

K-Pettit-Teri -20050304153004

To: Julie L. Sigall
Associate Register for Policy & International Affairs

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From: Teri K Pettit

Comment:

I am a paper doll artist and a collector of vintage paper dolls. Often I would like to either make derivative works or else make freely available online for historical preservation purposes electronic images of out-of-print paper dolls which were originally published between 1930 to 1970. In the vast majority of cases, the paper dolls were produced as works for hire, the original copyright holder was not the artist but a children's book publisher or a greeting card publisher, and the publishing house went out of business decades ago. I have no way of knowing whether or not the copyrights were acquired by someone else who purchased the assets of the company when it went out of business. Since I make absolutely no money from sharing these images (even my own entirely original non-derivative paper dolls I distribute for free), I cannot afford an expensive search service.

I think our copyright laws desperately need revision in a way which will facilitate the movement into the public domain of works for which the copyright holder can no longer be located, and moreover make it easy for anyone to ascertain at no cost whether or not a work is in the public domain or still under copyright. As the law currently stands, many rare items of historical interest are lost to the public, except for those few collectors who happen to hold copies of the originals, because it is impossible to determine whether they can be reprinted or not. This benefits no one.

As an artist myself, I think I can safely say that most of us would be gratified to know that after our death someone else might take it upon themselves to make our works available again, without the cost of an expensive search. It is, after all, our art which will live on after us, and keeping it from being reprinted effectively kills it.