



**Above from left to right:** This original Steiff rod bear stands 16 inches tall, with a rare elephant-style button in his ear. Iron rods in the body provide movement for the head, arms and legs. This was sold in 1904 as a bear, not yet a teddy bear. • Here's a Steiff 1906 white mohair bear on wheels, 10 inches, with an underscored "ff" button. The head is now cardboard disc-jointed; it would be called a teddy bear pull toy the following year. • Gebrüder Bing made this key-wind mohair baby bear that takes bows and waves to the crowd in the 1890s. Trained circus bears inspired Richard Steiff as well.



**1906:** Seymour Eaton's creates the Roosevelt Bears, "Teddy B" and "Teddy G," which profoundly influence the toy bear market and actually prompt Steiff, Uncle Remus, and other companies to dress their little plush bears.

**1906:** E.I. Gustin's poem "Little Teddy's Prayer" marks the first time the phrase "teddy bears" is used in print. "Little boys don't play with dolls, so I brought to you my teddy bears." (see Page 30)

**1907:** Every advertiser, maker, seller, and buyer now calls their stuffed-bear toy a "teddy bear."

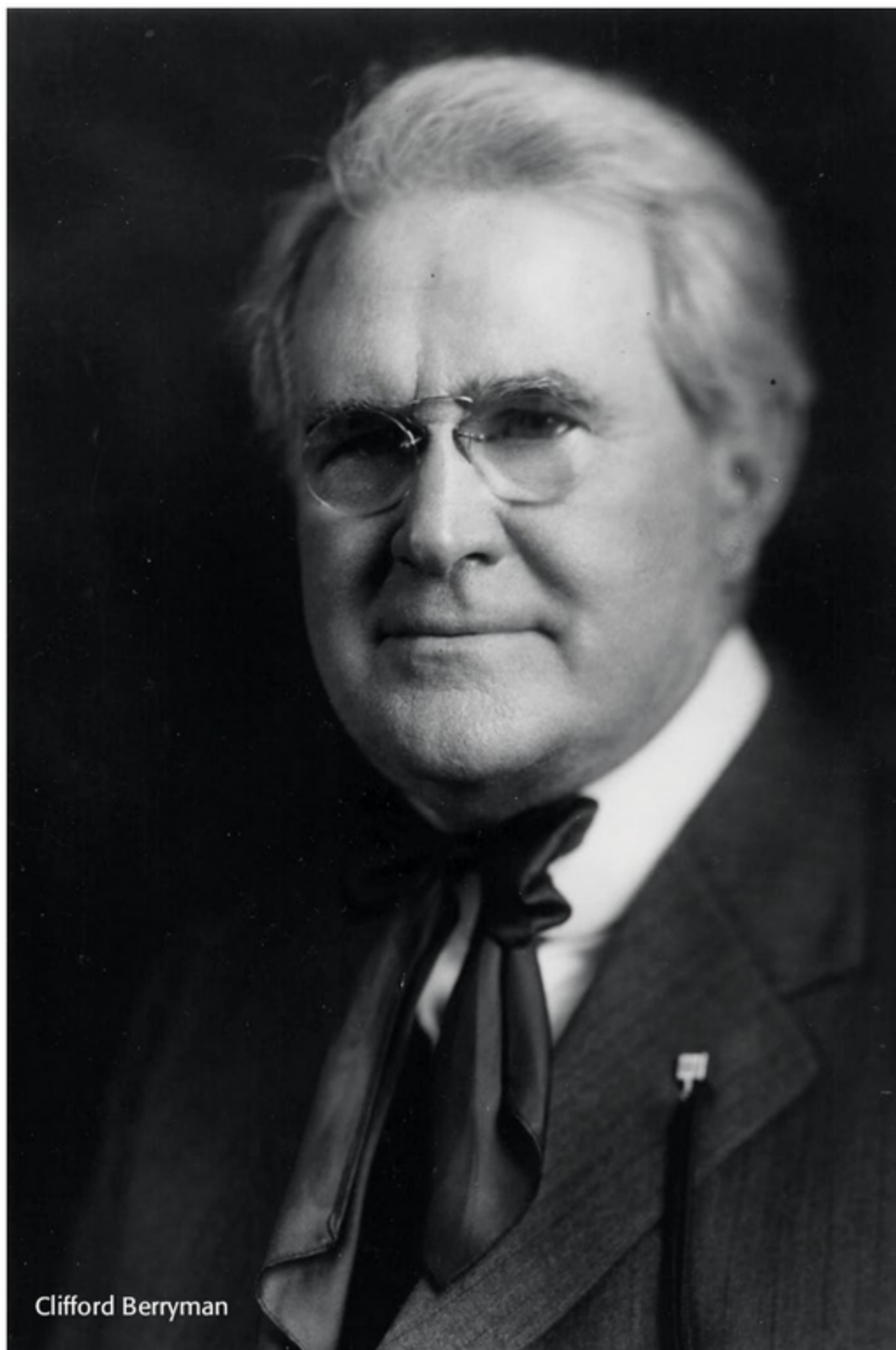
In closing, let me thank a friend and researcher, Charles Moose, for his assistance over the years in exploring true history of the teddy bear. Today the teddy bear provides more goodwill and good times than it ever has, thanks to organizations like Good Bears of The World. Brenda and I cherish all the kindness and goodness that finds its way back to us from participating in the teddy bear world. 🐾

**Above:** German Mache animals from the 1880s-1900 are spectacular. This 20-inch Grisly is mohair covered and has a pull growler under his belly. This toy bear was recovered from the silver storage room in a well-to-do estate in Ohio. Records show it was a Christmas gift from that period.

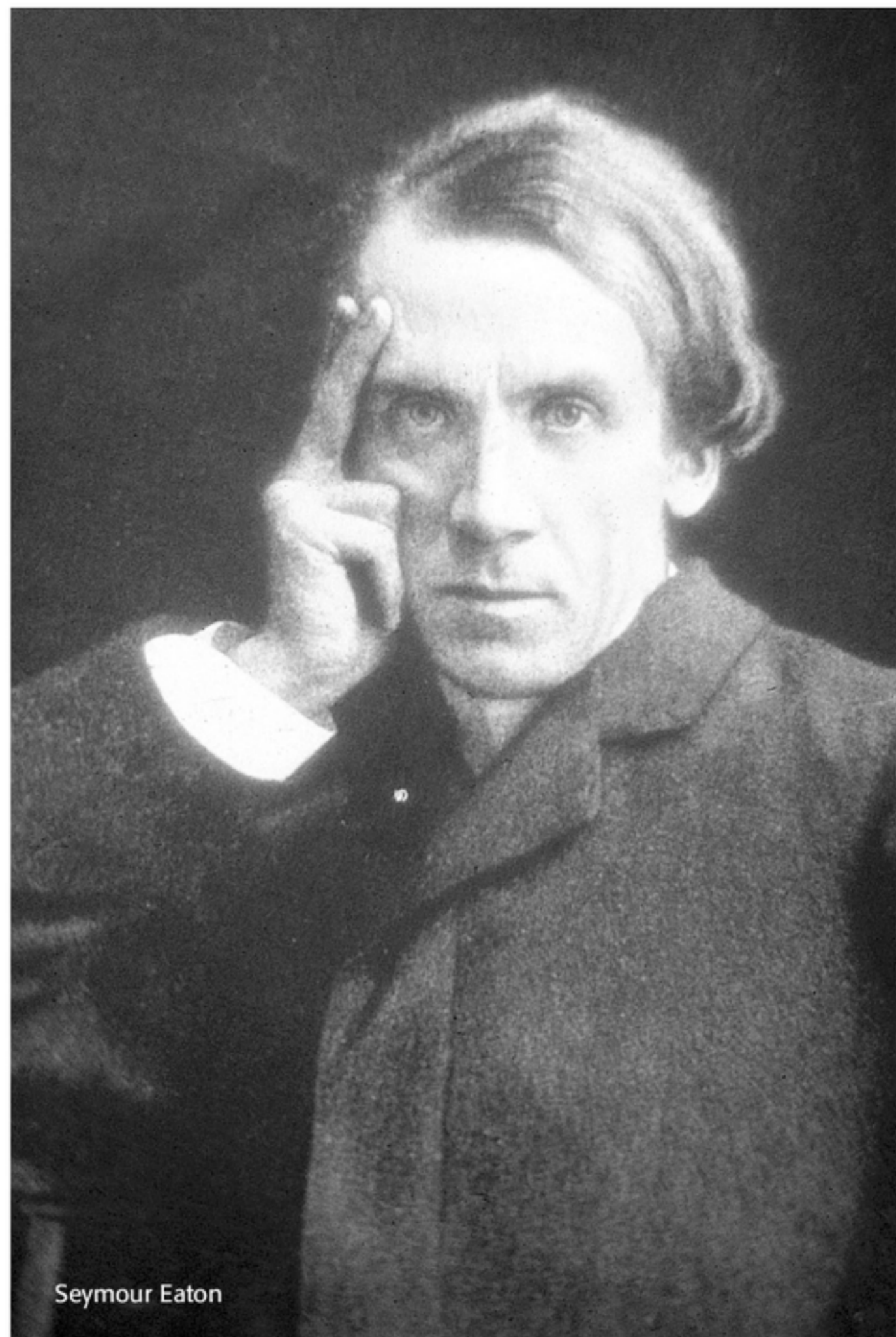
**Below:** This rare set dates from 1906-1907: "Teddy B" (brown) and "Teddy G" (gray/white). The 5-inch bears were wired to pose and made from spun cotton, with paper paw pads, wire noses, and black half-circle Indian-bead eyes. This wonderful pair, characterized in Seymour Eaton's Roosevelt Bears books, played a huge role in the creation and success of the teddy bear.







Clifford Berryman



Seymour Eaton

# Who Created Teddy?

The answer may be revealed by two cartoons

By Charles Moose

Two stories about the creation of the first jointed plush toy bear, later called a teddy bear, have been debated for years. Were the first teddies invented independently, by two different manufacturers? Did Richard Steiff in Germany, or Morris Michtom of Brooklyn, N.Y., create the teddy bear? And how did the teddy bear name become attached to this plush toy, which experienced an explosion of popularity in 1906? The creation of the teddy bear, an American icon inspired by a popular President, is a mystery to be unraveled.

## Steiff's Bear Story

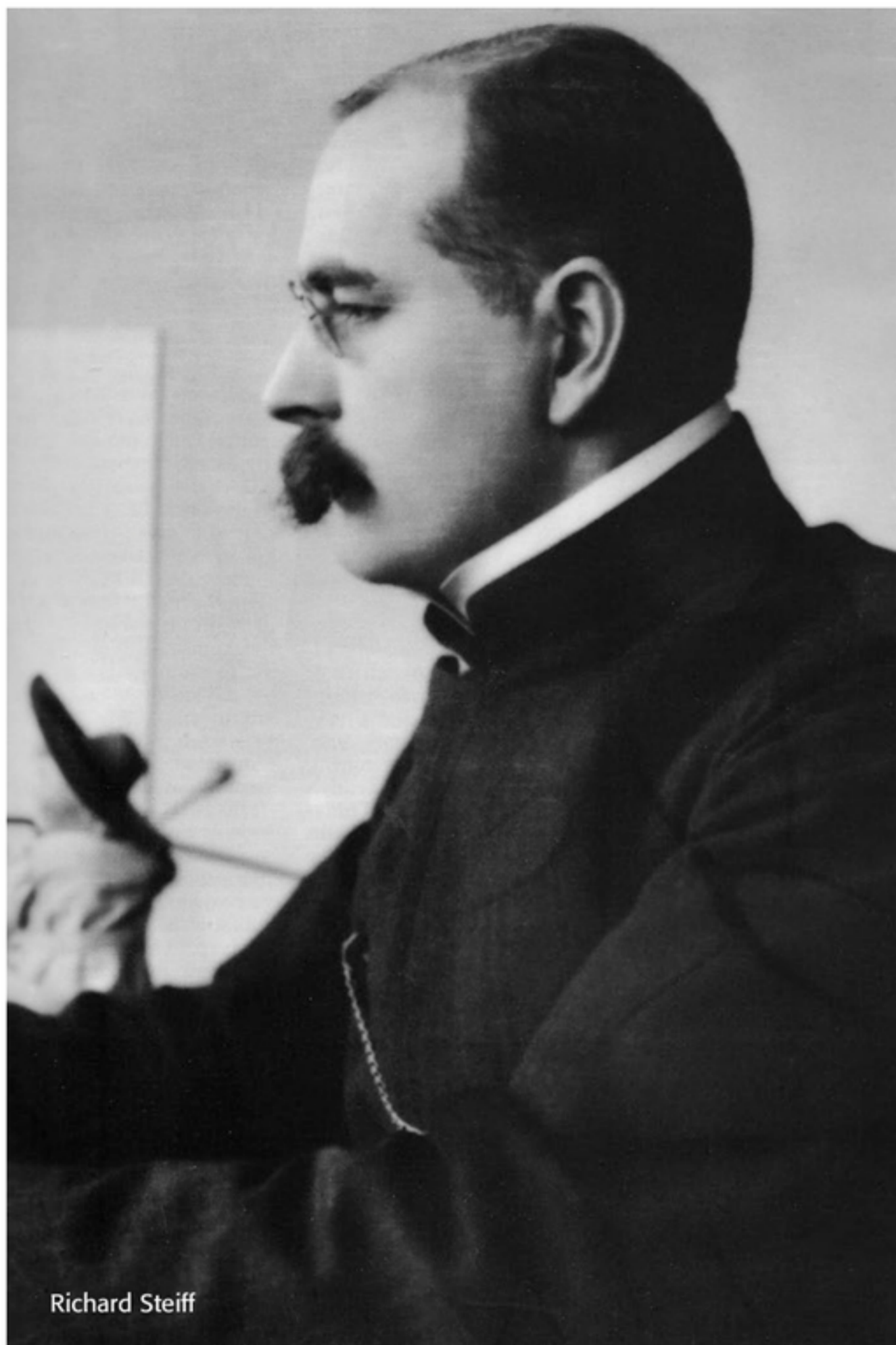
Margarete Steiff of Giengen, Germany, founded Steiff GmbH in 1880. Steiff produced toys, primarily plush animals. Margarete Steiff's nephew, Richard, enjoyed sketching bears at zoos and carnivals. He developed a jointed plush toy bear and persuaded his aunt to produce it using mohair, despite the expense of the luxurious material. Steiff reports that this occurred in 1902, and the bear was displayed at the Leipzig Toy Fair in Spring 1903. This bear is shown in the 1903 Steiff catalog as "55PB."

At the close of the show, an American buyer ordered three thousand bears. While Steiff's records show the number purchased, none of the company's surviving documents record the buyer's name or the company where the bears were shipped. Information revealed in the 2012 book "The Untold History of the Teddy Bear" by Patricia Thorne indicates that the buyer was Albion Thorne of Carson Pirie Scott & Company (CPS&C) of Chicago.

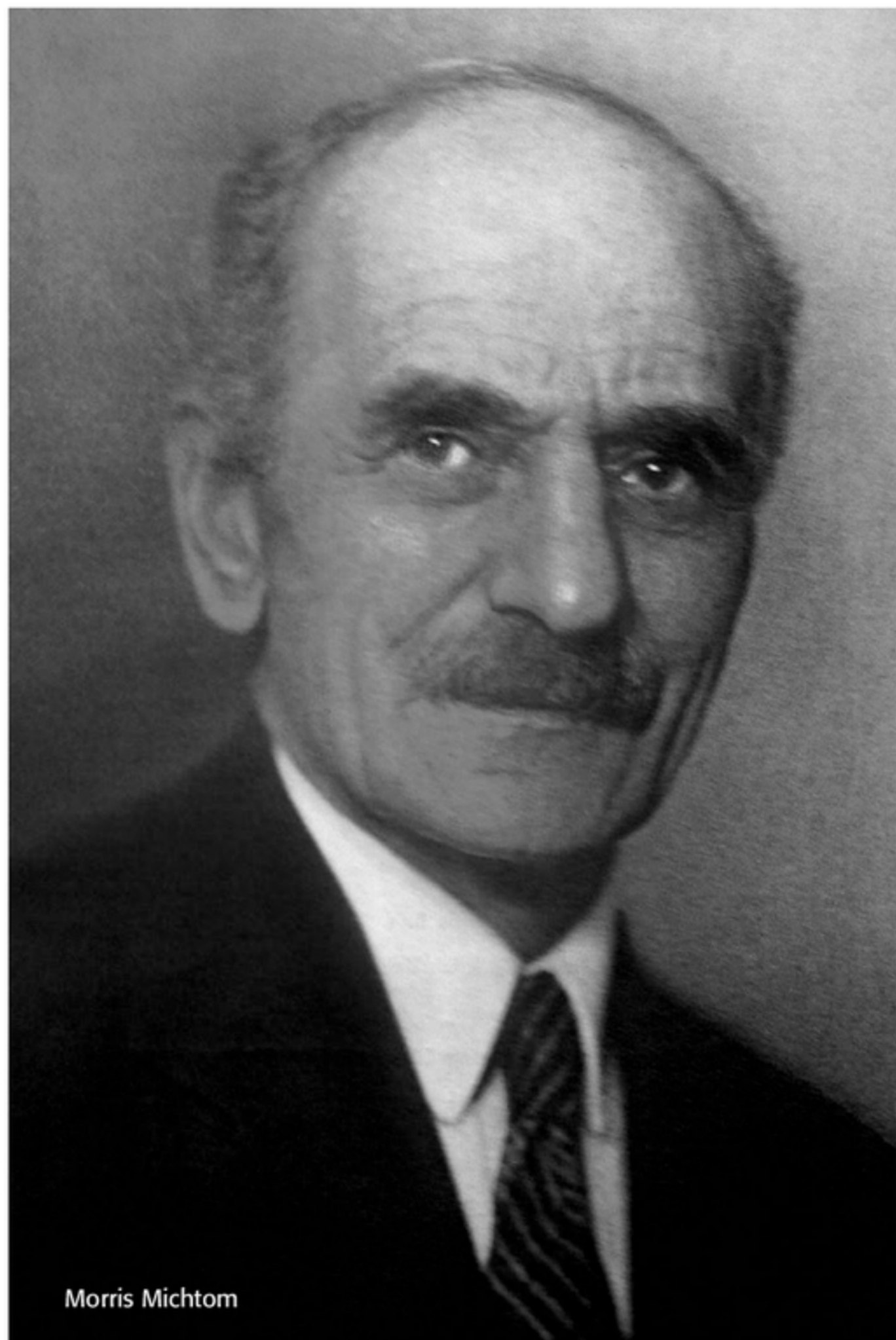
Steiff displayed jointed plush bears at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis and was awarded a grand prize for German toys, and Margarete and Richard Steiff each won a grand prize medal for the quality of their toys — it is assumed that the plush bear, although not specified, contributed to the awards.

There is little evidence of teddy bear popularity until 1906. By then, Steiff had twice improved the bear's design, moving from string joints to doubled wires to rods. The disk-jointed bear, with a design copyright registered in February 1905, was ultimately the successful design, and became available in seven sizes when the bear's popularity exploded in 1906.





Richard Steiff



Morris Michtom

## Home-Grown Bears

In the United States, Morris Michtom, who emigrated from Lithuania in 1889 with his bride, Rose, had opened a cigar store in Brooklyn, New York. Pursuant to the teddy bear fad of 1906, Michtom formed a business partnership with Aaron Cone, a Russian immigrant. The two co-founded the Ideal Novelty Company for the purpose of manufacturing toys in January 1907.

In January 1908, the Ideal Novelty Company ran a single ad in "Playthings" magazine, in which it claimed to be the "Largest Bear Manufacturer in the Country." In the first few years of the business, the names "Ideal Novelty Company" and "Ideal Novelty and Toy Company" were both used. Michtom and Cone's partnership was formally dissolved at the end of 1911, leaving Michtom the proprietor the company.

After President Theodore Roosevelt left office in 1909, the teddy bear business waned and most of the bear manufacturers founded in 1906 disappeared, but the Ideal Novelty Company (Ideal) shifted to dolls, and was very successful for many years. Morris Michtom's son, Benjamin, took over the Ideal business in 1938. He then told the story, as it had been passed down to him, about how his father got into the teddy bear business.

In a letter to Margaret Hutchings in 1964 he wrote, "The teddy bear first appeared in 1903 as a result of a [Clifford Berryman] cartoon ..." Here, Benjamin seems to assume that his father's



**Below:** Steiff's Bär 55PB. The original black-and-white photo, taken from the 1903/1904 Steiff catalog, has been colored according to the results of a gray-scale analysis. GAF Guenther Pfeiffer GmbH, Germany, [www.gaf-pfeiffer.com](http://www.gaf-pfeiffer.com)



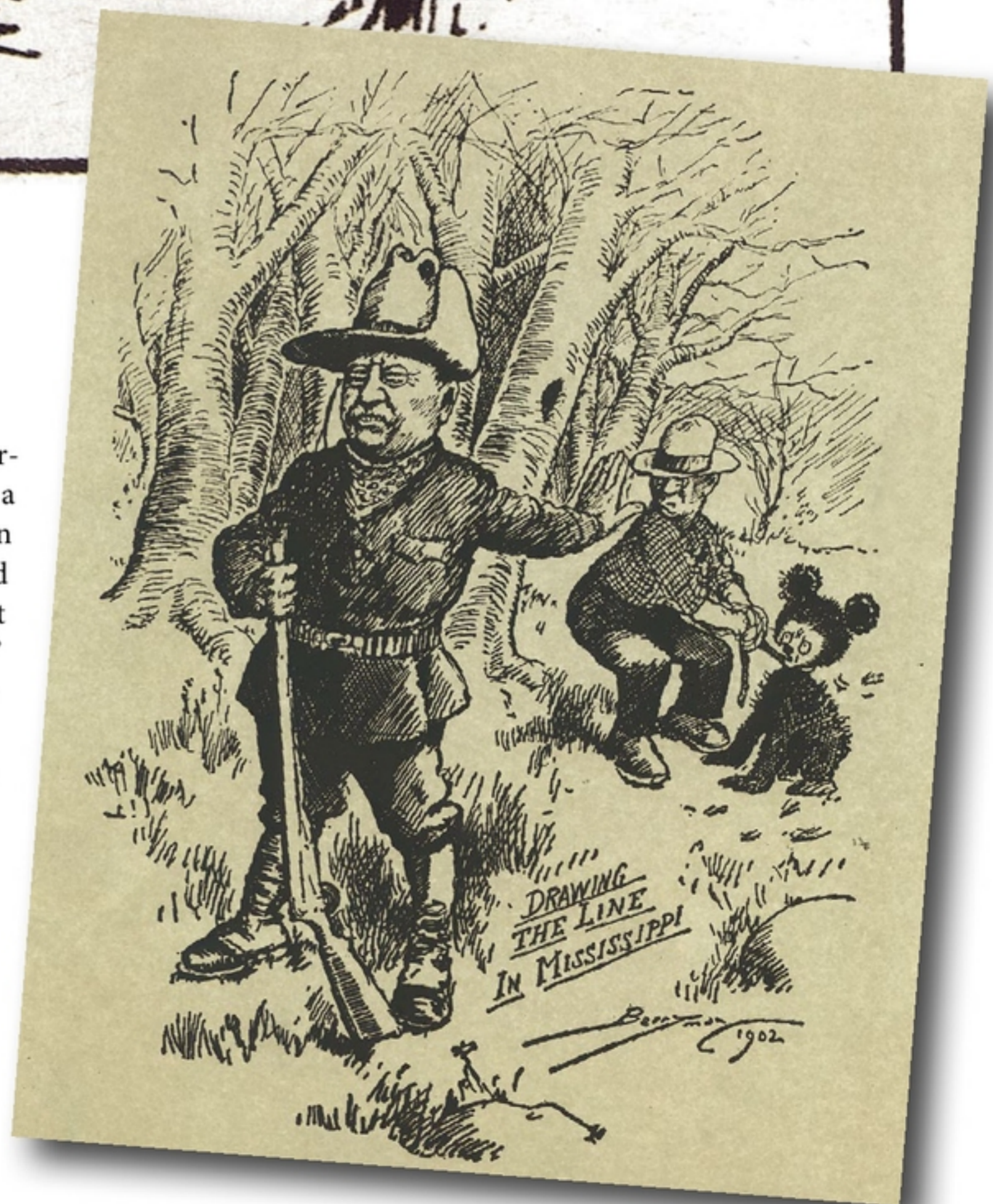


**Above:** Clifford Berryman's original "Drawing the Line in Mississippi" cartoon from *The Washington Post*, Nov. 16, 1902, edition shows an adult bear. *Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Harvard College Library*

**Right:** The redrawn Berryman cartoon turned the bear into a cute cub. *Berryman Family Papers/Smithsonian Institution/National Archives*

creation of a new toy bear was the result of seeing this original Berryman cartoon (of an adult bear, as opposed to a cub drawn in a later version). "My father saw this cartoon, and having always been an admirer of the President, wrote him a letter asking if it would be an impertinence for him to make a small bear cub and call it "Teddy's Bear." The President replied "... you're welcome to use it." This letter has never been recovered, nor has a copy been found in Roosevelt's White House correspondence.

Benjamin's mother, Rose, made sample stuffed toy bears. One bear was sent to the President. According to the story, Morris Michtom then took the President's letter to the buyer of Butler Brothers, a large wholesaler. "They ... took his entire output of these teddy bears and guaranteed my father's credit with the mills, which supplied him with the plush. This was the beginning of the Ideal Toy Corporation. He operated as an individual from 1903 to 1907, calling himself Ideal Novelty and Toy Company, and in 1907 he incorporated. In 1938 the name was simplified to Ideal Toy Corporation."





How much of this information was oral history and how much was documented is not known, nor at what age Benjamin learned it. The earliest known claim of the 1903 date appears in the September 1938 "Playthings." A double-page ad for Ideal says, "In 1903, Ideal's founder introduced the 'Teddy Bear,' extolled throughout the world for the happiness it brought to children."

There are discrepancies in this claim, and the dates are based on the assumption that the cartoon Morris Michtom saw was the first Berryman cartoon from Nov. 16, 1902. But the second Berryman cartoon, with the bear as a cub, is the one most widely circulated. It was redrawn some time later and hung in the National Press Club for decades. The Michtom story fits facts and dates much better if Morris Michtom had seen the second cartoon when he wrote his letter to President Roosevelt.

## Two Cartoons

Clifford Berryman, a well-known political cartoonist for The Washington Post, is at the heart of the controversy regarding the creation of the teddy bar. "Drawing the Line in Mississippi," the original Clifford Berryman cartoon of President Roosevelt refusing to shoot a captive bear, was a 3- by 2-inch panel, just one of five separate cartoons published in Nov. 16, 1902, edition of The Washington Post. The 235-pound bear, which had been chased for hours, was depicted as large as the man holding its rope.

In Berryman's redrawn cartoon, published Nov. 19, 1903, the adult-sized bear was converted into a cub, being pulled by a rope with a tag labeled "Back to the Zoo." The cub became a standard cartoon "dingbat" for decades, usually appearing alongside Teddy Roosevelt. No evidence has been found that the first cartoon was printed anywhere except in the Post, searches in concurrent magazines and in New York papers notwithstanding.

In first few months of 1903, a few major papers reported about the popularity of Berryman's bear cub, now appearing with the President in most of Berryman's cartoons. Those reports didn't show the original cartoon. It seems unlikely that Morris Michtom saw either Washington Post cartoon.

Berryman later redrew "Drawing the Line in Mississippi" again, expanding the panel into a full-sized illustration. The bear is shown as a cub, Roosevelt is depicted as older and heavier, and this time the image includes Berryman's signature and the year 1902 (identifying the date of the original event, not the date the cartoon was redrawn). When was this version created? That information would help clarify the Michtom story.

## The Roosevelt Bears

Plush jointed bears exploded in popularity in 1906, the result of the publication of a weekly series, "The Roosevelt Bears," in 20 newspapers. Each episode filled an entire newspaper page and followed the adventures of two bears, told in verse and cartoons. Created by Seymour Eaton, the Roosevelt Bears, Teddy B. and Teddy G., took their names from items left behind by hunters in Colorado, where Teddy Roosevelt had a successful hunting trip in spring 1905.

Eaton was a well-known American educator, author, journalist, publisher, promoter, and entrepreneur, who had developed two library systems. In 1905, Eaton copyrighted the first five episodes of "The Roosevelt Bears" and began publishing his first series of 29 episodes in January 1906. The highly successful series created a demand for plush bears to fill the roles of Teddy B. and Teddy G. The Steiff Company was unable to meet the demand (despite producing over 385,000 stuffed toy bears in 1906, increasing to 975,000 in 1907), and American firms

sprang up to meet the demand. The rise of the teddy bear fad is seen through advertising and articles in "Playthings" magazine.

**Left and Below:** Seymour Eaton's Roosevelt Bears, Teddy B. and Teddy G., became tremendously popular. The original series ran as full newspaper pages beginning in January 1906.







By April 1906, the first advertisement for jointed plush bears appeared in “Playthings.” In subsequent months, ads from more companies appeared, including ads for clothes embroidered with “Teddy B.” and “Teddy G.” By June, the Bronx Zoo had acquired a pair of cubs from Colorado and named them Teddy B. and Teddy G. The New York Times claimed partial credit for the fad because it published the “Roosevelt Bears” series. The term teddy bears was first used on Page 43 of the October 1906 issue of “Playthings.”

By the end of the year, the term was widely, though not universally, used. In Sears & Roebuck’s Spring 1907 catalog, they were still called Roosevelt Bears; in the fall catalog, they became teddy bears. By any name, the bears had become the greatest toy boom in history; girls treated the bears like dolls, and boys could use them as hunting targets like their President. In November 1906, “Playthings” reported that “... in spite of every effort on the part of domestic and foreign manufacturers the [teddy bear] demand cannot be met.” Most big toy fads quickly, but while its popularity diminished by 1909, the teddy bear has remained a staple international toy for more than a century.

## Berryman’s Cub

The popularity of teddy bears also resulted in a major change in Berryman’s career. In Washington, his cartoon cub became associated with the plush bears, and at some point his “prequel” creation was included in stories about the popularity of the bears. He was guest at social events, sometimes demonstrating his cartoon skills for an appreciative public, and sometimes celebrated as the originator of the teddy bear boom. In 1907, articles in several states credited him with creating the teddy bear.

Berryman found national recognition when he was nominated to the Gridiron Club of reporters in December 1906 — he was the first cartoonist to be invited, and later became its president. He was inaugurated at the Gridiron’s annual banquet Jan. 26, 1907, with many politicians, President Roosevelt included, watching him demonstrate his drawing skills, and with two teddy bears (men in bear suits) looking on. He co-authored a booklet to commemorate the event, which displayed 50 politicians and included a poem — mostly limericks — for each one. The scene was in a large cartoon the next day on the front page of the Washington Star.

A major event in Berryman’s life was his departure from the Post and subsequent employment by the (then larger) Washington Star. The Star promoted Clifford Berryman as the “Teddy Bear Man,” and he appeared at a wide variety of social functions and at schools. The significance of this change is demonstrated by his application for two copyrights, dated June 3, 1907: “Delighted,” his first cartoon for the Star, published Jan. 31, 1907; and “Teddy and the Berryman Bear,” his redrawn cartoon of the President refusing to shoot the bear — now a cub. This famous cartoon, expanded to a full-size, stand-alone cartoon, was widely circulated.

Historian Mark Sullivan said in “Our Times, 1900-1925” (published c. 1928), that Berryman’s bear “has been reproduced thousands of times.” “Our Times” shows the redrawn cartoon with a cub. This redrawn cartoon is said (incorrectly) to be the original, and a framed pen-and-ink version of the cub version hung for decades in the National Press Club. Berryman’s only cartoon copy-

**Top Left:** Ideal teddy bear, circa 1907. Ken and Brenda Yenke Collection

**Bottom Left:** A 16-inch Steiff from 1904 with X-ray showing the rod joints. Ken and Brenda Yenke Collection





**Above:** Illustrations from Richard Steiff's sketchbook. *Margarete Steiff GmbH via GAF Guenther Pfeiffer GmbH, Germany, www.gaf-pfeiffer.com*

**Right:** An Ideal ad in the January 1908 "Playthings" promotes the company's reproductions of foreign jointed bears and other animals.

rights link the best-known version of the cartoon to the time frame of his new employment at the Washington Star.

If Morris Michtom saw the redrawn cartoon in 1906 and Rose Michtom designed their bear, his story fits the timeline of Ideal being incorporated in early 1907. Evidence that the cartoon was seen earlier is suggested by the "Playthings" obituary for Michtom, reporting that Michtom had two employees in 1906. If anyone sold a plush jointed bear before 1906, it was more likely based on a Steiff design than inspired by a Berryman cartoon.

However, if the story as related by Benjamin Michtom was based on the 1902 original or 1903 redrawn cartoon, there are many discrepancies:

- If Morris Michtom introduced his bear in 1903, why is there no evidence of any plush bears other than Steiff's being sold before 1906?
- Wholesale distributors Butler Brothers may have taken Michtom's early production, but there was no advertising of his bears under Ideal or Butler Brothers in "Playthings" until 1908. The Christmas 1905 Butler Bros. catalog had no bears.
- Morris Michtom's entry in the New York Area City Directories listed only his cigar business and his residence before 1907.

- Benjamin Michtom reportedly told Peter Bull that "there were dozens of firms turning out bears in 1903." This was not the case before 1906.
- Who's Who in America: 1908-1909 (with 16,395 entries) credits Seymour Eaton and Clifford Berryman with creating or originating teddy bears, but has no entry for Morris Michtom.
- Ideal's 1908 ad says: "Why send to Europe for your Jointed Animals? Our Bear is an exact reproduction of the foreign models."
- Several items in 1906 and 1907 issues of "Playthings" identify teddy bears as having originated in Germany. Examples can be seen in "The Untold Story of the Teddy Bear."
- A Washington Post article from Nov. 4, 1906, named Margarete Steiff as the person who conceived of the idea for a teddy bear and placed it on the market a year prior. An importer was quoted as saying, "We could sell a thousand dozen a day if we had them, but we haven't," and added that at the beginning of 1906, foreign bears were sold; toward the end of the year, in the last few months, bears were being manufactured in the U.S.
- When Michtom discussed business expansion, friends advised him to give up the seemingly unprofitable business of competing with well-established German factories.

PLAYTHINGS 79

*Why send to Europe*  
for your  
**Jointed Animals**

*When you can buy them right here at  
half the price?*

Our Bear is an exact reproduction of the foreign model. Made of the finest plush. Lowest prices on the market for goods of this quality.

**The Ideal Line of Bears, Cats and Rabbits**

Samples will be sent by express prepaid. Prices on application.

**IDEAL NOVELTY COMPANY**  
The Largest Bear Manufacturers in the Country  
Tel., 2362 East New York      **311-317 Christopher Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.**

## Conclusions

In light of the information available, it seems most likely that:

- Richard Steiff conceived of and designed the jointed plush bear that later became known as the teddy bear. He convinced his aunt to produce it using high-quality mohair, and they made improvements in the design so that the Steiff company was prepared to fulfill much of the demand when teddy bears became popular.
- Clifford Berryman's cartoon cub was linked to the plush bear in 1906 and raised his (already high) stature.
- Morris Michtom saw a cartoon of Berryman's cub around 1906 and jumped into an already exploding market. But while he and Rose Michtom made great contributions to the toy business, they did not invent the teddy bear.
- Seymour Eaton anthropomorphized fierce bears into appealing characters, naming them Teddy B and Teddy G. The popularity of his Roosevelt Bears helped drive the overwhelming demand which Steiff was unable to fulfill, leading to the entry of Ideal and other companies into the teddy bear market. 🐾