

"AUNT BETTS' ATTIC": MONROE, MICHIGAN

I was in Monroe, Michigan, just about an hour southwest of Detroit, in October of 2004 to attend my younger son's wedding. Having some time on our hands, my wife and I, accompanied by our older son and his wife, decided to visit the Monroe County Historical Museum. We knew little else but that they had an extensive exhibit of historical materials about General George Armstrong Custer, who had once resided in Monroe. I enjoyed the Custer exhibit as I had expected to, but I was delightfully surprised to discover an exhibit entitled "Aunt Bett's Attic."

Elizabeth Upham McWebb, usually called Aunt Betty or Aunt Bett to her relatives and youthful fans and known for her "Little Brown Bear" stories, donated a life-long collection of children's games and toys to the Monroe Museum. There are awards there from individuals, organizations, and government officials, as well as a bust of Aunt Bett herself and two life-sized papier maché figures-"Grandma," seated in a chair, and "Maude," her favorite elementary school teacher-that she made herself. But the bulk of the collection consists of dolls, dollhouses, stuffed animals, and a variety of other toys, some of which were given to her as gifts or were used by her as storytelling props. Most of these items are early mid-twentieth century and are in excellent condition. There is also a typewriter table and set of paints that Aunt Bett used to decorate souvenir cups that she presented to friends and admirers, and her signature hat and locket are displayed on the bust.

As Simon Bronner has observed on various occasions, the study of children's material culture has a long way to go. If you are in the Detroit area and can spend the time, you might want to visit the Monroe County Historical Museum and take a look at "Aunt Bett's Attic."

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If you know of other, perhaps out-of-the-way museums that have collections of children's material culture, please do a short write-up like the one above and send it to the *Children's Folklore Review*.