

WC 8905031

### Female Doll, Swampy Cree, c. 1800

A wooden doll with articulated limbs, painted/gesso face, the wig of human hair in two plaits bound with beaded cloth and skin strips. Clothed in a dark blue stroud-cloth dress tied at the waist with a quill-woven belt; a red stroud-cloth cape with fold down wide collar, a green stroud-cloth hood, red cloth leggings, and moccasins with red cloth vamps. The dress and cape appliquéd with strips of wool braid, applied in geometric patterns. The hood decorated with geometric patterns in beadwork. Red yarn tassels on beaded strings fringe the lower edges of the belt, dress and cape. A pair of cuffed skin mittens hang on a quilled neckstrap; beaded necklaces and a beaded roundel.

### Swampy Cree Dolls

After more than 100 years in a British family, these two dolls (see WC 8905032) were sold at Christie's auction in London, April 4, 1989, as lot 280. Their earlier history is unknown.

Representing an Indian woman, this doll and cradled baby-doll belong to a small number of remarkably similar antique dolls, dressed in meticulous reproductions of the type of clothing worn by Swampy Cree Indians in circa 1800. Made of lathe-turned wood with painted gesso faces, these dolls have been identified as "Queen Anne" dolls, made in England between 1790 and 1820. Dolls of this type were often used in England to display particular fashions; they were not intended to be used as play toys. Also these examples, dressed and decorated by Cree women, were apparently intended to illustrate the clothing and apparel of the native people in the James Bay region.

We do not know who initiated this project, whether in England or in Canada, but dolls shipped to James Bay were mentioned in the records of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1801 to 1809 (Oberholtzer, 1999: 238). They were sent to trading posts at Albany, York Factory and Churchill, all located in the region inhabited by the West Main or Swampy Cree Indians. At the request of fur trade employees some native women, known for their superior craftwork, created the incredibly detailed costumes and accessories. Matching the descriptions written by early fur traders, these costumes illustrate many details otherwise unknown to us.

Only six other examples survive from the same region and period. Three dolls representing two women and a man are in the Horniman Museum in London, England. Three dolls representing a man, his wife and baby-on-cradleboard are in the Rosalie Whyte Museum in Bellevue, Washington (Feder, 1984; Oberholtzer, 1999). Differences in their costumes do not go beyond the range within one single tradition, but they do suggest that the dolls were not all made near the same trading post. There is no evidence to support the identification of the X-shaped cut-out on the cradleboard as an abstract symbol of the thunderbird (Oberholtzer, 1999; 226)

Shortly before the Cree Indians made these dolls, the Huron Indians near Quebec City made the first dolls for the souvenir market. Their production of dolls and other miniatures became a profitable cottage industry, but that example was never followed by the Cree Indians.

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Literature:

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## **WC 8905031**

### **Female doll, Swampy Cree, ca.1800**

**Provenance: remained in English family until sold at Christie's London sale in 1989 (lot 280); purchased by Masco Corporation Collection; now Warnock Collection**

This lathe-turned and peg-jointed wooden doll with her gesso face and finely painted features is of English manufacture made during the late Georgian Period (1790-1810). For the doll's wig, human hair has been twisted around cord, then attached to dark blue trade cloth and tacked to the doll's head. The hair of this wig has been separated into two bunches with each of these covered with a beaded red wool trade cloth wrap completed by a beaded fringe suspended from the bottom. The narrow-waisted and broad-hipped doll is dressed in clothing worn by the Cree of the James and Hudson's Bays' region during the late 1700s and early 1800s. The trade cloth items are stitched with commercially-made threads and trimmed with woolen braid, ravelled yarn and glass beads. The only indigenous materials are the caribou hide used on the moccasins, mittens and ties and the porcupine quills of the belt and mitten "cord". Close attention to detail and the inclusion of items not found in museum collections confirm that the doll was skillfully dressed by a Cree woman (or women) possessing intimate knowledge of traditional clothing and with access to trade goods.

From what little we know, these dolls appear to have been gifts or souvenir items acquired by men involved in some capacity with the Hudson's Bay or the Northwest fur trade companies. Tantalizing entries in the archival records of the Hudson's Bay Company suggest that dolls such as these may have been ordered from England (Oberholtzer 1998:237-239), however this has yet to be confirmed. Furthermore, as these dolls were considered by the British to be miniature mannequins rather than play things, they may not have been listed as "toys". These concerns aside, these Cree-dressed dolls, as a form of self-representation, became cultural ambassadors wherever they travelled.

Only four female dolls, two male dolls and one baby doll are known for this genre. Two of the female dolls are held by the Cuming Museum C2337 and C2338 (formerly on loan to the Horniman Museum 1976.459 and 1976.460, respectively); and another in the Rosalie Whyel Museum of Doll Art (no number) and this Warnock one. One male doll is a companion to the female of the Whyel collection and the other male is housed in the Horniman Museum. The Warnock baby doll in the cradleboard is the only one of this genre as the infant in the Whyel cradleboard is a substitute. While museums and private collections hold full-size examples of individual clothing items, these dressed dolls inform us of the manner in which these items were worn. The Warnock doll certainly adds further to our knowledge of Cree clothing in the James Bay area with the inclusion of a single diamond-shaped beaded earring with its twin bead fringes and a beaded rondel hung around her neck and worn as a pendant on her chest. Currently these are the only known, and hence invaluable, examples of these items.

Three of the four female dolls wear capes over their clothing. One cape is of painted hide (Cuming C2337) while the other two are of woolen trade cloth. Until recently there were no full-size examples of women's capes until the first was sold at Christie's auction house on 13 June

2005. Described as navy blue wool trade cloth with bands of scrolling floral motifs embroidered with wool, this cape was part of an ensemble of dress, separate sleeves, bead belt, hood, leggings, moccasins and a cloth panel. The patterns on all these capes indicate that about one-third was folded back providing extra protection around the shoulders. The capes were fastened by tying ribbons or thongs around two buttons on the front. Although several ethnohistoric references make reference to capes, only Thomas McKeevor describes the cloth ones. He states (McKeevor 1819:52) that: “On Sunday, in place of the blanket, they wear a piece of green or scarlet cloth, made into the form of a mantle, and thrown carelessly over the shoulders; it is in general very handsomely embroidered with various ribbons, particularly green or yellow; under this they wear a cloth dress...”. This doll’s cape falls within this description, and like the two other small examples, is replete with a fringe on the lower portion.

Cloth dresses, particularly in the areas in proximity to the trading posts, replaced dresses of caribou hide. The two Cuming dolls wear hide dresses while the Warnock and Whyel dolls wear cloth ones. The cloth ones have incorporated the striped selvage of the cloth to provide horizontal stripes around the bottom of the skirts. Dyed triangles finish the bottom edge of the Warnock doll’s skirt as well as the bottom edge of the cape. All dresses are cinched by fringed belts of woven porcupine quills or beads. As well, all four include the practical separate sleeves; that is, sleeves which are sewn only from wrist to elbow and then the wider part joined by ties or straps at the back and at the front. These allow flexibility in movement and physical comfort unhampered by constrictive tailoring. Sleeves can be removed or added when needed and are easily manipulated to facilitate breast feeding.

Significantly, these four dolls and another later example possess a pectoral or breastplate worn just below the throat on the upper chest. Although these breastplates have been attached to the separate sleeves, they were actually separate items. There are no known full-size examples and their actual presence among the Crees is confirmed by only a couple of references. For example, during the late 1730s and early 1740s, James Isham observed that in dressing up for a feast, the women (Rich and Johnson 1949:165): “... equipping themselves to the greatest advantage: the embroidered cap [hood], sleeves, smock, hair dress and breast-plate put on ...”. In 1820, Robert Hood illustrated a Cree woman wearing a breastplate of loom-woven porcupine quill (Bunyan, et al. 1993:71). When the Reverend (later Bishop) John Horden sent an “ornament for the breast” to the Church Missionary Society museum in 1854, he did not provide a description for us to consider as a comparative.

The doll’s rectangular hood is a form typical of the ones worn by Cree women throughout the region. The geometric designs on this miniature one reflect its manufacture during an early time period as beaded floral examples don’t begin to appear until a slightly later date. The triangles and the circular motifs of the beaded and appliquéd decoration are repeated elsewhere on this doll’s clothing as well as on the breastplate of the Cuming doll C2337 and painted onto the sleeves of the same doll and on the coat of the Whyel male doll. The tassel on the peak, which was created in this instance with strips of cloth, was believed by the Crees to be the hood’s soul. For not only did these hoods afford protection against the elements, but they also played an important

role in hunting and hunting rituals (Oberholtzer 1991a; 1991b).

As all four of the early female dolls have hair covers of either porcupine quillwork or beadwork finished with fringes, it can be inferred that Cree women of the late 1700s and early 1800s wrapped their hair with similar decorative covers. This style may have continued well into the 1900s when loom-woven bead hair wraps were collected by Ernest Renouf on the east coast of James Bay (for example, British Museum 1920.10-4.185ab and 1920.10-4.187ab).

The well-detailed leggings, mittens and moccasins of the Warnock doll along with the other examples are again typical of the period and region. The doll's leggings display a straight leg stitched to form a flap along the outer edges. In full-size examples of women's cloth leggings, this flap curves inward just above the ankle. Both the high top winter moccasins with their cloth vamps and the mittens illustrate the Cree use of welted seams in which a piece of hide, or as in these instances, a piece of cloth is stitched into the seam. Mittens are always worn with a cord around the neck so that when a Cree removes them to attend to traps and snares, the mittens are readily accessible – and not full of snow.

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