 4,000 Carolers® figurines fans. We find this to be quite exciting. If you have questions or ideas you wish to share with us, please, don't hesitate to write to us. It may take a while, but we will do our best to answer your questions through this newsletter.

Our newsletter is not intended to represent the type of club many manufacturers have established. Instead we hope for this to be a means by which we can become better acquainted with you, and you can learn more about us.

I made character figurines for many years before contacting a manufacturers' representative and deciding to turn this growing hobby into a serious business. To those of you who enjoy making handcrafts I must say, this is a very big step. Even though we knew our product was very well received, the transition from making figures for twenty to thirty primarily consignment shops to exposure in the national gift market was enormous. Anticipating the potential growth, we reduced the variety of different figures to be made. We stuck to men and women Caroling figures plus modern and old-fashioned Santas. Initially we named the old-fashioned Santa "Belsnickel", a Christmas figure familiar to the Pennsylvania Dutch. The level of interest in different Christmas figures was not as great then as it is today, and the name "Belsnickel" did not catch on with the country as a whole. Consequently we changed his name to Old World Santa. He remained a part of the line until his retirement in 1986.

The Caroling men and women first produced for national circulation were standardized to seven basic figures, four men and three women, because we realized in order to fill our increased demand we would have to hire and train others. When I worked alone there were usually no more than ten of any one character made. Most of them were one of a kind.

(Continued next page)



Joyce Remembers (continued)

Good fortune was ours from the beginning. We found art and fashion students as well as designers eager to work with us. These women had the skills to create a much greater variety and better quality than we had anticipated. The Carolers have always been a work of love, and we have been fortunate to have found others who have shared our philosophies to work with us. This factor is so important to us because the whimsy, happiness and joy reflected in these figures must come from those who create them.

The memories of our first summer are wonderful. Art students Alaina and Carrie made the figures. I can still see them sitting in the barnyard in shorts and Amish hats sculpting paper bodies and molding clay heads while a menagerie of goats, sheep and geese looked on with a friendly curiosity. Maryann, a fashion student, helped me dress the figures in a two-car garage which served as our corporate headquarters. Bob and our two sons, both in their early teens, played a big part in both a production and administrative capacity. Every Tuesday at lunch we had a party—fast food, sodas and jug wine. Sometimes between the warm summer sun and the wine, Tuesday afternoon became a



THREE WISE MEN

Three new pieces are now available to complement the angels and shepherds already in your Christmas Pageant collection. The Three Wise Men are the latest addition to this special Carolers series. Each dressed in his own unique regalia, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar bear the traditional gifts for the Christ Child in the manger.

Check for these Christmas '89 pieces at your favorite Byers' Choice dealer.

little too laid back for serious work.

In September the students returned to school and left Bob, me, four or five artists, the dog and half a dozen kittens huddled around the wood stove in the garage to finish off the year's orders and reorders. Good news came at our Christmas celebration when Bob, with a huge grin on his face and a Santa-like twinkle in his eye, announced our first year had been a success and Byers' Choice was on its way.

Sincerely,

Joyce Byers



WAYSIDE COUNTRY STORE

Five years ago Joan Scerra took a risk by purchasing one dozen Byers' Choice Carolers. . . last year she sold thousands of pieces at her gift shop in Marlboro, Massachusetts. Wayside Country Store has become a sort of gathering place for collectors, and for these loyal customers Joan has developed a newsletter, founded an annual Byers' Choice Day, and trained her staff in the oldtime virtues of personal service.

"The nice thing about the Caroler line is you get to know your customers. So many times in the retail business you might never see a customer again," says Joan. "But when you have something like this, they seek you out, talk to you about their collection and what they bought, and how they have them arranged in their home."

To get to know the customer even better, Wayside Country Store holds a Byers' Choice Day each September, complete with a big, colorful tent, homemade pastries, cider, and hot coffee, and of course, lots of Carolers.

Byers' Choice Day not only successfully promotes Wayside Country Store and the Carolers, it provides something special for customers. "They all have something in common and they discuss their collections. 'Well, I've got this many.' 'Oh, I found this!' 'Did you know about this piece?' Everyone talks to everyone else whether they know each other or not," Joan explains.

In addition to trying to get to know her customers better, Joan helps them become better acquainted with their collections. Because collectors seemed to have so many questions, Joan decided there was "a need for knowledge" about the Carolers. Three years ago she began publishing "A Dickens of a Newsletter" to inform collectors about the pieces they were purchasing. She started with 50 names on her mailing list, and today the quarterly newsletter goes to nearly 4,000 Byers' Choice aficionados.

When asked why her customers like the Carolers so much, Joan responds that it's a combination of things, including the fact that "they're totally handmade, they're each very different, and they have some character. . . They're just a happy thing to have." From her own point of view, she says selling this "beautiful line" of collectibles is just a whole lot of fun.



SPIRIT FUTURE: NEXT IN DICKENS SERIES

“As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn phantom, draped and hooded, coming like a mist along the ground, towards him.

The phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the spirit neither spoke nor moved.”

—*A Christmas Carol*
Charles Dickens



TALE OF A RUSSIAN SANTA

Diamonds and ice—that’s how Dyedt Moroz feels about good and bad children. This Russian counterpart to Santa Claus, as legend has it, turned a Siberian mother’s wicked daughter into a pillar of ice but rewarded her ill treated, but well behaved, step-daughter with diamonds. Although this folktale was not originally a Christmas story, the long beard and sleigh of Dyedt Moroz eventually tied him in with the holiday season.

Translated literally from Russian, Dyedt Moroz means “Grandfather Frost”. It is this character that the secular Soviet government has appointed to deliver gifts to good children on January 6th in celebration of the New Year.

Although December 25 is a working day like any other in the Soviet Union, you can be sure that millions of Russians greet friends and families with the holiday phrase, “S Rozhdyestvom Khristovym” (Merry Christmas) and entertain children with tales of Dyedt Moroz, the wintry wizard who emerged from a harsh Siberian night in his reindeer-drawn sleigh to turn a bad girl into ice and shower a good one with jewels.



OUTSTANDING STORE DISPLAYS RECOGNIZED

Many thanks to stores that entered pictures of their Caroler displays in our 1988 Photo Contest. We really appreciate your taking the time out of your busiest season to participate. Judging was based on Christmas spirit, overall composition and originality of display and was not an easy task, since each of you did a wonderful job. Congratulations to the winners!

Grand Prize goes to Old Mill Pond Village in Granby, Connecticut. Kerri Radwilowicz, Manager and Buyer of the Christmas Shop, wrote “Customers are greeted by the staircase of Carolers approximately 20 ft. straight ahead of the entrance. The staircase is illuminated with micro-chip lights that operate with

a continuous steady running blink which draws attention to the Carolers. Alongside the stairs is a fireplace with its mantle above and below full of singing Carolers, dogs and cats. Being our first Christmas with Byers’ Choice, Ltd., we have been very pleased with the product, happy with its quality and response to the consumers.” We are looking forward to entertaining Kerri and her guest during a weekend this spring.

Second Prize of \$300.00 went to Borgardt’s Country Cupboard in Sturtevant, Wisconsin. Owners: Pam & Louise Borgardt.

Third Prize of \$200.00 went to Tannenbaum in Sister Bay, Wisconsin. Owner: Penny Scheller.

Fourth Prize of \$100.00 went to Willie the Woodsman & Wife of Audubon, New Jersey. Owners: Gloria & William Jensen.



CAROLER KIDS AT PLAY

This year Byers' Choice remembers two traditional Victorian past times. News Boy with Bike and Girl with Hoop are new Caroler figurines for 1989.

News Boy with Bike, sporting a felt cap and newspaper sack, stands proudly beside his shiny red velocipede. The Girl with Hoop appears frozen in time as she propels her wooden toy along.

Both of these creative and charming pieces come in assorted dress.

Each of these characters is available in limited quantity only, so if you wish to have one for your collection please ask your favorite Caroler dealer.

CHRISTMAS "WAITS" ADD MUSIC TO FESTIVITIES

To help the Carolers keep their tiny voices in tune, Joyce has come up with her own version of Christmas "waits"—strolling musicians who add the joyful sounds of their instruments to the general yuletide symphony.

Originally the term waits referred to medieval watchmen who patrolled the streets at night calling out the hour and occasionally bestowing blessings on the homeowners. Later this term applied to hired musicians who played at civic events, private parties and weddings. At Christmastime, these paid pipers strolled through the town playing holiday songs in exchange for small treats. By the 19th century, however, most cities no longer hired official waits and the name came to denote any caroler at Christmas.

The first wait in our series proudly displays his clarinet. Joyce plans to expand the musical entourage in the future.





COLLECTORS WIN CONTEST

Thanks and warm wishes to all collectors who sent in photographs. It was not easy selecting from all the wonderful entries, and after many hours of judging we are happy to announce the winners. Congratulations!

Grand Prize: Mrs. Betsy Cartier
Rockland, Maine

Betsy has been a collector since 1981 and makes frequent visits to her two favorite Caroler dealers, Andrus Flowers & Gifts in Rockland, Maine, and Two's Company in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. She enjoys setting up displays of Carolers all through her restored Victorian home during the holiday season, with most of the figurines shown off on the fireplace mantle in the dining room. The winning photograph features a beautifully-refurbished fireplace with its unique wooden mantle which has a built-in leaded glass mirror framed on both sides with semi-circular shelves and with another shelf across the top of the mirror. Carolers are grouped on all the shelves, which are trimmed with greens and candles. An old toy sled filled with Carolers is placed on the stone tile floor in front of the fireplace, where the family's stockings have been hung with care. As first prize winner, Betsy will receive a pair of Carolers personally designed for her by Joyce Byers.

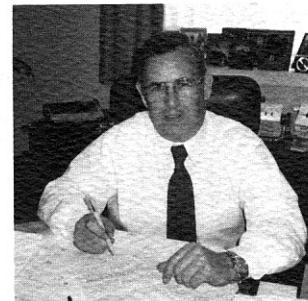
- 1st Runner Up: Patty & Don Patterson
Forestville, Connecticut
Prize: A pair of Carolers of their choice
Favorite Dealer: The Christmas Shop,
Bethlehem, Connecticut
- 2nd Runner Up: Mrs. Nadine Hartman
Yardley, Pennsylvania
Prize: One Caroler of her choice
Favorite Dealer: Truffles,
Lahaska, Pennsylvania
- 3rd Runner Up: Mr. David Planche
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Prize: One Caroling Dog
or Cat of his choice
Favorite Dealers: Santa's Quarters,
New Orleans, Louisiana
The Christmas Attic, Alexandria, Virginia
- Honorable Mention: Shaun & Sharon Kelly
East Hampton, Connecticut
Favorite Dealer: Marlborough Country
Barn, Marlborough, Connecticut
- Mr. & Mrs. James Hayman, Jr.
York, Pennsylvania
Favorite Dealer: Christmas Tree Hill,
York, Pennsylvania

DID YOU KNOW?

That Christmas caroling was banned in England by Oliver Cromwell and that it did not become popular again, until the Victorian Era, after the publication of *A Christmas Carol*?

A MESSAGE FROM BOB BYERS COPYRIGHT VICTORY

We are pleased to announce that Byers' Choice has been awarded a judgement for copyright infringement and unfair competition against Brinns' China and Glass Co. of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



After a two week trial last summer, the U.S. District Court in Pittsburgh found that certain products, imported by Brinns' from Korea and sold primarily through the televised Home Shopping Network of St. Petersburg, Florida, were substantially similar to, and had been copied from Byers' Choice products.

While pleased with the successful conclusion of the Brinns' suit, we are still concerned that the great popularity of our products will be undermined if copies and copiers of our products are permitted to proliferate. We hope that U.S. Intellectual Property Laws and Fair Trade Protection mechanisms will continue to be effective to protect not only ourselves, but also, other American artists and innovators as well. Furthermore, we feel it's very important for us to fight these battles because we wish to protect our collectors' investments.

Please help us in this effort. If you see a product in the marketplace that is confusingly similar, or you feel has obviously been copied or evolved out of our figurines, please write us a letter with the pertinent details. We can't win these battles without the help of caring collectors.

A related action against Home Shopping Network, for copyright and trademark infringement and unfair competition, is still pending in the Pittsburgh court. In that action, Byers' Choice has asserted that Home Shopping Network misled viewers by its on-air comparison of the Brinns' product with products available in retail stores. The trial date has yet to be set.

Sincerely,

Bob Byers



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COLLECTOR'S CORNER

In this column we will help you get in touch with other collectors and answer your questions. We wish it were possible to respond to each of your letters individually, but we will do our best to address each question through the Chronicle—either in the Collectors' Corner or in a feature article. Byers' Choice Ltd. will not get involved nor be in any way responsible for any of the transactions which may occur due to information supplied in this column.

WANTED: First edition of Scrooge and Mrs. Cratchit. Please contact:

Jim Lacock
Norwich, Ct 06360

This collector is searching for 1st editions of Scrooge, Mrs. Cratchit, Mr. & Mrs. Fezziwig and Marley's Ghost. If you can be of help in locating these pieces, please contact:

Alan Good
Gwynedd, PA 19436

To complete her collection, this collector has been looking high and low for the Boy on Rocking Horse, Mrs. Claus on Rocker and 1st editions of Mr. & Mrs. Fezziwig. If you know where she can find these special pieces, please get in touch with:

Mary Kinahan
Franklin, MA 02038

I am interested in purchasing an original horn player introduced in January, 1985 (the one with the chubby face). If any of your readers would be willing to sell their copy, I am willing to pay up to four times the original purchase price.

Sincerely,
Ronald R. LeBlanc
Leominster, MA 01453

WANTED: 1983 Boy on Rocking Horse, 1983 Easter Boy, Leprechaun, 1983 1st edition Scrooge with Clay Hands, will buy or trade. Have 1987 Mother's Day, display-size Drummer Boy, display-size Working Santa, Santa in Sleigh, Mrs. Claus on Rocker, 1st edition Mrs. Cratchit, other limited pieces.

Sheila Gracie
Hampstead, NH 03841

I have an Easter Caroler that I am willing to sell. It is a little girl with an Easter Basket. If interested, please contact:

Debbie Pagliaro
Cranston, RI 02910

I am collecting Byers' Choice "Christmas Carol" characters. I am looking for a first edition of Scrooge and Mrs. Cratchit. If you can help in locating these items, please contact:

Kay Collins
Bedford, IN 47421

My mother and I have been collecting the Carolers since 1978. Looking over your Caroler Chronology, I noticed a few we are missing—Icabod (1982), Violin Player Man (1983-84), Horn Player (1985), and Caroler with Lamp (1987). If you can help us locate them, we would appreciate it very much. Please call:

Carol Morris
Londonderry, NH

A collector has notified us that she is looking for a Chimney Sweep. If you can help, please contact:

Charlene Roberts Hayden
Newton, MA 02160

Editor's Note: Our Venice, Florida, dealer has notified us that she has a few 1st edition Spirit of Christmas Past figurines. If interested, please contact:

Martha's Candy & Clutter
Venice, FL 34285

This collector is looking for a Choir Boy in red with straight white surplice (no lace trim). If you can be of assistance in locating, please write to:

Ken McNelis
Audubon, PA 19403



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524-5440

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- Annual Byers Choice Day with special Carolers
- Keep well informed, join our quarterly "Dickens of a News Letter" \$3.00 annual dues
- Send for your Free introductory news letter.
- Your local store, serving you personally & by UPS



CAROLER QUESTIONS

Q: I am interested in exactly what Scrooge figures have been issued to date, and if prior figures are still available.

T. D., Massachusetts

A: We introduced Scrooge in 1983, and the Scrooge of that year is called the First Edition. Back then Ebenezer was wearing a white nightshirt, red long johns and nightcap, brown felt slippers, and he was carrying nothing in his clay hands. THE WOODEN SOLDIER catalog put their own candle in his hands, so if you have a First Edition Scrooge with a candle, that's where it came from.

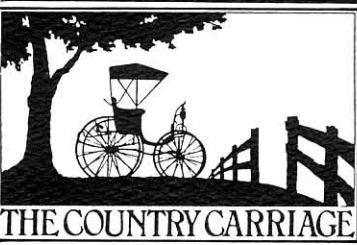
Scrooge from every year after 1983 is called the Second Edition, and he now wears a white nightshirt, red and white striped long johns and nightcap, brown painted clay feet, and he carries a lantern in his knitted mitten hands.

Figures from earlier years may be available through stores that still have that stock or from individual collectors.

Q: I received two of your lovely figurines for Christmas and would like to add to my new collection. Do you have a catalog, and may I order directly from you?

L. M., Knoxville, TN

A: Since the Carolers are made in so very many styles of dress, with so many different faces, and carrying many different things, and since these designs change constantly, it would be impossible for us to issue a catalog as it would always be outdated! To help you in identifying Carolers, a column entitled "Caroler Chronology" is periodically included in our newsletters. This column lists all Carolers made generally available and the year or years they were produced.



Distinctive country gifts and decorative accessories, including a year-round Christmas corner featuring Byers' Choice Caroler figurines.

Mail and phone orders welcome.

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We are set up strictly as a supplier to retail shops, and as such, it is our policy not to sell directly to the public. We are fortunate to count among our dealers many fine shops who are very knowledgeable about the availability and history of our Carolers. One way we recognize their hard work on our behalf is to refer collectors to them.

If you are planning a trip out of town, or need to know where you can purchase the Carolers closer to home, please drop us a note, including zip codes whenever possible. We will be glad to give you the names of our dealers in the specific area you request.



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MEET WENDY WININGER



According to Wendy Wininger, working in the baseroom can get awfully messy, but it sure is a lot of fun. For nearly four years, Wendy has been making the bases that Byers' Choice Carolers stand on. Recently Wendy talked about her work in the baseroom and her experiences at Byers' Choice Ltd.

Q. When did you start working for Byers' Choice?

A. I started in May 1985. At first I worked in boot-making, but after two

months I began making bases. I've been offered the opportunity to do other phases of production, but I want to stay in the baseroom.

Q. Working in the baseroom must be fun then. What's it like?

A. It's a lot of fun. There's a radio in the baseroom and four

people, so we can talk and listen to music as we work. I'm on my feet all day and always doing something. Of all the jobs at Byers' Choice, I think it is the most fun.

Q. How do you go about pouring bases?

A. We mix buckets of plaster and spoon it onto a table. The most difficult part is making the bases the right size. It's kind of like baking cookies.

Q. What other jobs do you do in the baseroom?

A. Sometimes I pour dogs and cats. I also make molds for the heads.

Q. I've heard there's a tradition in the baseroom of naming the dogs and cats.

A. Yes, we look forward to naming the new ones. For instance, my husband has a beagle named Freckles, so I named *one plaster* dog after him. Naming the 12 dogs and 12 cats is a way to keep them straight when they come out of the mold.

Q. You've worked for Byers' Choice a long time. What do you like about it?

A. I've never come across bosses like Bob and Joyce. It's like having another set of parents. They make you feel welcome and relaxed. And if you have an idea about how your job can be done better, they're always willing to listen.



Newsletter Editor Pam Trauger

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