

Vintage Paper Dolls

By Inga Milbauer



Among several items Ms. Amreau Blood donated to the Boylston Historical Society Museum are four paper dolls with paper clothing outfits and accessories.

Amreau Bontelle Blood was born on 20 March 1896 to Alfred Wilder Blood and his wife Eliza Ann “Annie” Kittridge in Lancaster, Worcester County, Massachusetts. The 1900 U.S. Federal Census shows that Amreau, age 4, and her sister Gertrude, were living with their parents in Lancaster, Massachusetts. Their father’s occupation is mail carrier. Gertude Abbie had been born in Clinton, Worcester County, Massachusetts on 15 November 1898. In 1913, Amreau and Gertrude Blood are mentioned as alto and soprano of the Lancaster High School Glee Club in the Boston Globe article, Enjoyed by 300 people – Lancaster High School Glee Club assisted in its Concert by Several Worcester Soloists.¹

Nursing Career

According to the 1917 through 1920 Clinton City directories, Amreau Blood, was a nurse at the Clinton Hospital where she also resided.² By 1929, she had moved to Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts where she was an employee at the Odd Fellows’ Home of Massachusetts in Worcester, her occupation was “trained nurse”.^{3 4}

Independent Order of Odd Fellows

Construction of their brick building, designed by Barker & Nourse, began in 1890. On 22 June 1892 the first building was dedicated to provide a home for fifty-two members of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The building was expanded in 1902 and occupied by the Odd Fellows’ Home until the organization opened a new facility on the grounds in 1990. The original building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980, but was demolished in 2014.

The exact roots of the Order of Odd Fellows have been lost to antiquity, but a number of Odd Fellows groups existed in the 1700s in England. “King George IV of England, while Prince of Wales, was admitted in the membership around 1780.”⁵ Following a business meeting one of their favorite songs showing the brotherhood and conviviality of the organization is:

*When Friendship, Love and Truth abound Among a Band of Brothers,
The cup of joy goes gaily round Each shares the bliss of others.*

*Then let us be social, be generous, be kind,
And let each take his glass and be mellow,
Then we’ll join heart and hand, leave dissensions behind,
And we’ll each prove a hearty Odd Fellow.⁶*

Established as an altruistic fraternal organization for the trades, Odd Fellows Lodges were established in New York City in 1806. Under the leadership of Thomas Wildey, the Washington Lodge No. 1 was organized in Baltimore on 26 April 1819. He is recognized as the founder of the American Odd Fellowship.⁷ The first Lodge in Massachusetts was established in Boston on 26 March 1820. During the decades after the Civil War membership of fraternal organizations soared in the United States. By 1889, the International Order of Odd Fellows had lodges in every state and became one of the largest fraternal organizations.⁸

Received the Distinguished Citizen Award in Boylston

By 1939 Amreau Blood was residing with her mother and brother Charles Dana at Central Street in Boylston, Massachusetts.^{9 10} According to this United States Federal Census, she was employed as a nurse at the Worcester County Sanatorium. The family’s previous residence had been Holden, Massachusetts where her father had died on 24 August 1934. Her sister was married to Matthew John McNeilly, originally from Clinton, Massachusetts; they were living in Quincy, Norfolk County, Massachusetts.¹¹ On 25 August 1944, Amreau Blood, a graduate of Clinton Hospital, was appointed as the Board of Health registered nurse, effective September 1st. She held the positions of school and town nurse until her retirement in June 1964.¹²

In 1974 Amereau [Amreau] Blood, R. N., Town Nurse was awarded the *Distinguished Citizen Award* by the American Legion. This award was given annually to a towns-person who had performed in an outstanding way for the benefit of the community.¹³

Amreau Blood died on 6 February 1996 at the age of 99 and is buried with her parents and brother at the Woodlawn Cemetery in Clinton, Worcester County, Massachusetts.¹⁴

Paper Dolls

Her donation of paper dolls consists of two larger dolls and two smaller dolls and eighteen outfits. One of the child’s dolls seems to be home made, as are the four matching dresses which are colored by hand. This doll has several names written with pencil on the front and back: Lilla Bigelow, Bonny Burns, Eddie Bryant, and Natty Barney.



Hand-made Paper Doll and Dresses
BHSM Collection

¹ Enjoyed by 300 people – Lancaster High School Glee Club assisted in its Concert by Several Worcester Soloists, Boston Globe, 20 May 1913

² Clinton City Directory, U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, 1920, digital image, ancestry.com

³ Worcester City Directory, U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, 1929, digital image, ancestry.com

⁴ Fifteenth Census of the United States: Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1930, digital image, ancestry.com

⁵ <https://odd-fellows.org/history/wildeys-odd-fellowship/>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940

¹⁰ Boylston, Worcester Telegram, Wednesday January 18, 1939, Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts, digital image, genealogybank.com

¹¹ Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930

¹² Boylston Town Nurse Retires, Worcester Telegram, Tuesday June 2, 1964, page 3, digital image, genealogybank.com

¹³ Filgate, Bruce, Boylston Historical Series, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts

¹⁴ https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/193760234/amreau_bontelle-blood

Since the 1820s boxed paper doll sets were produced in Europe and exported to America for families who could afford them. “The first American paper doll commercially produced as a children’s toy was Boston-based J. Belcher’s “The History and Adventures of Little Henry” in 1812. The dolls accompanied a children’s book and were designed to act out various scenes as the narratives unfolded.”¹⁵

The paper dolls from this donation are described as “Godey print” paper dolls. The Godey paper dolls were printed in November 1859 as part of the Godey’s Lady’s Book. Godey’s Lady’s Book started by Louis A. Godey in Philadelphia, was published from 1830 to 1898. It was the first known magazine to print paper dolls in black and white, followed by a page of costumes for children to color. A second page featured colored costumes which could be cut out and placed on the paper dolls.¹⁶ Godey set the trend that many women's magazines followed in years to come.¹⁷

The clothing pieces in the Historical Society collection have a front and back piece which are attached and reinforced with linen in the shoulder area, and have an opening on the top which is how they are attached to the paper dolls. An extra opening in the back of the clothing is added if the head will not fit through the top opening.



PAPER DOLL OUTFIT
BHSM Collection



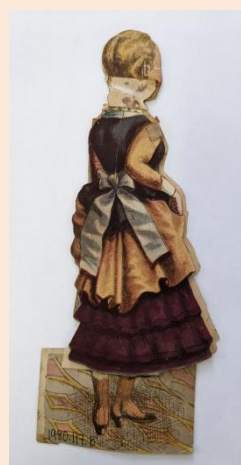
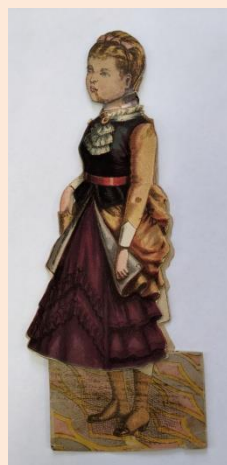
PAPER DOLL (front & back)
BHSM Object Collection



CHILD PAPER DOLL
BHSM Collection



PAPER DOLL WITH HAT
BHSM Object Collection



PAPER DOLL (front & back)
BHSM Object Collection

Technological advances in the 19th century lowered the costs of printing and made reproducing images easier which resulted in a rise of illustrated collectibles, such as books, magazines, prints and cards, as well as paper dolls. Paper dolls increased in popularity over the century, with newspapers and magazines printing them as toys and as illustrations of fashion for girls and women.¹⁸ The popularity of paper dolls peaked between the late 1930s and early 1950s and declined in the later decades. Not only have paper dolls been beloved toys over decades, but the dolls and their colorful wardrobes also give us insight into the society of their time.

Acknowledgements:

<https://www.ancestry.com>
<https://jbdpreservation.com/blog/2014/8/21/the-odd-fellows-home-worcester-lost>
<https://odd-fellows.org/history/>
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https://paperdollywood.com/index.php?main_page=page&id=32
<https://specialcollections.blogs.brynmawr.edu/2020/07/03/paper-dolls-and-how-to-make-them/>
 Editor, Nancy A. Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, Massachusetts

¹⁵ <https://www.womenshistory.org/articles/history-paper-dolls-and-popular-culture>
¹⁶ <https://library.samford.edu/special/treasures/2024/paper-dolls.html>
¹⁷ Ibid
¹⁸ <https://www.womenshistory.org/articles/history-paper-dolls-and-popular-culture>