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CODING IN
WOMEN'S FOLK CULTURE

Edited by

JOAN NEWLON RADNER

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Susan Gordon's version of "The Handless Maiden"

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“Awful Real”: Dolls and Development in Rangeley, Maine

MARGARET R. YOCOM

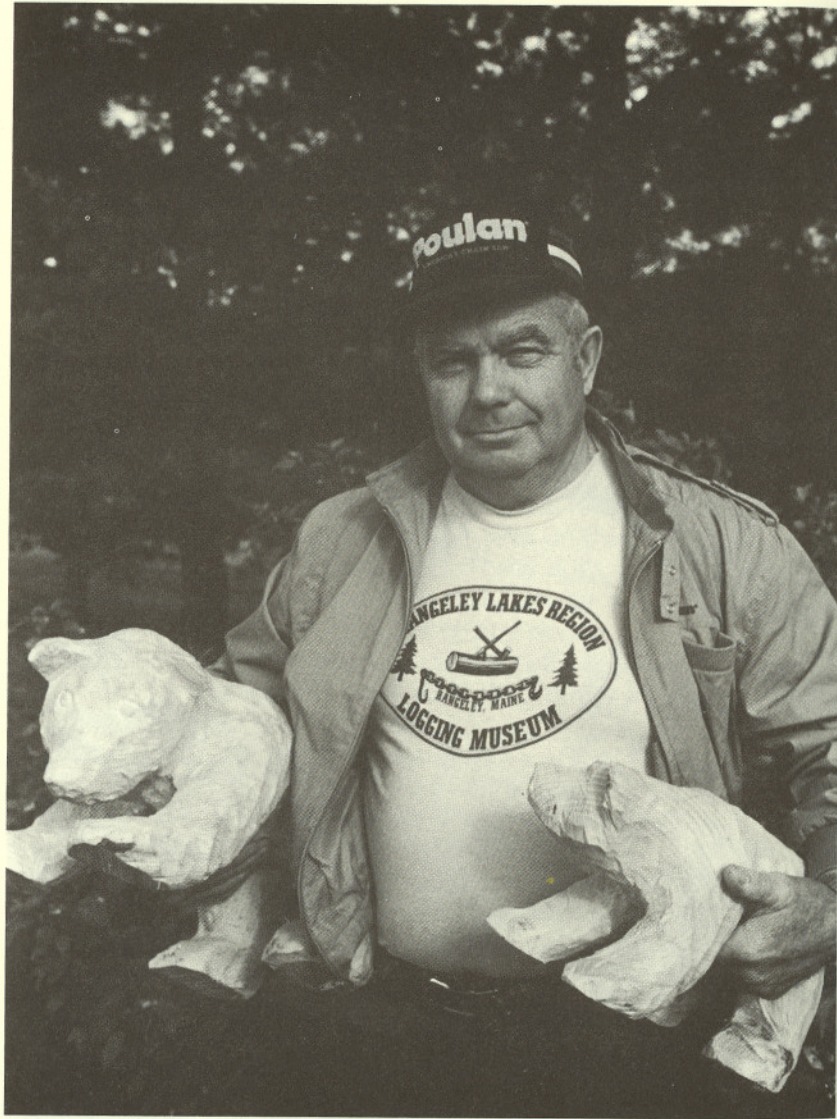
In the logging country of northwestern Maine that I have been visiting for fifteen years now, two things stand out for me: the chain-saw carved wooden bears and the baby dolls with their hand-knit dresses. The bears conjure up the white pines that the loggers drag out of the forest and then haul through towns on thirty-five-ton rigs that rattle and roar. When I think of the baby dolls, I remember church basements or quiet living rooms and women telling tales of their children to the rhythmic click of knitting needles.

I am studying a three-generation family of loggers and homemakers, woodcarvers and knitters from Rangeley. When I began, it was the logging and the chain-saw wood carving that caught my eye. My fieldnotes spill over with stories about work in the woods, details about how to drag logs out of the forest with a skidder and the proper use of a birch hook, and reasons why a carver turns from a life-size chain-saw figure to carve a half-inch bunny out of a chip of basswood. I had always been aware of the baby sweaters in yellow or green or aqua lying half-finished in a yarn bag alongside a living room easy chair, but it took me several months in Rangeley to begin to see that the dolls had a vital story of their own.

During my fieldwork in the winter of 1985, I worked in the woods with the men. I learned how to operate the skidder. I bounced around in the truck delivering pulp to the mill—sometimes two loads a day. And I would come home with pitch and sweat all over, covered with a weariness that often responded only to beers and jokes at the Wagon Wheel Restaurant or dancing at the Rangeley Inn. Then I would return to the world of women, with their clean clothing in their warm homes, knitting soft pastel yarns into doll dresses. I felt as if I were crossing over into the Twilight Zone. I did not feel comfortable with



Lucille Richard with two of her baby dolls.



Rodney Richard with two of his chain-saw carved wooden bears.

my reactions to the world of the women in those early months: their work seemed so easy compared with the work I had just done. The male world of the loggers was exotic and seductive. And there were other reasons, more personal ones, that colored my early view of Rangeley.

Being a woman fieldworker and studying dolls is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because my own childhood experiences with dolls undoubtedly helped me pay attention to the dolls and their clothing. The curse comes with the complicated associations that dolls call up. Dolls revive childhood memories. They stir up feelings about our mothers and our relationships with them. Ultimately, they urge us to question who we are as women. In a doll's face, we see ourselves as children, as teenagers leaving dolls behind, as women having or not having children, and as women. They are mirrors of our souls. They invite us to turn inward. Studying dolls, like studying housework, involves women fieldworkers in a long, sometimes joyous, sometimes painful journey home to visit and, perhaps, embrace another part of our selves.

As my days in Rangeley went by, I began to see the many ways that dolls—and always baby dolls—entered into the life of the community. The windows of Mo's Variety Store and Jannace's Clothing, for example, almost always feature dolls and stuffed animals as people celebrate holidays and such community events as Girl Scout Week and the Blueberry Festival. When the Logging Festival Field Days Committee offers awards to young girls at the Little Miss Woodchip contest, it gives baby dolls. One of the first summer festivals, the Fourth of July, is celebrated in Rangeley not with a parade of local bands and fire engines but with a parade of dolls. In nearby Dummer, New Hampshire, Mildred Smith decorates her yard with dolls, 125 of them.

So, in the summer of 1987, I turned to the dolls and decided to learn what I could from them. For me, they have become multivocal objects encoding women's values and their protests against changes that they perceive they can neither accept nor stop. As the women face economic changes brought on in part by a tourist-driven economy, they inscribe their protests in the baby doll by choosing her over the more expensive dolls brought in by "people from away." The knitters turn from the model-thin Barbie and the Cabbage Patch doll with its flattened face because the former calls forth to them a self-absorbed woman devoid of nurturance and the latter reminds them of children who have been abused. The women's continued use of dolls signals a statement of their values and their belief in maternal power in the face of a patriarchal world that so often trivializes them and their creations.

If we look at the knitters of the generation born in the late 1920s and early 1930s first as girls, then as women with husbands and young children, and finally as older women living in a tourist town filled with strangers, we can read in their stories and their stitches how knitting has taken on layer upon layer of meaning.

Girlhood

When Lucille Haley Richard, Bertha Lamb Haines, and other knitters were growing up in the Rangeley area in the 1930s, most people lived on farms. Franklin County was rich farmland, with 220,777 acres being tilled for crops. Of the 9,670 adults working in the county, 1,785 worked the land.¹

Lucille Richard, born in 1927, tells of working her father's pea and potato fields, weeding rows that stretched longer than she could see. She preferred indoor work, though, and learned to sew and knit from her mother. Her story about learning from her mother shows how women learned from working closely with one another and how they, as girls, began to develop a doll craft aesthetic. As Lucille considers why knitting doll clothes is important to her today, she discusses the role of dolls in her life as a young girl on a Maine farm:

I like knitting dolls' things and small children's, really, better than I do adult items, although I've done quite a few adult sweaters.

And I particularly like little girls' things, even though I never had any little girls. The three were all boys.

I think that maybe some of it stems back from the fact that I always loved dolls growing up and I had dolls till I was . . . probably older than most kids today. I was probably eleven or twelve and still getting dolls at Christmas. And perhaps living on a farm, where you weren't close to the town and didn't have a lot of activities and getting together with a lot of other kids.

Because I remember sitting with my mother. She often did make cloth dolls and dolls' clothes *for me* because most of my sisters . . . liked the outdoor work and they really could care less about dolls. I guess I was probably the only one that really, really enjoyed dolls. So she used to sit with me and make the dolls, make the dolls' things.

I probably started knitting when I was twelve or fourteen. Probably started just some simple knitting because my mother used to knit a little. She used to knit our mittens and she used to knit sweaters without patterns. They were just plain cardigans, is what she'd make. Probably I started from watching her and then I progressed buying books.²

Traditional learning among women in rural Maine thus consisted of learning by sitting close to another woman, watching her, and receiving instructions as the process went on. As women like Lucille learned to make dolls and their clothing, they also learned and internalized a set of values that prized careful handwork, baby dolls that a girl could nurture, the tutelage of another woman, and careful work:

I think kids really had more of the baby doll types. And we didn't have the—like Barbies—the stylish dolls like they have now. We had more that looked like babies. They were bigger sized. Or, occasionally you had a cloth-bodied one or the cloth ones that were *made* at home. Not like Kens and the Barbies and a lot of the model dolls, I'm trying to say thin dolls, small dolls that they have now.

[My mother] always made the dolls and made the dolls' hair out of yarn. And she had no patterns or anything. She did everything by newspapers. She would just take newspapers and shape out the doll's head, the arms, legs. I think she made them all separate and then sewed the legs on and the arms on and the head on. But she would use, like, an old sheet, that's what she would use for the doll.

And I really don't remember what we would use for the stuffing. It was probably some old cotton, like, maybe some old pillowcases and sheets.

She would embroidery the face and then she would take yarn for the hair and she would either make the curls or the pigtails.

Lucille's story about the time her family's house burned down and she saved her one big doll emphasizes the importance of dolls in her life and illustrates one of the first challenges to her values:

They were quite big. We might have used some small baby clothes because I remember one in particular. It was a pretty big one, so it might have taken six-months-sized clothes. Cause I remember we had a fire at our house and my mother never got over it: that was the first thing I grabbed of all the things to grab to save. The big doll was the thing that I picked up first. [laughs]

And my father either: "Of all the things to save, you saved that first!"

But I suppose I hadn't had it that long. She hadn't made it that long ago.

Lucille's story is echoed in those of other women, such as Bertha Haines, who learned from her mother-in-law, Blanche, when both families lived together on the Haines farm: "We'd sit by the old kitchen stove and sometimes in the living room, like sometimes half the afternoon. We had no radio or anything. And she'd say, 'Well I guess it's time we have a little knitting bee.' And knitting! She wouldn't think anything of knitting for two, three hours at a time. And I got so

I could knit pretty fast.” As girls, then, the Rangeley knitters began work in the women’s sphere with its relational, affiliative values and developed a liking for baby dolls that would deepen with the years.³

Young Wives and Mothers

In the late 1940s, the 1950s, and the early 1960s, the Rangeley region underwent rapid change. For ninety-one years, the town had been governed by a board of selectmen, but in 1946, a town manager form of government began to handle the increasingly complicated affairs of the town. Motels and small, private summer cabins multiplied. With the opening of Bald Mountain Ski Area in 1959 and Saddleback Ski Area in 1960, Rangeley became a major four-season resort.⁴ The number of farms dropped rapidly. In 1945, Franklin County had 1,351 farms and 180,405 acres in farmland; in 1964, 451 farms remained, with 121,705 acres of land.⁵

During this period, many of the women of Lucille Haley Richard’s generation worked in the drug stores, restaurants, and motels of Rangeley that served both local people and the ever-growing tourist and summer resident trade. Lucille worked at the soda fountain of Riddle’s Rexall in 1946 and then waited on tables at Doc Grant’s Restaurant from 1947 until 1953. When her youngest son started college in 1977, she returned to waitress work.

In 1951, Lucille Haley married Rodney Richard of Phillips, a town just forty-five minutes down the mountain from Rangeley. They settled in Rangeley and raised their sons there: Rodney, Jr., was born in 1955, John in 1956, and Stephen in 1959.

During the 1950s, Lucille began to knit more. “I didn’t do a lot of knitting,” she says, “until my kids were small.” She made some sweaters for the boys, but mostly she knitted children’s clothes for the church fairs.

By knitting children’s clothing and thus clothing that could fit on baby dolls, the women were able to give such dolls to their children, a purposeful choice in their minds:

BERTHA: I just like the baby dolls that they could play with ——

LUCILLE: Yes! I did too.

BERTHA: —— and put into a doll’s crib. I mean Sheila would play for—Lucille knew it—wash those doll clothes till they were about worn out.

LUCILLE: And she’d put them on a bed ——

BERTHA AND LUCILLE: —— cover them up ——

BERTHA: —— and kiss them ——



Lucille Haley Richard, on the right, at her first waitress job, Riddle’s Rexall, 1946. (Courtesy of Lucille Richard)

LUCILLE: ——— and she'd lie down with them.

BERTHA: I said I think nowadays that if some parents, some mothers felt like she did, as much love for children as she did for a doll that there'd be ———

LUCILLE: ——— less child abuse.

BERTHA: I guess not!

LUCILLE: And then when Butch was little, I can remember, I had a little basket on wheels and Bertha would come over and visit and help a little. And Sheila, she'd get there. And oh, if the little stocking wasn't up just right or wasn't even, she'd pull on them.

BERTHA: Yeah, straighten them ———

LUCILLE: ——— pull his shirt down ———

BERTHA: ——— tuck his shirt in ———

LUCILLE: ——— and touch his hair. Oh! You'd think it was a living doll. Had to have everything just so ———

BERTHA: ——— just so ———

LUCILLE: ——— on it. He'd kick a bootie off, she'd have that bootie on.

Doc Grant's Doll Carriage Parade, begun by "Doc" and Lelia Grant in 1946, underscored the importance of dolls and homemade doll clothing. The Grants invited little girls from all over the region to put on a special dress, decorate a doll carriage, and push their dolls down Rangeley's Main Street. One year Doc had 103 little girls and their carriages in his parade. "Many parents would start a month or two before," Lucille explains. "Some of the carriages would be really elaborate. Most of them were handmade with many, many hours of handwork."

A few years later, the Grants added a children's parade so boys and girls could participate by riding their tricycles and bicycles. Doc gave prizes and gifts to all the children; he also fed them ice cream from a big barrel. "And he talked to every one of those kids himself," Norma Keep adds. Doc hung poster-size pictures of the award-winning children all over the walls of his restaurant. "Oh, that was quite a parade, the biggest event Rangeley ever had," Norma recalls.

Doc Grant ran the parade every year until his death in 1964. "He had a little son whom he lost at about two years old," Lucille Richard explains, "and they never had any more children. So he thought this was one way he could start something for children. They never adopted a child because they said they were very bitter over the loss of their child and I'm sure it took a while to accept it and get back on with their lives. So doing this seemed to be honoring him."

In the late 1950s, while the doll carriage parade was still going



Program book cover from the Doc Grant's Children's Day and Doll Carriage Parade, 1952. (Courtesy of the Rangeley Lakes Region Historical Society)

strong, the Barbie doll appeared in Rangeley. The knitters greeted her with disgust. "I have made Barbie Doll clothes," Lucille admits, "but they're not easy. They're so tiny, so few stitches on them. And you usually have to use the very fine yarn. And then to sew them together and turn them right side out ———. Uh! I don't enjoy doing them. I've done it, but I don't enjoy them. I'd rather knit the baby doll clothes."

This opinion of Barbie and her clothes is shared by several knitters in Rangeley, among them Kay Morgan:

KAY: My granddaughter's into Barbie things right now. She's *into* Barbies. She would like this baby doll and she would lay it on her bed and go play with Barbies.

LUCILLE: You like knitting for Barbie? I hate doing it ———.

KAY: Oh! I *hate* doing it.

To the knitters, then, the Barbie clothes are painstakingly troublesome to make and the Barbie doll itself represents a strong shift away from the values of the baby doll. Barbie, with her sexual if not anorexic figure, her expensive cars and houses, and her career and evening clothes, models a type of woman that a girl can fantasize becoming, not a baby that a girl can nurture.

Talk about Barbie also encodes messages about child abuse, messages so strongly felt that sometimes they erupt into explicit speech, as they did with Bertha and Lucille. The women are aware of the increasing child abuse statistics in Franklin County; Child Protective Services of the Maine State Department of Human Services reports that in 1986, the Lewiston office, which includes Franklin County, received 3,120 referrals of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse of children and accepted 842 cases.⁶ Barbie, a doll more likely to be held up to a mirror than to be cuddled, is just the kind of woman, in my interpretation of the knitters' visions, to be more likely to abuse her children. Through their knitting, their participation in the doll parade, and their consistent use of the baby doll, the knitters speak for the kind of love and attention they believe children deserve.

Older Women with Grown Children

From the 1970s, the Rangeley Lakes region has continued to grow as a commercial and resort area, leaving its agricultural heritage behind. By 1982, the number of acres in farmland had fallen to 51,046,⁷ and only 424 farm laborers remained in 1986. The 812 seasonal homes located in Franklin County in 1940 mushroomed to 3,334 in 1980,

an increase of 310.6 percent.⁸ As of 1985, Rangeley's year-round population stood at 1,150 and, during the peak tourist season, the total population of residents and visitors reached 6,700.⁹ From 1984 to 1988, real estate sales tripled to three hundred annually, and six new condominium projects were proposed.¹⁰ In 1988, Saddleback Ski Area began plans for a major expansion, many rental cottages were sold as condominiums, and there was talk of a convention center. In 1986, real estate in Rangeley was valued at \$58,116,475, almost double the figure for 1983, when a revaluation of property was done.¹¹ Despite all this growth, the 1979 median family income of Rangeley stood at \$14,904, 12 percent lower than state average.¹² Many local people saw the late 1980s as the time to sell. Along a mile-long stretch of town, five year-round residents had For Sale signs on their lawns.

For the Richard family, tourism brings mixed blessings. In 1984, they opened a little shop on the edge of their property to sell their carvings, knit goods, and the handmade work of other friends in the region. Now, as they look out their front window toward Rangeley Lake, they see not an open field but condominium units going up and the specter of a two-hundred-unit motel that a developer is planning.

In these times, the women of Rangeley knit even more. Lucille continues to work at the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church Fair with her neighbor Bertha Haines, as she has done every year for twenty-eight years. The fairs, though, have changed. Local people used to form the greater part of the audience. "Now," Lucille explains, "a big percentage of people who come to the fairs and different events to buy the stuff are strangers or some tourists." As the women look around them at the newcomers to Rangeley, they often speak of knowing no one. They are becoming strangers in their own hometown.

As her sons matured and tourism increased, Lucille Richard's knitting changed. "Once in a while when the boys were young," she remembers, "people would see something I had done for the church fair and I would occasionally take an order." Now, though, she takes many more orders and sells some of her creations in the family's craft shop.

Orders are not her favorites. She does not like the pressure involved in getting things just right for people and getting them done at a particular time. She is also quite aware of the low price—fifteen to twenty dollars—she gets, considering the time she spends. Raffles, however, are something else. "I like to knit things on raffles," Lucille explains. Since she believes that helping others through charities is how people should live, she has knitted many a bunny and teddy bear



Lucille Richard's and Bertha Haines's knit goods table at the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church Fair. (Mrs. Richard is at the far right.)

outfit and is now planning doll outfits for both the Farmington Hospital Auxiliary and for the Logging Museum.

Raffles also satisfy a good knitter because they show how her accomplishments are recognized throughout the community. Often people scoop up raffle tickets without even seeing the knitted prize. Just knowing that it is the work of Lucille or another fine knitter is enough. Lucille's outfits often bring about seventy-five dollars at a raffle. Even though she earns no money, Lucille enjoys raffles because through them she can see her work go for the monetary value she believes it deserves. Like other women knitters, however, Lucille faces a dilemma: for her work to realize its greatest economic power, she herself must earn nothing.

As Lucille increases her orders and her benefit work, she and the other knitters continue to strengthen their ties within the women's sphere. As adults with grown children, they teach others to knit. Lucille remembers when her niece Julie was ten: "Some evenings Julie and I would just sit here and she'd go get my needles and say, 'Would you help me?' What I tried to start her on was dolls' things because

they would be small and she wouldn't get too discouraged. We would do a doll's scarf or something real plain, in the beginning. And then we'd go to a little doll's sweater and from there on to bigger things. I'd be knitting at the same time. And I think that's why she'd want me to show her: sometimes, I was probably knitting and she wanted to do the same thing."

The women's sphere also encompasses women knitters' visits with one another. When Lucille visits her neighbor Bertha Haines or sees Kay Morgan, who fashions the buttonholes on Lucille's sweaters, talk focuses on knitting as they praise each other's work, discuss the challenging details on a sweater or a doll dress, trade information about where to get materials, consider how to get the best price for the time spent, and take a few swipes at the dolls and doll clothing they all dislike.

At the church fair, a major part of the women's sphere in Rangeley, women compliment each other's work as they pick up the sweaters, clothes, potholders, afghans, clothes hanger covers, toilet roll covers, and pin cushions on the knit goods table—"My, what a lot of beautiful things you've got here." "Look at these! Are these yours?" "A lot of work in these!" The knitters' expertise is clear, especially in their talk about sizing mittens for children. With ease, they recommend one size for one child, one size for another.

In the aisles between the tables, women hug and kiss. Summer residents greet local people and each other after long absences. Others throw kisses and wave to the many babies and children in the room. A local woman who owns some cottages greets Lucille, and, amidst the praise for her work, they comment on the summer people they both depend on and disparage:

WOMAN: Hi, Lucille. Thanks so much for making those sweaters for my friend. They were beautiful! She was so pleased!

LUCILLE: How are the camps this year?

WOMAN: Well, good. Some people are saying the motels aren't full, but our people have to book ahead, so they come rain or whatever. "Is it always like this?" they ask. "So rainy?"

What do they expect? Doesn't it rain where they come from? [laughs] I want to say, "No, it just rains over you; there's a grey cloud that follows you around. Just you."

Honestly, you think they could take what they get like we do.

From the ranks of the older women in town came a few who, disturbed by the end of the Doc Grant's Doll Carriage Parade in 1964, lobbied to have it begin again. "We older ones," Rose Quimby explained,

"thought it was something they shouldn't drop. I talked to them [the women at the Chamber of Commerce] several times. It was nice, something for the kids in Rangeley to participate in. You know, there's not too much for the Rangeley kids to do."

Jane Linnell, then at the Chamber of Commerce, had been talking about the parade with her friend Joan Blythe. "I was interested in new things to attract people to town," she explained, "things to do. And when you could bring people from Connecticut—that was something." Jane, Joan, and Rose began the parade again around 1974. "This time, though," Rose added, "we called it the 'Children's Day Parade' [from the start] so boys and girls could enter it. This way everybody could participate."

Enthusiastically, Lucille and her friends entered grandchildren and the children of friends. Though the parade certainly gave the children something to participate in, it also provided the Rangeley knitters with a major public space to exhibit their creations and declare the values inherent in baby dolls, hard work, and handmade goods. This time, however, Lucille and like-minded others encountered competition from mass-market doll products. The parade became a visual dialectic between contesting sets of values. "I entered Meredith [Larry and Eileen's girl] for three years, 1980, '81, '82," Lucille pointed out:

The first year she was only six months old, so we decorated a big baby carriage and sat her in it but we made it all white. Rodney hand carved a husky dog and a friend of mine made a sled the exact replica to go along with the size of the dog carving. We put her in sponsored by the Saddleback Motor Inn and we put a little crown on her head. It was cute.

And then the second year, she was a year and a half and her mother dressed her all in a little pink smock dress and I made the doll carriage all in pink. I used a little stroller and put a big doll in it and then the bottom part of the stroller formed her gown. And that was really pretty. I decorated the carriage with crepe paper. I made a frame and put sheeting around it. Then you sew your crepe paper to the sheet—you'd have to hand sew it on. And when you finally got it fit around the frame, you'd sew one seam to keep it on. I waited until I got it onto the carriage and then I embroidered little rose buds with yarn all the way around it. It was a lot of work. But it was cute.

And then the third year, the final year, I dressed her as a bunny and made her carriage an Easter basket and filled it full with toys and Easter eggs.

One year when we put Meredith in, another little girl got first prize and her carriage was just a tin carriage from Sears and Roebuck that was a Strawberry Shortcake and her dress was a Strawberry Shortcake, also from Sears and Roebuck so there was no work involved. I don't know

how they judged it first except that they thought it was cute. It was the first year Strawberry Shortcake had come out, but there was no work in it. And Meredith's, I'd spent days on her carriage. To me, there's not an equality in judging when they do it that way. And when you're judging, you really ought to consider the amount of hours that somebody put in, even if it's not quite as cute or pretty as another that was put together in a short length of time.

Not everyone greeted the new parade with enthusiasm. As Rose Quimby, who organized the parade for several years, comments, "The parents now don't take the time, don't have the imagination. They say they don't *have* time. I called a lady in Oquossoc: 'Why don't you put your three in the parade?' 'Well, what could I do?' she said. 'Dress them up like Indians. The two boys and a princess. Call them O-squaw-sic.' Get it? Oquossoc. They won a prize. But I had to give her the idea."

Though the Chamber of Commerce continues to support the parade, the 1989 head of the chamber reminded me that the parade was "always really more of a local parade than anything for the visitors. More for the people who live here year round."

This much smaller doll parade thus faced challenges from the different priorities of young parents, from increased emphasis on the differences between locals and "people from away," and from a greater use of mass-produced rather than handmade costumes. A greater challenge to the values of the Rangeley knitters, however, was on its way: the late 1970s witnessed the whirlwind arrival of the Cabbage Patch dolls.

"I don't see how kids could love them," exclaims Lucille to her neighbor, Bertha, who agrees with her:

BERTHA: They're homely things. Yes, they look like something stepped on their face, almost like an animal or horse or foot had stepped on their face and flattened the face right back.

LUCILLE: I like the baby dolls, the fat little baby dolls.

BERTHA: Oh, I know it.

LUCILLE: I still got the one that you people bought Steve for his second birthday. That's the big one, the big baby doll that I usually put doll sweaters on down to the shop.

I had a lot of uneasy pros and cons on the Cabbage Patch doll, that people were making too much of the adoption part. And that if kids broke them or set them aside or neglected them, it would be like a real kid they were doing it to. Or if they got dirty. I don't think the whole thing was good for kids psychologically.

BERTHA: I just like the baby dolls that they could play with.

Rose Quimby echoes Lucille's and Bertha's position as she, too, speaks for baby dolls and against the injustices brought about by popular, widely advertised, expensive dolls: "I like the baby dolls: they're so soft. And cute. Not at all like those Cabbage Patch. What a farce! Cloth dolls, too, but forty dollars! And not good-looking either, their faces. Did you hear about the birthday party? One woman had a birthday party for her daughter and invited only those who had Cabbage Patch dolls. Imagine. Forty dollars! Well, not everybody can *afford* that. There were a lot of little girls crying because they couldn't go to the party."

As they had done with the Barbies earlier, the knitters made Cabbage Patch clothes, but they displayed the clothes on baby dolls or teddy bears—never on a Cabbage Patch Doll itself. Neither did they put up any signs to mark the clothes as Cabbage Patch clothes; buyers either recognized the sizes as appropriate or they asked a knitter, who would usually reply, "Yes, and they also fit teddy bears and baby dolls." The knitters continued to praise the doll they cared for most: the baby doll. As Lucille discusses her preference, she also outlines her belief in the value of dolls for young girls:

[Baby dolls] are more appealing to me. They're cuter and *more appealing*. Their little faces, the expressions on them. And sometimes their little hands and feet are so real looking.

I think [children] did more then [with dolls], had dolls for a longer age. But now the kids after they're seven, eight years old feel like they're being sissies—or a lot of kids tell them they are—if they get dolls. They are too mature at such a young age.

I hate to see them get too mature too early because I think they lose—Rodney and I both say—a lot of their youth too quickly and they think they're older and they want to work and do things. Then sometimes these kids later in life want to revert back to a childhood they've missed.

And some parents will encourage their kids to be grownups ahead of their time. They'll either dress them older or encourage them to go to dances at a young age and rush them into being teens when they're just kids. I don't mean that they should try to keep them as a baby or an immature child, but I think there's no harm in a little girl having dolls say at eight or nine or ten years old.

I think sometimes if they really liked dolls, they would make a good mother.

So I try to encourage Eileen or any of our friends. I say, "Look, if your little girl really wants a doll for Christmas, go buy it for her. She'll have years enough that she doesn't want them and wants to feel mature." That's my feeling.



Lucille Richard dresses a teddy bear.

There is much support for Lucille's opinion in and beyond Rangeley. Merchants often decorate their windows with baby dolls. Parents support the Logging Museum talent show for girls between six and eight years of age—the Little Miss Woodchip Contest—where every contestant receives a baby doll and, often, a doll dress knitted by Lucille. Southwest of Rangeley, down the Androscoggin River through the logging country of New Hampshire, lies the tiny town of Dummer, where Mildred Smith decorates her front yard with 125 dolls.¹³ Mildred's use of dolls cues us to strategies that, in my opinion, enable her and the Rangeley knitters to grow older, creatively, in a society that undervalues all women but especially older women.

Some of Mildred Smith's dolls are dressed as riders atop motorcycles, some are arranged like vignettes from such childhood stories as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and "Jack and Jill," some stand with masks in place of lost heads or with stuffed stockings for a lost arm, and some just stand. Mildred's dolls grab the attention of all who drive past.

"Four times a year," Mildred explains, "I change [their clothes] for summer, fall, winter, and then spring":

I change them for the whole four seasons. Now school will be starting up in another month or so, September, so by next month, August, I'll be changing their outfits to their fall clothes. I change their pants, their shirts, and if I have the light jackets, I'll put light jackets on them—until winter.

Then I'll start changing them to their heavy jackets and ski pants and skidoo suits that I got. I take all the toys in. Then I start putting sleds and stuff out with them. They'll all be changed.

I'll take their clothes off out on the porch there and I'll take them in and I'll have the hot water right there at the sink. I'll start cleaning them right up and brushing their hair . . . I got to wash their wigs.

When I comment about the time Mildred devotes to her dolls, she laughs and says, "I *love* the dolls anyways. The faces look *so real*, they look awful *real*. Oh, when I see a doll I fall in love with it right away [quietly]. I can't go out to the stores; I'd buy it. [laughs] If I don't have no money I can't buy it, so I don't go in the store. I stay out of the stores."

Mildred was born in 1924. "We were so poor when we were small," she remembers, "all we could have was one doll and that was it. And I still ain't got that doll that I had." Now, Mildred has a thousand more dolls inside. She gets many from family and friends. Some are given to her by strangers. "This doll with the note attached was left on my



Andrea Brackett, Little Miss Woodchip, 1988.



Mildred Smith of Dummer, New Hampshire, and some of her dolls.

doorstep," she explains. "Please take care of me. I need a home. Suzi." Some dolls she picks up at tag sales or at the dump. She tells everyone she meets, "The more the merrier. Don't throw them away, throw them my way."

If we saw just Mildred's dolls, or just the Rangeley Children's Day Parade, or just the Little Miss Woodchip talent show, or just a knitted doll's outfit in a craft shop filled with chain-saw animals, we would probably not ask ourselves much about dolls in this region of loggers. Taken altogether, however, the dolls with their open, though silent, mouths speak many cultural truths.

These baby dolls, produced and discussed within the women's sphere, give the older knitters—usually bound to silence by politeness and humility—the opportunity to pronounce their own ideals, to say what they want to in their own voice. The dolls speak for the value women place on the period of childhood, before the tumult of adolescence and sexual maturity, and on the importance of play that teaches children to nurture others and to be good parents. The women's belief in careful handwork also shines through the stitches of the doll clothes. In these real-life dolls, mothers set before their daughters their aesthetic that is based on realism. By raising them in the knitting world, then, the mothers of Rangeley teach their daughters to be women.

The baby dolls also speak for the value the women place on their spheres of influence in the community. The women defend their choice of dolls and stress how others enjoy viewing their work. "At first my sons, they thought it was weird of me doing the dolls," Mildred Smith explains:

I said, "Weird? What?" I says, "Everybody's got a hobby," I says. There's guys that play with trains; they pick trains up. My youngest daughter's husband, he collects model airplanes. He goes to these model airplane shows. He pays two, three hundred dollars for his projects. I says, "Well, I collect dolls."

In Milton Mills where I lived before I came here, people from California and all over came down to see them. Even by the bus loads, the van loads and everything to see the dolls. And I was on the main highway where the school bus goes by, so the kids used to look forward to seeing the dolls and the changing of their clothing. Then a nursing home, Edgeworth Manor from Portsmouth, they come up by the busloads to see the dolls.

Talking pointedly against mass-produced dolls enables the knitters to state their positions more forcefully.¹⁴ The knitters scorn Barbie. Her clothes, a drudgery to knit, do not provide the relaxing, shared

experience the women want for themselves and their daughters. With Barbie, girls do not learn to nurture babies; they learn to want to become Barbie. Strawberry Shortcake fares no better with the knitters because this self-contained doll who needs no dresses cannot show young girls the importance of careful handwork.

For the Rangeley women, however, the Cabbage Patch doll is the most pernicious, for it is ultimately a perversion of baby doll ideals. Soft and cuddly, able to be dressed in real baby-sized clothing, this doll represents some of the women's values. But its price tag makes the reality of class differences, already uncomfortable in a small town, even more uncomfortable, and its face reminds the women of ugly, pushed-in, flattened faces and elicits comments on child abuse.

For me, the women's emotion-filled comments on the flattened faces of Cabbage Patch dolls encode messages of protest about spouse abuse, too. Though the knitters themselves have marriages free from physical abuse, they read of the new women's shelters in the larger towns of Franklin County, and they have seen the results of spouse abuse when they visit the service organizations in Farmington and Rumford to give them donations from knitting sales, raffles, and rummage sales. Encouraging girls to play happily with smiling, bright-faced baby dolls is their way of creating a vision of the kind of relationships they would like to see throughout the world.

The use of baby dolls also shows the strategies these women use as they face growing older in a society that undervalues older women. Through baby dolls, the women encode that time when, as young women and new mothers, they received more attention and favor. Such messages foreground maternal power and serve not only to console but also to empower women as they present images, in code, of their continuing strength and creative abilities.

Conclusion

"One of the major challenges for Rangeley," 1988 town manager Bill MacDonald said, "is adjusting to the fact that the town is changing rapidly and . . . thinking how they're going to face the changes." The knitters of Lucille's and Bertha's generation indeed see that change is upon them. Condominiums, timberland sales, second-home buyers from Boston are now common in Rangeley; Barbies and Strawberry Shortcakes and Cabbage Patch dolls grow in popularity; independent loggers struggle to earn a living wage; and more and more women and

children suffer physical and emotional abuse. Since most of these are not changes the knitters feel they can "adjust" to—and they also do not see how they can stop the changes—they meet change through the dolls. They clothe the dolls in their own values and give them knitted, handmade exteriors. They also keep urging the baby doll upon as many children as they can.

The worlds that immediately surround the knitters—the male world of logging and construction as well as the world of tourists and land development—do not hear the voices of the women as they speak through the dolls. But it may be exactly this choice of the dolls—a seemingly trivial but safe form—that allows the women to be so expressive and creative in their own world. In the dolls, they have selected texts that are fully available only to those who share their ideals or are sympathetic to them as women. Their selection of a "trivial" form may be, as Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser suggest, a coded message, a message that minority groups—such as local women in a male- and tourist-oriented community—often adopt, a "set of signals—words, forms, behaviors, signifiers of some kind—that protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing particular messages."¹⁵

Many of the women's actions do confront, albeit through coding, the other worlds of Rangeley and their conflicting values. Each time the women put Cabbage Patch doll clothing on a baby doll or a teddy bear, each time they enter a meticulously prepared doll carriage in a parade or give a baby doll for an award, they speak out for their own positive valuation of women's role in their world as they know it.

Their actions stand up in the face of the sons who think their mothers "weird" for collecting dolls, the fathers who think it incredible to save a doll from a fire, and the husbands who comment, "What do you think of a wife who still plays with dolls?" Their actions also stand up against the mass-produced dolls that, like the tourists and summer residents and real estate developers, bring a host of alien assumptions to town.

And for me, when Lucille takes a teddy bear dressed in a little knit outfit of aqua or lavender or pink with teddy bear buttons and sets it in the shop next to one of her husband Rodney's carved wooden bears, a shift in perspective occurs. Rodney's bears soften. His bears, carved in pine with a chain saw to look like the powerful, agile, wide-ranging Maine black bear, look more like toys. Through this juxtaposition, Lucille calls attention to her own work and points out the similarity between her knitting and her husband's carving, both in

subject matter and in quality. She transforms part of the male world into the female world.

Through the dolls, the knitters create a world of their own, a model world. "The miniature," as Gaston Bachelard writes, "deploys to the dimensions of a universe. Once more, large is contained in small."¹⁶ Dressing the baby doll and thinking of her even as Cabbage Patch doll clothes spill from their needles, the women of Rangeley reenact a time of pleasure, the moments when they enjoyed their nicely dressed babies, cared for them, and showed them to their friends. A time when others smiled on them as new mothers. A time when their power as women who carried on their husbands' lineage in a male-oriented community was strongest. A time when they were not strangers in their own hometown.

The baby dolls re-create the happiness and power of motherhood. "A miniature," Susan Stewart proposes, "is a material allusion to a text which is no longer available to us, or which, because of its fictiveness, never was available to us except through a second-order fictive world. Its locus is nostalgic."¹⁷ Baby dolls are texts that select and celebrate one part of the experience of being a mother.

The use of the miniature helps people order, understand, and control their world, especially a world that may seem to be changing rapidly beyond their control. "The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world," Bachelard notes, "the better I possess it."¹⁸ Similarly, Stewart reminds us that the miniature presents a "diminutive and thereby manipulatable version of experience."¹⁹

The world of the dolls in Rangeley also represents a reaction to change. Within this world of the baby dolls, adults always love children, and children look adorable, cute, happy, and well cared for. They do not die of crib death; they do not get shot while hunting. They are ever alive, ever young. Their faces do not bear signs of the anger of adolescence. They do not grow up to choose lives different from their parents' or careers that lead them away from parenting. Spouses and children are never abused. Mothers always want to be mothers, and fathers always want to be fathers.

Yet, for me, the world of the dolls has another side, hinted at by the knitters' comments on abuse and the eerie stillness of Mildred Smith's dolls. Her lawn full of dolls makes chillingly manifest the dialectic on life and death that dolls embody. Even as the dolls look so alive with their wide-open eyes and their outstretched arms, their silence reminds us of death. The eternal happiness of their faces calls to mind the opposite, the faces of children when they fight, cry, get abused, and die.

The continued use of the baby doll may also be understood in terms of Annette Weiner's discussion of reproduction and regeneration. For her, *reproduction* refers to the "cultural attention and meaning given to acts of forming, producing, or creating something new," such as children, and *regeneration* refers to the "cultural attention and meaning given to the renewal, revival, rebirth, or re-creation of entities previously reproduced," such as dolls. For Weiner, the regeneration of reproductive forms constitutes "an unrelenting attempt to counteract the constant threat of deterioration, degeneration, infertility, and eventual or immediate loss."²⁰

When I asked Mildred why she displays and tends the dolls, she paused and then said forcefully:

Well, after raising a big family and then you got nothing else to do and they're all gone and there's no others around, only your grandchildren to come visit. The dolls keeps *my mind* occupied 'cause we're so used to having kids around, you know? It's hard, but I make use of it. Hard when you're by yourself, you're all alone. Your kids ain't here to come in and say, "Ma give me this, Ma give me that," you know? That's *hard*.

I have fifteen, eleven boys and four girls. Plus, there's two boys and a girl gone. One died at the age of four months. The other one was pretty near a year old. The other one was nineteen; he was shot outside the woods and they call it an accident. It was no *accident* because the kid was standing right beside him and blew his stomach out. A *moose* is more important than a human being's life. You got to pay a stiff fine for a moose, but when you kill a human being's life. . . .

And he's my Labor Day baby, born the first of September.

I see the dolls on the lawn standing as if desperately trying to stay alive and cheerful while their rubbery flesh bleaches, hardens, and decays with the season. "They are real," Mildred Smith comments, "awful real." Popular tales, such as "Pygmalion" and "Pinocchio," show just how much we want dolls to be alive. Perhaps the life and death we see in them is also our own. For me, the dolls signify women's lives creatively contending with forces—economic and patriarchal—that would drag them down to a life not worth living. And, on Mildred Smith's lawn, the battle scars show.

Perhaps because change, danger, financial hardship, and death swirl around the women so often, perhaps because they push so hard to be creative and alive in a world that does not fully welcome them, it is life that Mildred Smith and the knitters of Rangeley focus on when they speak of the dolls.

When Lucille's nephew, Randy Brackett, was almost killed two years ago in a logging accident, she donated a teddy bear with a knit

outfit to a raffle to raise extra funds for him. "I had the little teddy bear and I dressed it," Lucille says. She goes on to explain:

A little knitted suit. It seems like it was in the fall, near a holiday season and I made his outfit out of red or green.

[My nephew] drove a big truck. He had parked his truck and it was on a little bit of ice and when the sun came out in early afternoon, it [melted and] moved the truck. It was his big logging truck. And he went to jump down offen it to keep it from rolling and when he did, this big piece of wood from the guy loading [a man on the bucket loader was loading wood into the bed of the logging truck] struck the back of his head and knocked him down.

It was about an hour and a half before the ambulance could get there, then another two hours to drive him down [to the hospital].

He was really quite critical. They didn't expect him to live at first. And he still has a hearing problem to this day. Very bad. He hears very little. He mostly reads lips. But he's lucky to be alive because it cracked his skull in two places.

Must have been two years ago, at least two years ago. It was real serious. It was in Bemis, way in the back shore of Bemis and it would have been harder except that they have radio towers and so there was somebody right there at the garage that they called right into to get the ambulance started down, otherwise you'd have to wait until somebody could get to a phone or get somewhere to get help and it would have been many hours later.

It was a serious accident.

Lucille's teddy bear puts life and death before us. This toy bear, surrounded by silky, warm yarn, calls forth the world of living children tucked safely in bed and also quietly acknowledges and protests the dangerous work that takes the limbs and lives of many Rangeley men and brings hardship to their families.

It also signifies the life that creative women fashion for themselves in the midst of forces that could bring about a death of the spirit. "Lots of times I like to pick up my knitting before I do the day's work," Lucille explains. "After I have breakfast, I feel a little bit lazy and rather than get out the dishpan, I go down and put the laundry in real quick and I just pick up my knitting, knit a few rows, set it down, then go work on something. And lots of times I pick it up after lunch. Quite often, later in the evening. Because if I get keyed up or need to sit down for a few minutes to relax, I go get my knitting. It gets my mind off other things. [laughs] When things get complicated, I grab my knitting and my needles and just sit."

The knitters of Rangeley speak to us through the dolls they love

and the dolls they hate. Their baby dolls are cultural texts that present us with multilayered stories of personal change and responses to the economic development of the region. Through their dolls, the women act against and react to the worlds that seek to circumscribe them. "The need for such coding," Radner and Lanser remind us, "must always signify a freedom that is incomplete."²¹ The messages, however, are there in the stitches for careful readers to receive, and they show us the survival strategies of women who, faced with the strictures of their community, find in creativity a measure of freedom, self-expression, and strength.

Notes

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1. Richard Barringer, Charles Colgan, Lloyd Irland, John Joseph, Frank O'Hara, and Kenneth Stratton, *The Western Mountains of Maine: Toward Balanced Growth* (Augusta, Maine: MaineWatch Institute, 1987), 20, appendix 2.

2. All interview material in this essay comes from tape recordings and journal notes from the summers of 1987 and 1988.

3. In speaking about the women's sphere, I am drawing from such literature as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 53-76, and Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 243-70. Smith-Rosenberg uses the term *female sphere*; Showalter uses *woman's sphere*. I am using the *women's sphere* to better designate the culturally specific group of women in this essay—the twentieth-century Rangeley knitters.

4. Edward Ellis, *A Chronological History of the Rangeley Lakes Region* (Farmington, Maine: Rangeley Lakes Region Historical Society, 1983), 75-87.

5. Telephone conversation, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., August 1988. I thank Thomas Vesey of the New England Agricultural Statistics Service for his help.

6. Correspondence, Child Protective Services of the Maine State Department of Human Services, August 1988.

7. Telephone conversation, U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Regional Economic Statistics, Washington, D.C., August 1988.

8. Barringer et al., *Western Mountains of Maine*, 21.

9. Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, *Comprehensive Plan: Town of Rangeley, Maine* (Auburn, Maine: AVCOG, 1987), 8.

10. Scott Allen. "Uproar in Rangeley," *Maine Times*, July 8, 1988, 18-20.

11. Annual Town Report of Rangeley, Maine, 1970–1987.
12. Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments, *Comprehensive Plan*, 23.
13. For other folk environments that older women have created using dolls, see Seymour Rosen, *In Celebration of Ourselves* (San Francisco: California Living Books, 1979), 82–87, 156–58, and Verni Greenfield, “Silk Purses from Sow’s Ears: An Aesthetic Approach to Recycling,” in *Personal Places: Perspectives on Informal Art Environments*, ed. Daniel Franklin Ward (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1984), 133–47.
14. Woman’s protest against mass-produced dolls has a history in the United States. See Miriam Formanek-Brunell, “With Pins and Patents: Mothers’ Resistance to the Toy Store, 1870–1900,” a paper presented at the Second Annual Feminist Roundtable, George Mason University, April 9, 1988.
15. Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser, “Strategies of Coding in Women’s Cultures,” herein.
16. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1958), 157. I thank Leslie Prosterman, who brought this quotation to my attention.
17. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 69.
18. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 150.
19. Stewart, *On Longing*, 69.
20. “Reproduction: A Replacement for Reciprocity,” *American Ethnologist* 7, no. 1 (1980): 71–72.
21. Radner and Lanser, “Strategies of Coding,” herein.



Women in the Larger Community

It is a commonplace that women tend to be confined to the home and the domestic sphere, while men occupy public, visible community roles. In every community, however, men and women share public space and responsibilities differently; the essays in this section illustrate some of the range of difference. Sometimes women’s voices are audible in the community, chiefly in formal and circumscribed roles, as was the case with the rural Irish women discussed by Angela Bourke. But when, in times of economic or political change, women have entered realms previously dominated by men, they have often eased their entrance and communicated their own points of view in the buffered form of coded creative expression.

No matter how muted women are in extreme patriarchal societies, they may be able to express even subversive ideas through their formalized, stable public roles—singing, delivering ritual greetings, lamenting the dead, supervising children—which protect them from debate or censure. The situation reported of Araucanian women in Chile is a dramatic example:

The ideal Araucanian man is a good orator. . . . Men are encouraged to talk on all occasions, speaking being a sign of masculine intelligence and leadership. The ideal woman is submissive and quiet, silent in her husband’s presence. At gatherings where men do much talking, women sit together listlessly, communicating only in whispers or not at all. On first arriving in her husband’s home, a wife is expected to sit silently facing the wall, not looking anyone directly in the face. Only after several months is she permitted to speak, and then, only a little. . . . The