

RAGGEDY ANN TURNS 100



Hour photo / Erik Trautmann

Vicky Oatis, Norwalk Public Library director of youth services, and Ralph Bloom, vice president of Friends of Norwalk Museums, Inc., are organizing a sale of the Museum's Raggedy Ann collection to benefit programming for the Norwalk Children's Library

Historian donates Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls for fundraiser

By FRANCIS CARR Jr.
HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — This year marks a century since beloved rose-cheeked storybook characters Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy jumped off the page and, as dolls, into the toy chests of children around the world.

"This is the dolls' hundredth anniversary. Their copyright starts in 1915," said Norwalk historian Ralph Bloom, adding that the characters were created in Norwalk by author and illustrator Johnny Gruelle (an early member of the Silvermine Guild of Artists), and Raggedy Andy dolls were manufactured here

beginning in 1920.

A native of Indiana, Johnny Gruelle moved his young family to Wilton around 1910, according to Bloom. (Gruelle's brother, Justin C. Gruelle, was also a Silvermine transplant and painted many of the Works Projects Administration murals now housed in Norwalk City Hall.)

"That was when inoculation was new," Bloom said. After administering Gruelle's daughter, Marcella, her first vaccination, doctors assumed it hadn't taken and administered it a second time. She died at age 13. "Mr. Gruelle was pretty overtaken by that."

However, the loss of his daughter is said to have inspired the author and illustrator to create the Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy characters: sentient, red-haired ragdolls that come to life and have adventures when no people are watching.

The books — and, eventually, the dolls — proved immensely popular.

In honor of Bloom has donated over 30 Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls to be sold at a themed fundraising event for children's programming at Norwalk Public Library.

Besides the dolls, Raggedy Ann books, coloring books and

other memorabilia will be for sale.

"We'll have two table loads," Bloom told *The Hour*. "It's all pertaining to the dolls."

The sale will take place during library hours on Oct. 17 and 18 in the children's department on the second floor of the main library branch.

Vicki Oatis, the library's Director of Children's Services, said funds raised by the sale will likely be put towards the library's annual New Years Eve party for children.

"We've done everything from a magic show to a dance party" for past New Years Eve events, Oatis said.