

ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S
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Fiberglass
Sock Monkeys

10 TH
ANNIVERSARY



by
Carol J. Fox

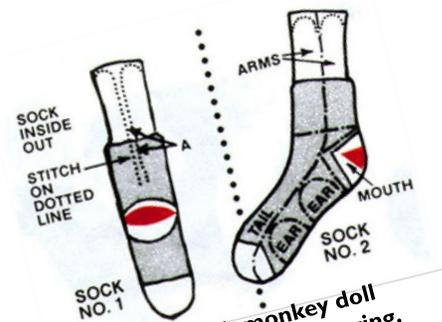


From the Editor's Desk Fiberglass

Fiberglass Searching for ^ Sock Monkeys

“Wanna buy a monkey?” Even though David Letterman famously said this in the movie *Cabin Boy* (1994), it is not the only time or place sock monkeys have been hawked charmingly to the public. People in the Rockford area were asking that same question over a decade ago at the beginning of Midway Museum Center’s Sock Monkey Madness campaign to recognize Rockford as the home of the little folk doll.

Claiming Rockford as the sock monkey’s hometown was legitimate since the toy has most commonly been made with Rockford Socks, the socks with the red heels, manufactured here in Rockford by the Nelson Knitting Company from 1880 to 1992 when the company went out of business. (The red heel was added about 1932 as a way to distinguish Nelson’s Rockford Socks from its competitors.) The socks are still made by the Fox River Mills in Osage, WI. No one knows who made the first sock monkey, but it became a popular folk toy in the 1950s and again in the 1970s and is still popular today as a home-made and manufactured toy.



Pattern for sock monkey doll included in the sock packaging.

Another Monkey Trail



Photo of the doll made by Grace Winget for her grandson in 1951. It is on display in the Sock Monkey Exhibit at Midway Museum Center.

In 1953, Helen Cooke from Aurora, Colorado patented the sock monkey she had made. In 1955, she sued Mr. Stanley Levy in Iowa for patent infringement since he was selling in his store sock monkeys made by people he had hired to make them. Mr. Levy appealed for help to Nelson Knitting Company. The company decided to assist in the suit. With the help of Rockford citizen Grace Winget who had made a sock monkey for her grandson in 1951 (before Cooke filed her patent) and still had the doll as proof, Nelson won the suit. Winget testified that she had made the doll before 1953. Nelson then bought Cooke’s patent and all other patents for the monkey doll. Nelson Knitting Company held the only patent until it expired in the 1970s. Nelson put the monkey pattern in their sock packaging and encouraged the making of homemade dolls. Thus, Rockford can claim it is the Home of the Sock Monkey.



Barbara Gerry,
great-granddaughter
of knitting machine
inventor and
business leader,
John Nelson.



**Joan Sage, former
Director of Market-
ing at Midway Village
and Museum Center**

Photo courtesy of J. Sage

Sock Monkey Madness

Remember CowParade in Chicago? Three hundred (300) life-size fiberglass cow sculptures were installed around the city of Chicago for the summer of 1999 in parks, malls, train stations and on streets and avenues, as a city-wide art exhibit and then the cows were sold at auction to raise money for charity. This was the idea that caught Barbara Gerry's attention. Why couldn't we do that with sock monkeys to proclaim to the world that the sock monkey has a hometown? She suggested this to Midway Village and to Joan Sage who was then Director of Marketing for Midway, and "Sock Monkey Madness" was born. In 2004, a seven-foot sock monkey made of forty-four Rockford Socks (a brand name) was created by Dee Lindner of Stone Lake, WI, named "Nelson," and sent traveling around the country as a good will ambassador for Rockford. The Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau partnered with the Midway Village and Museum Center and the *Rockford Register Star* provided substantial coverage for the story. In 2004-5, businesses and individuals in the Rock River Valley were asked to sponsor six-foot tall fiberglass sock monkeys (at

\$2,500 to donate a monkey and \$3,000 to keep one). No auction occurred so the monkeys are still here. Local artists were given a stipend to design each monkey. Twenty-two (22) in all were created as far as I have been able to determine. As luck would have it, a company in Rockford was already making fiberglass animals for other cities. Fibre-Techuals owned by Dean and Becky Vosburgh made the monkeys. The whole affair was wildly successful, Rockford is on the map as "The Home of the Sock Monkey" and Midway Village continues to sponsor a Sock Monkey Festival each year.

Searching for Sock Monkeys

Ten years later and **Rockford** is still the **Home of the Sock Monkey**. But where can you see them? At MidwayVillage, of course. Midway Museum Center has three fiberglass sock monkeys, an exhibit detailing the history and trials of the little fellow, some historic sock monkeys and a gift shop filled with delightful sock monkey memorabilia. But what if you want to see more fiberglass sock monkeys, as I did? What if you thought, as I did, that the fiberglass monkeys could be found around the city? That was where my search began. It wasn't easy to find them, but it should not be as hard for others now. This issue of **Nuggets** lists Sock Monkey names, artists, sponsors, locations, monkey accessibility (remember, they are privately owned) and has pictures of all the fiberglass sock monkeys I could find. I found record of twenty-two (22) and only three (3) are unaccounted for at this printing. I don't believe they are lost, only not-found. Someone knows where the missing three are. What would be nice would be to have one at **Rockford Public Library** and one at the **Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau** and maybe even one at **Cherry Vale Mall** along with a brochure/map for locating accessible ones—even a little sock monkey diary to record what happened when you found the monkeys with a place for pictures. But now I'm not writing about history anymore, am I?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES

Finding the monkeys took a lot of help from friends. Thanks to Midway Museum Center especially to Regina Gorman and David Byrnes. The exhibit at the Midway Museum Center on the sock monkeys was entertaining and most helpful for background information. Regina found pictures of monkeys I did not have. Joan Sage was invaluable in her assistance. She talked to folks and found three monkeys that would have taken me weeks to find. Judy Gambrel and company and Barbara Gerry helped with pictures. My husband De Lon and friends Sheila Winckler, Crystal Venable and Gail Zahm kept me searching and working.

Old newspaper accounts from the *Rockford Register Star* accessed through Genealogy Bank's Historical Newspapers—1690-2010 database helped me count sock monkey heads and identify them. Thanks to everyone who let me take pictures of the monkeys: Dr. K. Tumilowicz, Judy Gambrel, Rockford Area Arts Council, Rockford Register Star, Rockford University, Stockholm Inn, Rockford Speedway, Swedish American Hospital, Transatlantic Connection, Project First Rate, Rockford Day Nursery, Nelson Elementary School, Fridh Construction Company, Stillman Bank, Midway Museum Center, and Rockford International Airport. The pictures, for better or for worse, are mine unless otherwise noted.

BOOK

News FROM THE RHS EXECUTIVE BOARD

JUNE 13, 2015. RHS members and others will volunteer their time and talents for the annual Cemetery Walk. This year it is at Scandinavian Cemetery, corner of Prospect and Rural. **TIME: 10 AM to 2 PM.** Prominent Rockfordians buried there include P. A. Peterson, Maud E. Johnson, Levin Faust, John Erlander and Per & Charlotte Oberg. Interpreters will be at the gravesites to tell you about their chosen luminaries. Please mark your calendars; the tour is free but there will be a jar for good-will offerings. We are trying to raise money to install state historical markers at important historical places in the Rockford area.

RHS will publish a book this fall! *The Best of The Nuggets*, a collection of fifteen articles on topics of high interest including articles on Hononegah, John H. Manny, Col. Edward Ellis, the Rockford Water Department and more. Watch for more details so you can reserve your copy. Proceeds will go toward the first historical marker.

In an effort to match the NUGGETS issues with the calendar year, this issue is marked Volume 53, #2. The double issue about the old houses will retrospectively become Volume 52 #4, and Volume 53, #1. This will not diminish the number of issues

FIBERGLASS SOCK MONKEYS ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC



Courtesy Midway Museum Center

1. SOXANNE

Artistry: Marion Olson, Carole Anderson, Carol Ubben; Location: Midway Museum Center; Sponsor: Midway Museum Center's Nelson Fund.

The only fiberglass sock monkey that is outside all the time, Soxanne greets you as you drive into the parking area of the Midway Museum Center. She was named through a citywide contest sponsored by the Museum Center. The contest was won by Becky Krenek. This monkey is one of three seated monkeys.



2. FOREST

Artistry: Diane Garrett; Location: Chicago/Rockford International Airport; Sponsor: Barbara and Elbridge Gerry.

Forest was named after the old Forest City Knitting Company, one of the four knitting companies started by the Nelson family. Forest was the first sock monkey finished. His friendly countenance and traditional brown and white knitted suit welcomes visitors to Rockford, the "Home of the Sock Monkey." The monkey is a gift to the city from the Elbridge Gerrys. Mrs. Gerry is the great-granddaughter of knitting machine



3. EARTHLY ANGELS

Artistry: Carol Jacobson; Location: Swedish American Hospital State Street Entrance; Sponsor: Swedish American Health System.

Honoring the staff in the hospitals, this monkey is in the



4. LADY LIBERTY

Artistry: Cora Hutchinson; Location: National Business & Industrial Centre;

Sponsor: Maury & Judy Gambrel.

Lady Liberty graces the lobby of National Business & Industrial Centre in the old National Lock Building on 7th Street at 18th Ave. The lobby is lit both day and night. She can be seen at night through the lobby windows. The lobby is open during business hours, Monday through

5. ROCKFORD IN BLOOM

Artistry: Marty Panzer; Location: Rockford Arts Council;
Sponsor: Janet Kjellstrom; Donated to Y.W.C.A.

This beauty was originally stationed at the YWCA on State Street, but has been moved to the Rockford Area Arts Council headquarters in the Shumway Market Building. With her sparkling daisy eyes and floral motif and her sky blue background, she takes the prize for comeliness. She is decorated with a combination of decoupage and paint then clear-coated for longevity. Outdoors now, in the spring air, you can see her at 713 East State Street. During the winter, look inside. (P.S. She doesn't have a tiara; that's the window



6. CARL ANDERS

Artistry: Marion Olsen, Candy Wolf, Carol Jacobson; Location: Stockholm Inn; Sponsor: Stockholm Inn.

This pleasing fellow sports the blue and gold colors of the Swedish flag. He has the Dala Horse as trim around his sweater; three crowns representing the national emblem of Sweden and its capital, Stockholm; the delicate Twinflower, Sweden's national flower on his socks; and a blue and gold shield under his feet. He is located in Stockholm Inn, a justly famous Rockford restaurant serving Swedish dishes and bakery items in a unique setting featuring enlarged Carl Larsson paintings as wall coverings. This sock monkey celebrates the Swedish heritage shared by many Rockford residents since 1854 when the first immigrants arrived in



SOCK MONKEYS - ACCESSIBLE WITH CONDITIONS

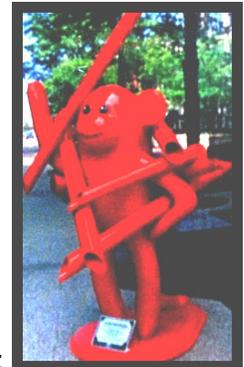
I became a little obsessed with the fiberglass sock monkeys. I wanted to find them all and get pictures of them. So, I understand if you want to go beyond the six that are easily seen and photographed. They will require more work on your part. I did not include addresses and phone numbers of the places that are accessible through the good will of the folks who own the monkeys. Use the Internet and the phone book. Color pictures of the fiberglass sock monkeys are on the RHS website. WWW.RHSIL.ORG



7. SYMBOL

Artistry: Deborah Stromsdorfer; Location: Private residence along Rock River; Sponsor: Dr. Kris Tumilowicz.

Sock Monkey "Symbol" waves across the river to his namesake "Symbol" in Sinnissippi Park. If you have a good telephoto lens you can get a picture from the east side of the river near the original artwork. The monkey is on the west



Courtesy Judy Gambrel



the doctor's yard, but the snow was like eggshells; I had to borrow a front view. The best idea here is to have a good camera. No yard trampling, please.

8. PAPER BOY

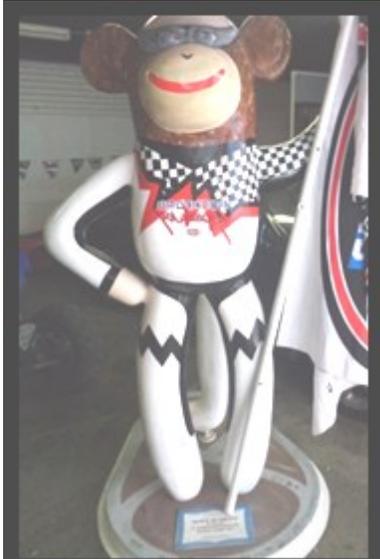
Artistry: K Dyer; Location: Rockford Register Star News Tower; Sponsor: Rockford Register Star.

Paper Boy was once in the front window of the News Tower. My granddaughter and I were standing outside looking in. I had tried to take several pictures but the glare from the window produced nothing but the trees behind us. A kind gentleman saw us, took one look at tiny Chelsea and must have decided we were not a security risk. He escorted us in, asked someone to turn the sculpture around and let us take pictures; then saw us out. Thank you, Mr. Parr. The statue is now in the lobby. You can stop in to

9. ROCKFORD COLLEGE SOCK MONKEY

Artistry: Jeanne Coe; Location: Nelson Hall, Rockford University; Sponsor: Rockford University.

The Rockford College Sock Monkey for a decade was a part of Burpee Center at Rockford University but has a new home in Nelson Hall at Rockford University. He wears the colors of the university and his name reflects the name of the institution from 1892 to 2013. The school became a university in 2013. Burpee Center was being remodeled when this picture was taken. He could go back to the



10. VICTOR e. LANE

Artistry: Jeanne Coe; Location: Rockford Speedway; Sponsor: Rockford Speedway and the Deery Family.

Victor e. Lane is a welcoming presence at the entrance to the Rockford Speedway in Loves Park. During spring, summer and fall he is available for photographs with fans of the Speedway. Staff there estimates that over 10,000 pictures have been taken of Victor with friends and families gathered round. Victor is in storage during the off season. If you are going at a time other than a scheduled



11. PATRIOT

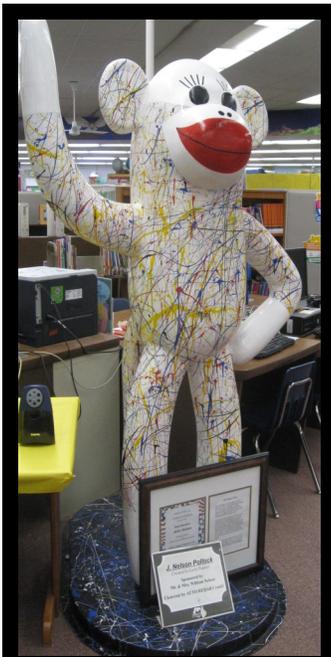
Artistry: Lonny Stark; Location: Midway Museum Center; Sponsor: Community Foundation of Northern Illinois; donated to the Midway Museum Center.

“Patriot” makes his home in the Midway Museum Center. Clad in Colonial garb from tri-corner hat to buckle shoes, he holds a simulation of the United States Constitution displaying the first sentence of the historic document. Normally, there is a fee to enter the museum if you are not a member, but if you just want to take pictures of the monkeys, they may let you.

12. CHEAP TRICK

Artistry: Jane Petersson Hooker; **Location:** Midway Museum Center. **Sponsor:** AmCore Bank; donated to Midway Museum Center .

Glorious pinks, purples and lime greens color this handsome monkey. The artist is sister of band member, Tom Petersson; the 12 string guitar was used in the band. Cheap Trick Sock Monkey is in the Midway Museum Center. See Patriot (#11) for access information.



13. J. NELSON POLLOCK

Artistry: Lorie Painter; **Location:** Library Center at Nelson Elementary School; **Sponsors:** William and Lois Nelson.

Nelson School, built in 1908, is named for John Nelson, the inventor of the knitting machine that could knit a sock with both seamless toe and heel. His company also made the famous “Red Heel” sock. J. Nelson Pollock is in the school library media center, but the school is locked during the day. A call is mandatory. The school is scheduled to be closed in the near future. Call the Rockford School District for updates on the location of the sock monkey. J. Nelson Pollock’s design is fashioned after the American abstract-expressionist painter, Jackson Pollock, whose work style is known as “drip painting.”



14. JULIA M. SCOUT

Artistry: Karen Harding, Sandy Ures, Lisa Normoyle; **Location:** Camp Medill McCormick Friendship Center, Stillman Valley; **Sponsor:** Gloyd Family Foundation.

Julia is one of three seated fiberglass monkeys. She is appropriately placed in the Girl Scout Welcome Center at the McCormick Camp in Stillman Valley. Call the Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois, Rockford office before you go. GSNI-R, 2820 McFarland Road, Rockford, IL.

15. STILLMAN

Artistry: Joyce Bietau Rieken; Location: Stillman Bank, Oregon, IL; Sponsor: Stillman Bank.

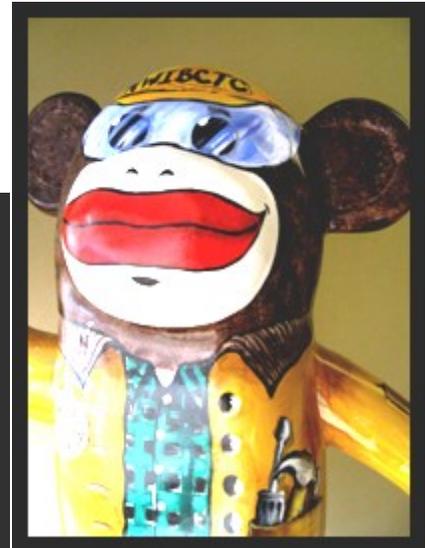
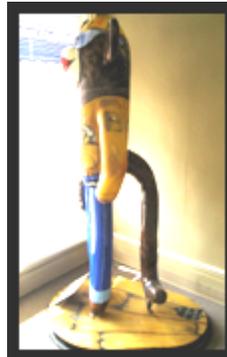


Stillman was one of the last fiberglass monkeys to be created. Seated, he is about five feet tall. The last time I saw Stillman he was residing in a storage area at the Stillman Bank in Oregon where you see him here. A call before you go is essential.

16. TRADESMAN

Artistry: Doug Adcock; Location: Project First Rate; Sponsor: Northern Illinois Building and Construction Trades Council.

Wistfully peering out the window is Tradesman reminding us that trades people like to be outdoors and/or working, even if they are sock monkeys. This monkey may be in transition right now. Call Project First Rate first.



17. BUILDING ROCKFORD

Artistry: Doug Adcock; Location: Fridh Construction Company, Rockford; Sponsor: Northern Illinois Building Contractors.

Vibrant, neon colors, urban buildings and a circular halo make Building Rockford a visual stand-out. A call to Fridh before stopping in to see the monkey is proper sock monkey hunting etiquette.



18. POWER OF THE SUN

Artistry: Nicole Georgis; Location: Rockford Day Nursery; Sponsor: Gloyd Family Foundation.

¹⁰ Blue as a summer sky, Power of the Sun is in the lobby, but a call that you are coming would be appropriate.

SOCK MONKEYS - IN PRIVATE RESIDENCES OR NOT LOCATED



19. FACES OF ROCKFORD

Artistry: Mary Rosandich, Jeanne Coe and Joe Marchione; Location: Transatlantic Connection; Sponsor: Robert and Erika Holdmann, Transatlantic Connection.

This monkey was on display at Stewart Square several times. She is beautifully decorated with Rockford landmarks, places to visit and art. Her hat is an addition, but fits her perfectly. At present she resides in a private residence and is unavailable for



20. ROCKFORD SPORTS TOURIST

Artistry: Jessica Cannova; Location: Unknown; Sponsor: Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Once seen at Stewart Square, this monkey's location is not known. There were rumors that one of the monkeys was badly damaged but I have not been able to verify that.



Courtesy Midway Museum Center

21. ROCKFORD TOURIST

Artistry: Jessica Cannova; Location: Unknown; Sponsor: Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

A picture of Rockford Tourist was in the *Rockford Register Star* on June 11, 2005. This is a sketch from that picture. She has distinctive mouth and eyes. She was once on the downtown mall. Or, could she be just another view of Faces of Rockford, above?



22. E.A.R.L.

Artistry: Lorie Painter; Location: Private Residence; Sponsors: Richard and Anne Hayes and family.



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Statement of purpose: To enlighten and to educate people about their place of residence, to entertain with stories and fact, and to enrich lives regarding what is available to enjoy, to treasure and to honor.

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