

# Doll Houses Preserve Memories

BY BARBARA MILLER

Lycoming Co. Correspondent  
LACEYVILLE — Most people take photographs to preserve memories, not Ruth Pickett—she makes doll houses.

"I wanted to hold these memories," Ruth says as she glanced around her dollhouse museum that features miniature replicas of past homes and furnishings. The museum houses approximately 14 of Ruth's dollhouses and matching sized furniture made over the past 30 years.

Ruth has been featured on local television and in local papers several times with her doll houses. In addition, she has published a children's book using photographs of old dolls to illustrate the story.

According to Ruth, many of her dollhouses have connections with her past, while others such as her Shoe dollhouse are based on story book characters or pure whimsy. The remainder are ordinary dollhouses.

Although Ruth still constructs dollhouses to sell, her main interest is creating additional memory and story book dollhouses for her museum.

One of the finest examples of Ruth's workmanship is the replica of the Fox Hollow School near Mehoopany in the late 1800's. Ruth's grandmothers, Eva Mae Preston and Georgeanna Strong, both taught at the one-room school. From the bell on top of the school to the tiny clock on the wall and the teacher with twelve students, the school is as exact in detail as Ruth could make it.

Another interesting example of dollhouses originating from Ruth's past is "The Loom Room." In the room an older woman is seated at a loom weaving strips of rags into rugs, a little girl sits in the corner winding a ball of rags.

Ruth explains that the older woman portrays her great grandma Preston who at one time loomed rugs from rags in a room attached to the house in which Ruth lives today. The little girl represents Ruth's mother.



Ruth Pickett keeps the past alive by recreating scenes from long ago. Here, she crafted sleighs to add to the outdoor scene around one of her doll houses.

With the help of her mother's recollections, Ruth constructed the room and completed it with a miniature working loom. During that time, Ruth's great grandma Preston sold rag rugs for 10-cents a yard.

Proudly, Ruth relates that the land where she lives has been in the family for four generations. "My great-great-grandmother (Lucena Woodruff) bought this (33 acres) about nine days after the end of the Civil War. Her husband had died in Petersburg, Virginia. She had five children. She was very courageous."

When Ruth's father, Raymond Inman, married Ruth's mother, Alice, he bought five-acres of the original homestead from Lucena's daughter, who was Ruth's great-grandmother.

Ruth's rich personal past serves as a storehouse from which she extracts not only ideas for her dollhouses, but also other creations like horse drawn sleighs carved from wood. A miniature red and green buckboard wagon brings back memories to Ruth when at age six she accompanied her grandpa in a similar wagon to visit relatives in Vestal Center, New York. She recalls the candy and

soda pop they purchased.

"I have very vivid, wonderful memories and I wouldn't trade them for anything," she exclaims.

Ruth invokes an air of nostalgia with her story book dollhouses. Her version of Goldilocks and the Three Bears is one in which the main characters are housed, suitably enough, in a charming, tiny, log cabin.

The Old Lady Who Lived in a Shoe doll house is a favorite with all age groups. The blue shoe contains not an old lady with a multitude of children as one would expect, but a family of five mice.

"The children grew up and she sold the place to mice," Ruth explains as she grins mischievously.

On the bottom floor of the shoe doll house, Mr. and Mrs. Mouse are getting ready for an evening on the town. Mr. Mouse is sporting a tuxedo and on the kitchen table, lay leftovers from supper, a loaf of bread and a cake of cheese. In the upper story the three little mice are preparing to go to sleep in their three-tiered bunk bed.

Concerning the more traditional dollhouses, Ruth reports, she just completed one the proper size for Barbie dolls.

Other doll houses displayed in Ruth's museum are an old general store complete with mail in the miniscule postal slots, a turn of the century four floor boarding house, a gypsy wagon, Santa's Workshop, a tea room, and an old western store and barroom completed by her brother, Ray Inman.

Although Ruth constructs dollhouses and furniture because, "I love working with wood," she adds that it all started with an old German bisque doll in a red dress given to her as a gift in the late 40's.

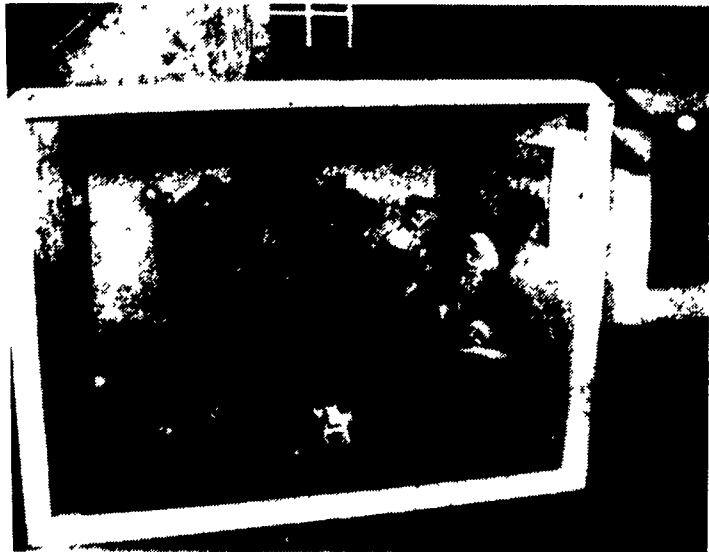
Failing at all efforts to buy a rocker of that period for the doll, Ruth made one in her father's workshop.

After that, Ruth says, "Things just kind of snowballed."

In 1958 she opened a store at the present location across the road from her home. Since then, Ruth has been making dollhouses and working parttime in a local bank. Both Ruth's father and husband died at relatively young ages and she and her mother lived together in her house for a number of years. Her mother died four years ago, but Ruth remains grateful that her doll house hobby allowed her to spend more time with her mother.

Ruth spends much of her time in a big workshop dotted with several kinds of saws, a drill press, planer, and a big pot bellied stove. "I live out here," she joked.

(Turn to Page B16)



A replica of Santa's Workshop complete, Ruth says, with two elves above, "goofing off."



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