

Historic Childs: Popular Images of Yesteryear, Part 4 – Alice Blue Gown

Posted 30 January 2022 at 8:32 am



By Doug Farley & Bill Lattin – Vol. 3 No. 3

GAINES – For our forth image in this series we have selected the print entitled, “Alice Blue Gown,” which hangs in the Vagg House at the Cobblestone Museum campus.

The print measures 11 by 14 inches and is a portrait of Alice Roosevelt Longworth, eldest child of President Theodore Roosevelt. She was born in 1884 and died in 1980. During her early lifetime, she became very popular as a trendsetter and remained a Washington, D.C. socialite most of her life.



This picture became immensely popular in the 1920s and it was widely published in various sizes. The original painting which this print was copied from was created by English painter, Arthur Paine Garratt. However, during the 1920s, Garratt spent several years in New York. He is best remembered as a fine portrait artist, with considerable success during his lifetime.



Arthur Paine Garratt (1873-1955)

Many of Garratt's female subjects were elegant, high-society ladies who expected a high degree of finish and detail in their portraits. Lavish gowns of exotic textiles were usually a feature. This painting of Alice was no exception. She was a beautiful young girl who was the equivalent of a princess and whose style signature were her azure blue gowns.

The press constantly followed her around to record many of her escapades. Her portrait would suggest a demure young woman but quite the contrary was true. Her father, the President, once said, "I can run the country, or I can control my daughter, but I cannot do both." She often smoked in public which was a "no-no" for women at the time. She had a pillow in her salon embroidered with the statement, "If you don't have anything nice to say, come sit by me."



In the portrait above, we note that it is signed in the lower left corner, "Arthur Garratt." It is entitled, "An Old Sweetheart of Mine." No publisher is noted on this print which measures 11 by 15 inches.



“Alice Blue Gown” is purposely displayed in the Vagg House (shown above) which represents the Teens, '20s, and '30s through its furnishings. Our print appears to be in the original frame which we believe is circa 1930. Framing of this time period is much more simplistic than picture frames of earlier decades.



It is not unusual to find “Alice Blue Gown” in antique malls today, because it was once so popular. This small 5 by 7 inch copy was framed in an octagonal frame.

The painting likely partly inspired the song “Alice Blue Gown” written by Harry Tierney with lyrics by Joseph McCarthy. It was sung by Edith Day in the 1919 play “Irene.” It became a top seller in 1920 and was revived several times in the following decades. You can listen to the 1920 recording by [clicking here](#).



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We end this story with a portrait of Alice Roosevelt Longworth done by Peter Hurd in 1965. This is a Tempura on Masonite and hangs in the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution.