

WC 8905032

Wooden Doll in Cradleboard, Swampy Cree, C. 1800

A small wooden doll with painted/gesso face, in a miniature wooden cradleboard, which is painted red and black. Provided with a wooden U-shaped device of which the front is covered with woven quillwork. Suspended from this head protector are fringes, those at both sides of the baby's head terminating red yarn tassels on metal cones. The baby doll is laced into a beadworked red woolen pouch, which is attached to a U-shaped wooden rim on the front of the wood board. The upper part of the board behind the baby's head has an X-shaped cut-out.

Swampy Cree Dolls

After more than 100 years in a British family, these two dolls (see WC 8905031) 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 Whyle 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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Baby 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

The bald-headed baby doll, carved from wood with painted features on gesso, is presumed to be of English manufacture and of the same genre as the full-size dolls from this era. The doll is laced into a miniature native-made *tikanagan* or cradle board. Replicating the features of a full-size *tikanagan*, this one has a wooden backboard with an iconic thunderbird cutout, steamed wooden foot rest and a steamed wooden face guard or hoop. Painted with red, black and blue pigments on back and front of board as well as on the sides of the face protector (hoop), the *tikanagan* is further decorated with punctates, porcupine quillwork, bead rosettes and fringes. Fringes of white, blue, yellow, red, green, crystal and black beads strung on caribou hide are attached to the upper edges of the back side of the board, suspended from both the loom-woven quill band and the beaded rosettes on the back. The fringes suspended from the loom-woven quill band on the front of the hoop (face protector) are made of natural and red dyed porcupine quills, metal tinkler cones and tassels of unravelled red wool. These fringes are backed with two free-hanging navy cloth strips outlined with alternating red and white beads. The upper edges of the front side of the board are each trimmed with five white beads.

The navy trade cloth bag is ornamented with gold wool braid and then strips of red wool trade cloth outlined with single lanes of white beads and a central pattern of alternating blue and yellow tiny crosses beaded on to the navy background. The outside edge is finished with beaded fringes and tassels of unravelled red wool; the bag is laced with a strip of caribou hide. Between the doll and the board is a pillow (mattress) covered with blue and white striped linen cloth. The front of the face protector (hoop) is attached to the board with a double strand of porcupine quillwork. The face protector protected the baby from a fall but also supported a blanket in winter.

Dried moss is placed between and around a baby's legs before the infant is fastened into a moss bag or the bag of the *tikanagan*. Moss, as a readily available, renewable, biodegradable and absorbent material, serves as a "diaper" for the baby. Then laced into this moss-filled bag, the baby is in a secure environment for either travel on the mother's back or propped against a tree when stationary. In either situation, the baby is in an ideal position to learn through observation. Making the *tikanagan* is a family affair with father or grandfather transforming the wood into the finished board and the mother or grandmother creating the bag and decorative elements. These cradleboards continue to be used until the toddlers are given a "Walking Out" ceremony (Oberholtzer 1997).

The Warnock model *tikanagan* is very similar in form to other models and full-size examples collected from the 1740s to the early 1800s. James Isham provides the first sketch of a cradleboard at York Factory with this particular cutout formed at the top of the board with a wide triangle inverted over a smaller triangle (Rich and Johnson 1949:105). Based on this cut-out I proposed earlier that the very similar Whyel example possibly originated at York Factory (Oberholtzer 1998:240). However, since then I have noticed that, under high magnification, the *tikanagan* depicted in a watercolor by William Richards also bears a similar cut-out. As Richards' painting was done at Moose Factory sometime between 1805 and 1811, the occurrence of this style is thus extended from the York Factory area on the south shore of Hudson's Bay down to Moose Factory on the southern shores of James Bay. In response to a number of studies, most significantly the work of Colin Taylor (1994:46-57), Douglas Light (1972:3,12,13,16,17,19), Ruth Phillips (numerous publications) and in my own work (Oberholtzer 1999), I have interpreted this cut-out as an iconic thunderbird form. The presence

of an iconic image of a Sky Power at a position over and/or behind a baby's head falls within the cultural and symbolic perspectives of the Cree.

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