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Creative Book Arts Preserving Family History

Sarah Owen Tabor

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**CREATIVE BOOK ARTS PRESERVING
FAMILY HISTORY**

By

Sarah Owen Tabor

A.B. Colby College, 1970

M. S. University of Maine, 1983

A MASTER PROJECT

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in Liberal Studies)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

August, 2002

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CREATIVE BOOK ARTS PRESERVING

FAMILY HISTORY

By Sarah Owen Tabor

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Owen Smith

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts (in Liberal Studies)
August, 2002

For the project I have developed a series of four artist's books from material I have collected pertaining to my family history. Over the last four years I have collected written narratives, photographs, tape-recorded interviews, genealogies, letters, electronic communications, and other documents.

The first book in the series is an accordion-style book contrasting a trip my Great Grandmother took to Yellowstone National Park by covered wagon from Oklahoma Territory in 1903 with my trip from Maine to the same park in 1978. Though technology had changed the mode of transportation, and the intervening years had seen changes in many other things, the images recorded in 1978 are remarkably similar to those in 1903.

The second book in the series was taken from a typed narrative written by my Grandmother about her childhood in Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. It is the story of a pet chicken, Rook, and takes the form of a children's book with large linoleum block images, large type, and few words on each page.

The third book in the series commemorates my two children, Philip and Jennifer, and combines images and text along with mementoes from their pasts. Two accordion-style books are enclosed in a case that rests on top of a box containing memorabilia.

The last book in the series traces my matrilineal line back seven generations, from my Great Great Great Grandmother down to my daughter. The images are photographs of each woman transferred on to silk and embellished with beads and sequins. The text for each is a biography telling each woman's story. The format of the book is accordion with signatures sewn into the folds.

For this project I have taken information about the family that speaks to me and I have researched historical information pertaining to the particular event or time and have created a series of artist's books using a variety of formats that document, in part, who I am and where I come from. Though there are four books created so far, the family material collected over the past four years demands more, so that I see this thesis project as a beginning rather than as a finished entity.

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INTRODUCTION

For the project I have developed a series of artist's books that capture and convey to a modern audience the disparate history of one American family's progress. Developed from the material I collected, each work in the series focuses on a separate topic that combines narrative, graphics, and historical research.

Since the summer of 1998, I have collected a vast array of primary and secondary source material documenting the lives and stories of one particular American family, mine, from the arrival of its forebears from Europe in the 18th Century through the Westward Expansion of the 19th Century and down through the 20th Century to the present. This material consists of formal and informal written narratives, photographs, tape-recorded interviews, genealogies, letters, electronic communications, and documents. In addition, I have collected secondary source material regarding the family from a variety of sources including non-commercial genealogical services, newspapers, and Internet websites. I have also sought out sources that help to support or enhance the historical accuracy of the primary and secondary source material.

The books created from this material take a variety of forms: books with computer generated type and photocopied images, letterpress with linoleum cuts, Lazertran on paste paper, and photocopy transfer on to silk. They have been bound in formats appropriate to their content, using an accordion style, a single signature style, and a combination of the two. The images have come either from the photographs collected or the suggested imagery of the narratives themselves.

BOOK ONE: YELLOWSTONE

The first book in the series is an adventure story contrasting my Great Grandmother's trip by covered wagon to Yellowstone National Park from Oklahoma Territory in 1903 with my trip from Maine to the same park in 1978. Though technology had changed the mode of transportation, and the intervening years had seen changes in many other things such as styles of dress, the images recorded in 1978 are remarkably similar to those in 1903. The book is an accordion book, the images are photocopied from the original photographs, and the text was typed and then photocopied on to the

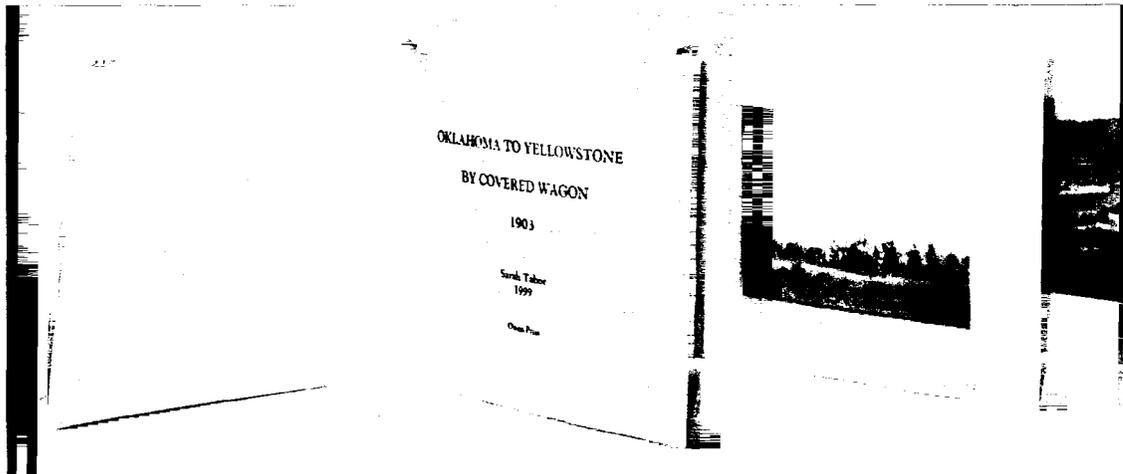


Figure 1: Oklahoma to Yellowstone By Covered Wagon 1903; title page.

pages of the book. The idea for the book took root at a family reunion in 1999 when the people gathering for the reunion had been asked to bring photographs or other family information to share. My cousin Grace, who lives in Vermont, happened to bring a small photo album she had inherited from her father, my mother's brother. He had inherited the eighteen photographs from his Grandmother, Mary Eleanor Renfrew DeGeer, a member of the covered wagon trip to Yellowstone. Mary Eleanor had lived with my mother's family in New Jersey for the last 23 years of her life. Apparently, my Uncle

Sam had put together the photo album with his Grandmother's help or from memory, and had added captions to each picture. The album intrigued me, not only for the trip it represented, but also because a whole series of early photographs had been saved. Unlike the stiff formal portraits that commonly survive from the period, here was a genuine photo travel album, from 1903!

There were so many questions. How had farmers been able to take that much time away from their farms? The trip from Oklahoma to Yellowstone was a little over 1000 miles. How far could they travel in a day in a covered wagon (see Figure 2)? What was the route they took? Who were the other people in the pictures? What sort of camera did they use and why were some of the photographs in an oval format? And again, as I looked at the photographs, I realized that the types of pictures that tourists take do not change over time and that I had some very similar pictures from a family trip out west in 1978. And so the idea of contrasting my trip with my Great Grandmother's trip took hold.

To complete my Great Grandmother's story from the captions that my Uncle had written, I started researching. I had a 1904-1906 version of the *Americana Encyclopedia* with an entry on Yellowstone National Park, which provided some timely facts. My husband, a geography teacher, collects atlases and other similar antique books, and he had a copy of Monteith's *Comprehensive Geography*, dated 1882, which included a map of the western part of the country with Oklahoma before it became a state, and listed as Indian Territory (see Figure 3). The answer to the questions about the covered wagon, how far it could travel in a day, about twenty miles, as well as its square shape, were discovered after finding a current covered wagon maker on the Internet. To answer the



Figure 2: My Great Grandmother, Mary Eleanor DeGeer, sits on the driver's seat of the covered wagon in which she rode to Yellowstone National Park in 1903.

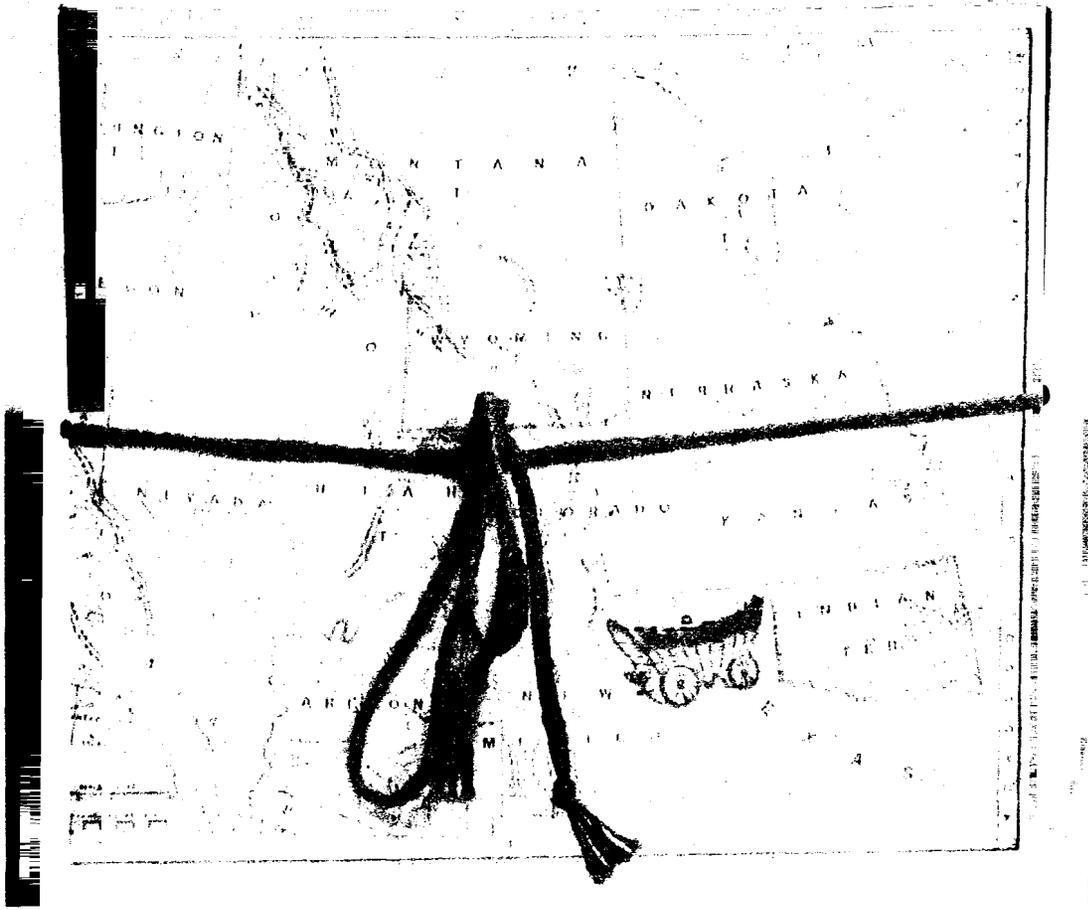


Figure 3: Oklahoma to Yellowstone By Cover Wagon 1903; cover featuring a map of the western United States from Monteith's Comprehensive Geography, published in 1882.

questions about the other travelers became like solving a paperback mystery. I used a family history written by my Great Grandmother's brother, a book commonly referred to in my family as "The Herd Book" for its listing of pedigrees. One of the photos was labeled as my Great Grandmother's sister, Hessie, who I knew had married a man named Anthony Nuce in 1895, eight years before the trip. The Nuce family later moved to Colorado. A "people search" on the Yahoo! search engine gave me all the listings for the state, there being just three listings for Nuce. All of them turned out to be relatives more than happy to reconnect with eastern relations. One of them, the Grandson of Anthony and Hessie, actually had written his own narrative about the trip to Yellowstone, based on his



Figure 4: Hessie Nuce, my Great Grandmother's sister.

Grandfather's recollections to him as a boy. So we traded photographs for narrative. With the written narrative, I had the route mapped out, and realized that the photographs my Uncle had placed in the album were in the wrong order. For instance, the travelers would not have seen the Missouri River until their way home. And because they took the train home, they would have been gone three months and not six, as I had

originally thought. I contacted the archivist at Yellowstone and sent him copies of the photographs and he was able to tell me where each one was taken in the park and which ones were from outside the park, because he could recognize rock formations and vegetation. He also corrected my misconception about the moose that my Great Grandmother saw. They were mule deer. Because some of the information came in after I had started to put the book together and I liked leaving the order of the photographs as they had been in my Uncle's album, the book retains the original sequence of images. Further research on the Internet yielded information about the photographs themselves. I learned that at least one of the cameras would have been a Brownie box type from Kodak, and that the oval framing of the pictures was an early offering of the company. Kodak's early cameras were purchased already loaded with film, and the entire camera was sent to Rochester, NY for developing, printing, and reloading.

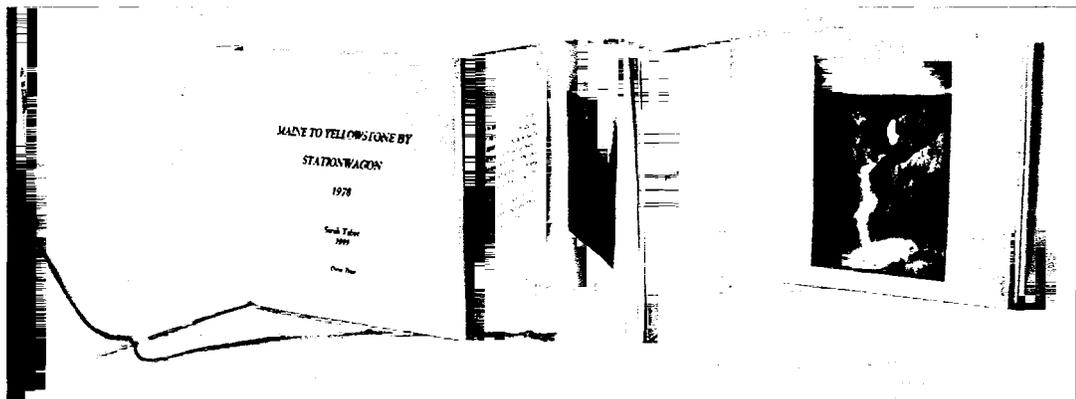
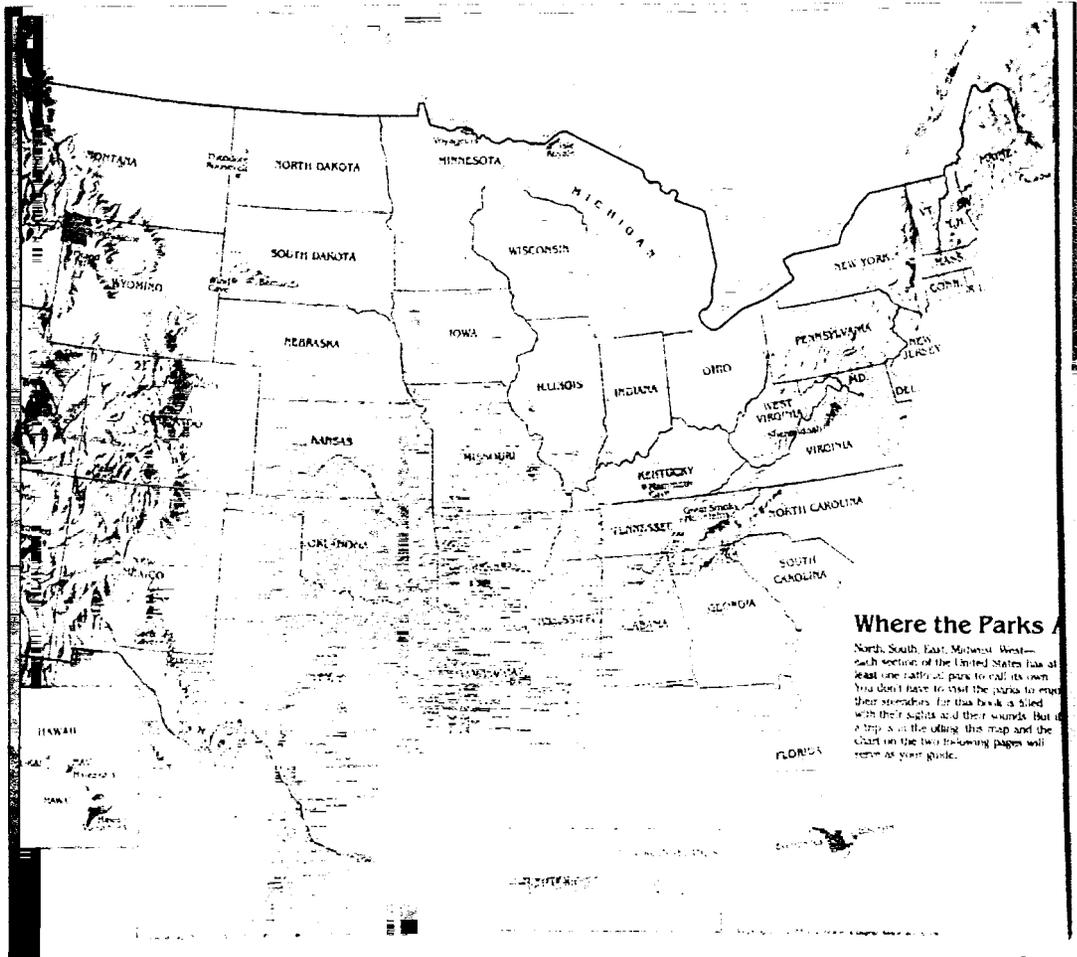


Figure 5: Maine to Yellowstone By Station Wagon 1978; title page.

For the 1978 trip, I had about 150 slides and photographs to choose from. I decided to limit the number of images to 18 as in my Great Grandmother's trip and to choose ones that were as similar as possible in subject matter to hers. I had prints made from the slides and then those prints photocopied so that the images from the two trips

would be close even though the earlier ones were black and white and the 1978 ones in color. I keep a daily journal and so was able to go back to the one I kept in 1978 and collect the information I needed about our route and campgrounds for my narrative. For the covers, I photocopied maps. My side of the book came from a 1986 book on our country's National Park system, and my Great Grandmother's, the 1882 geography book.

As I thought about the format for the book, an accordion-style book seemed logical, with my Great Grandmother's trip on one side and mine on the other. To contrast the trips, I chose regular type for my Great Grandmother's narrative and italic for mine. The page size was dictated by the size of the photographs, which I had slightly enlarged from the originals. Because the text was photocopied, every other page had to be joined by a strip of Japanese paper. I discovered as I was assembling the copies that to keep the accordion square, I needed to hold down the pages with weights as they were being glued. I also discovered, to my dismay, that using a mixture of PVA and wheat paste to glue on the photocopies of the pictures to the text pages created too much moisture and wrinkled the pages. The solution was to use a Rollataq applicator and adhesive that glued the images without buckling.



Where the Parks

North, South, East, Midwest, West—each section of the United States has at least one national park to call its own. You don't have to visit the parks to meet their stewards, for this book is filled with their sights and their sounds. But if a trip is in the offing, this map and the chart on the two following pages will serve as your guide.

Figure 6: Maine to Yellowstone By Station Wagon 1978; cover.

BOOK TWO: ROOK

The second book in the series was taken from a story in my Grandmother's eleven page typed narrative of reminiscences about her childhood in Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. She had a vivid narrative style and this was just one of several stories worth illustrating. The story is about a pet chicken, Rook, and while written by an adult, lent itself to the style and format of a children's book, with large images and type and few words on each page. The story naturally divided into ten pages, and letterpress and linoleum cuts seemed the logical choice for text and images. After much thought, I decided to leave off the last sentence as being inappropriate for the ending of a children's story. "She (Rook, the chicken)

did not die a natural death, but was caught and eaten by a coyote."

I used nine 6x8 inch type-high linoleum blocks and one 8x10 inch block for the images, the larger one being for the centerfold. The cover images are from two smaller blocks, one for the image of Rook and the other for the title. For the title, I enlarged the Century School Book Bold letters on the photocopier to the size needed and hand carved them. The straw-

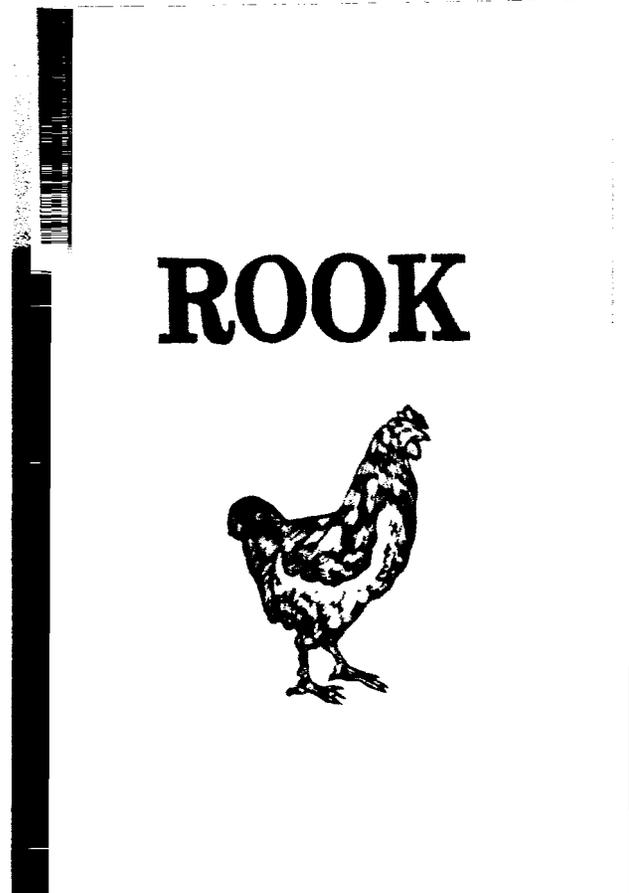


Figure 7: Rook: cover.

colored under-image on the cover was made by cutting an oak tag stencil and placing it under the paper as it was run through the press on an inked uncarved 7x10 ½ inch block.

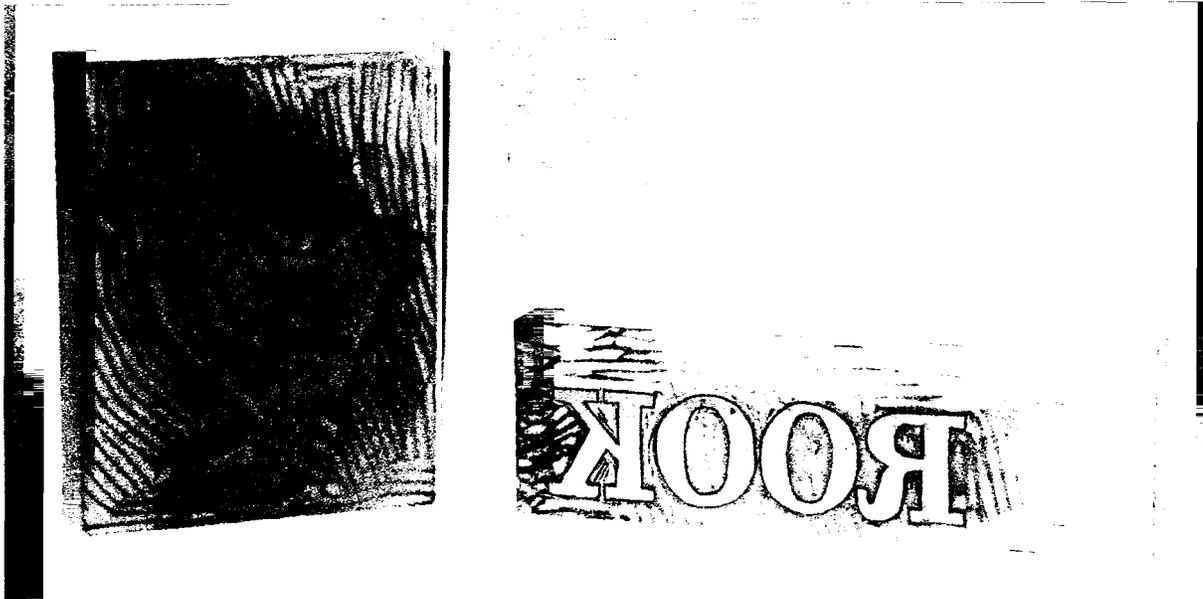


Figure 8: Linoleum blocks used for the cover of Rook.

It and the Twinrocker handmade Deep Tropics Natural paper used inside the cover represent the hay used in Rook's nest.

Various sources were used for the images. The wood cook stove is in my kitchen in Corinth, Modern Clarions being made in Bangor, Maine. The bed with the oak leaf coverlet and trundle bed underneath is in my family's old Victorian house in Freedom, New Hampshire. I liked incorporating images from my life into a story about my Grandmother's childhood. I found images of chickens and covered wagons in books and off the Internet. There are many old houses with porches in New England and I have an extensive garden. I grew up reading the Laura Ingalls Wilder books and from my memories of those, imagined what children would wear and what life on the prairie was like. Last summer, when my Mother viewed the book for the first time, she informed me

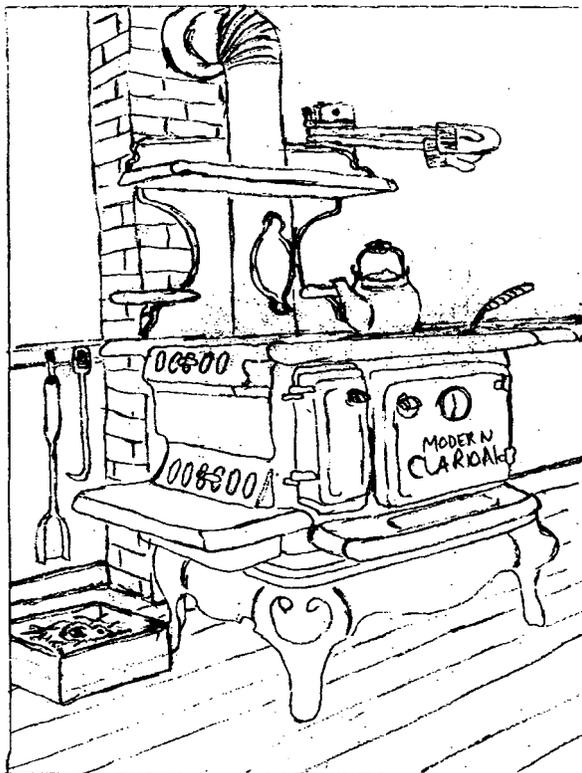


Figure 9: (Left) Original drawing of the wood cook stove in my kitchen in Corinth, Maine.

Figure 10: (Right) A photograph of the Modern Clarion wood stove, made in Bangor, Maine, that is used in my kitchen.





Figure 11: The bed with the oak leaf coverlet and trundle bed underneath is in my family's old Victorian house in Freedom, NH.

that my Grandmother was a tomboy and would never have worn dresses and certainly never would have played with dolls. Hopefully, a little “artistic license” can be employed in the design of a “children’s” book.

I wanted to hold the book to a single signature, as I intended printing multiple copies and wanted to be able to bind them myself. I also wanted to use the same paper for the cover as for the pages. My solution was to turn in and glue the outside edge of the cover

so that it was a double thickness and to make a double crease at the binding edge into which to sew the signature. Also, the straw colored under printing on the cover and the handmade paper separating it from the rest of the book create a break between the cover and the text. The centerfold image had to be altered slightly so that the binding didn’t interrupt the image of the chicken on the right. Originally, I planned to place the text under the images, but when I decided to use 18-point type for the text, placing it opposite the images worked better visually. I made a mock up to figure out what images and text to print on each sheet of paper. The ink color, a mixture of brown and black seemed appropriate for a story about a chicken on a farm. The straw color on the cover could have been a little more beige, but is acceptable.

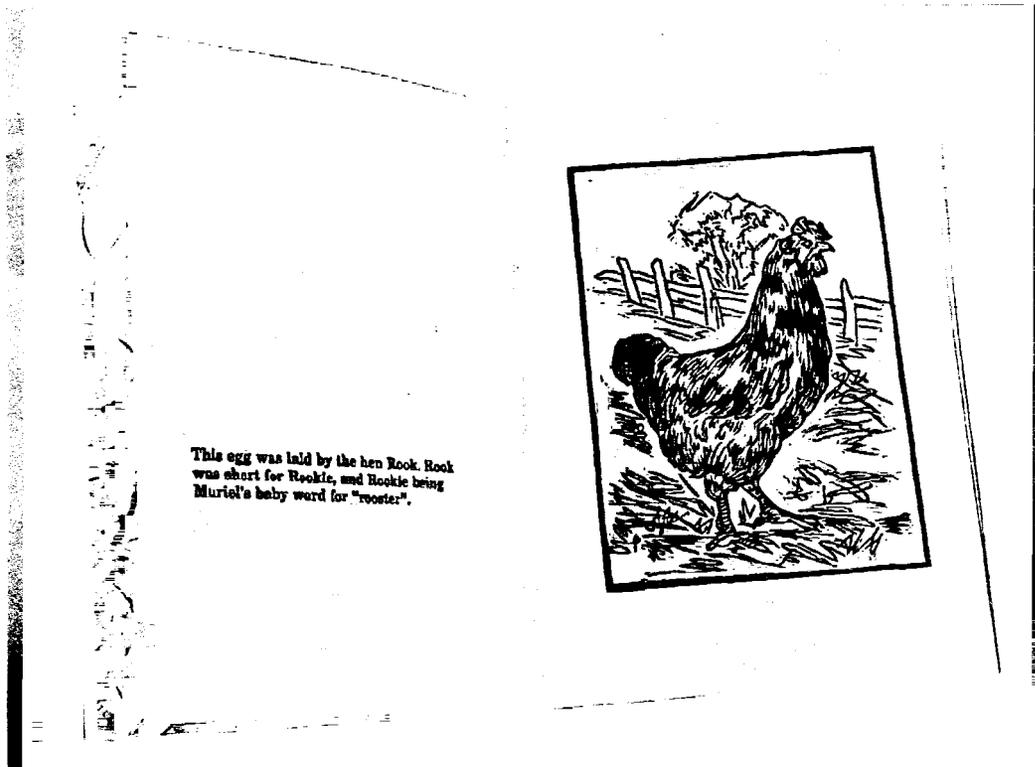


Figure 12: Rook, the book inspired by my Grandmother's recollections of life on the prairie, naturally lent itself to the style and format of a children book.

BOOK THREE: PHILIP AND JENNIFER

The third book in the series commemorates my two children, Philip and Jennifer, and combines images and text along with mementoes from their pasts. It is in the form of two accordion-style books in a single case set on top of a divided box holding objects I saved over the years as well as objects I collected for this project that are representative of their interests and professions. From their birth I took photographs and saved occasional drawings, school papers, report cards, and various other mementoes I thought my children would eventually like to have. For this book I wanted to use Lazertran, a relatively new image transfer system developed in England. I planned to adhere it to paste paper as it is transparent and I wanted the texture of the paper underneath to show through the images. After thinking about Philip and Jennifer's lives to date, and keeping in mind items I had saved, I made a list of possible things to include in each book. I located photographs, drawings, writings, and school records and typed and printed out text. I decided on page size and then scanned and printed out each item to be included the correct size. These then had to be attached to a backing paper to be photocopied on to the Lazertran that was then transferred on to the paste paper. By mistake I used a PVA methylcellulose mixture instead of matt medium to adhere the Lazertran and then had to deal with the accordion folded pages sticking together. After coating the whole book with plain methylcellulose, the stickiness disappeared though the surface of the pages was then glossy instead of matt.

To make the case and box, I worked from the inside out, making the covers for the accordion books first, then the case to hold those, and finally the bottom box to hold



Figure 13: Philip and Jennifer – closed, the box containing the accordion books commemorating my two children, Philip and Jennifer, and compartments containing memorabilia from their childhood.

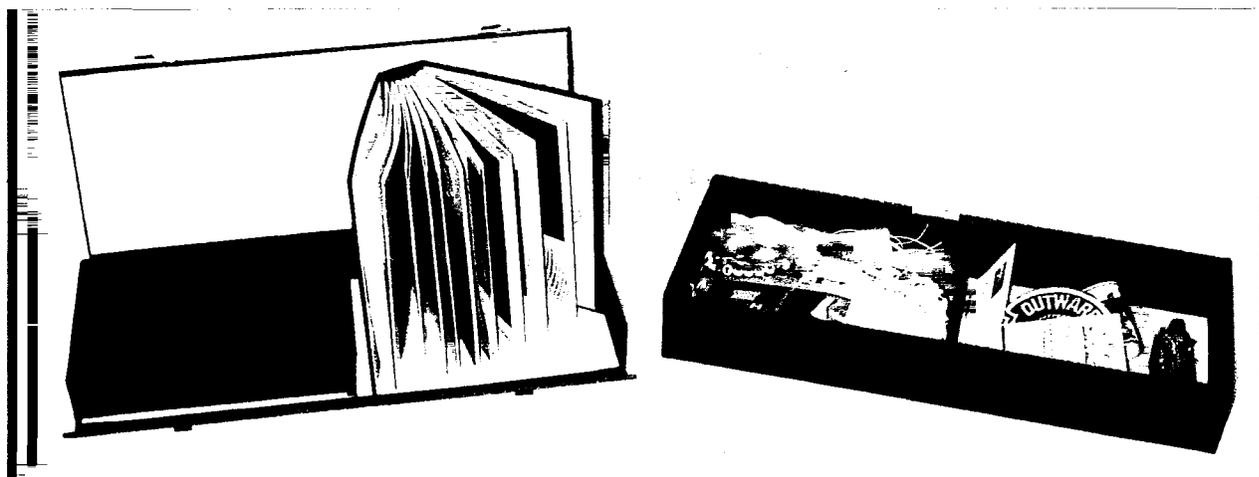


Figure 14: Philip and Jennifer – open; the box containing the accordion books commemorating my two children, Philip and Jennifer, and compartments containing memorabilia from their childhood.

the mementoes and in which the top case would rest. I used book cloth and paste paper to cover the case and box and bone closures for the case.

The whole collection and book making process was a trip down memory lane for me. I remembered that I had taught my daughter, Jennifer, to weave when I was doing that professionally, but had forgotten that she had written a school paper on the steps in setting up a loom. One of the papers I saved that Philip had written was titled, "When I am an adult, I will/will not...". I think sometimes we forget what an influence we have on our children's lives. I had saved some hair from Jennifer's first hair cut on her seventh birthday, and it was an emotional experience to be braiding her hair again for the first time in twenty three years. It felt the same as I remembered and took me back. The only problem I encountered in creating the work was the dilemma I inadvertently created by making one book for the two children, instead of one for each of them. Each views the work as a potential keepsake.



Figure 15: Philip's accordion book, expanded out to show a photograph taken in November, 1978 and another taken in July 2001.



Figure 16: Jennifer's accordion book, also extended to show photographs of her (left to right) on her seventh birthday, November 10, 1978, in elementary school, and on the lacrosse team at Wellesley College.

BOOK FOUR: GENERATIONS

Another book in the series traces my matrilineal line back seven generations. I have available to me photographs, narratives, and documents pertaining to all the women, each remarkable in her own right. I envisioned a book that unfolded to a single large page, using letterpress and photo etching or possibly photocopy transfer onto silk, or possibly a quilt or something more sculptural if the silk were adhered to wood. After much thought as to format, I decided on a book, but planned to transfer the images on to silk and sew them on to the pages and embellish them with beads and possibly lace as a tribute to women's historically traditional skills. At this point in the process, I experimented with the photocopy transfer on to silk method I learned during a class several summers ago as well as another iron on transfer method and was disappointed in the lack of detail in the first and the rubbery feel of the second. After calling a commercial photocopy business, I decided to try a method they used. I provided the silk and the photographs of the seven women. The images transferred on to the silk well and still retained the texture of the original cloth, but the silk was totally pulled out of shape. I was able to iron the silk repeatedly between layers of cotton and stretch it and eventually flatten it enough so that there was little distortion and it could be cut down with pinking shears and sewn on to paper by machine. I experimented with hand sewing some antique beads and sequins on to the silk images and liked the result.

The original thinking for this book was to include a small amount of written information about each woman and to use letterpress for the text. I had also thought to possibly include sisters and other female family members in the direct line on the family tree. As I worked on the research, I realized that I wanted to tell each woman's story

more fully and that letterpress would be cumbersome and also that I wanted to limit the women to the seven in the direct line. I grew up hearing stories from my Mother about her childhood and that of her Mother, my Grandmother, as well as those about my Great Great Grandmother. We have in the kitchen in Freedom, New Hampshire, the iron cooking pot that my Great Great Grandmother brought with her from Donegal, Ireland, and which is mentioned in her narrative. As the research and writing was completed, copies were sent to all the living women included in the book for corrections, additions, or deletions. It was interesting that my Mother slightly changed some of the information from that which she had given me in my taped interview with her several years ago. My Aunt Muriel, my Mother's sister, with whom she is currently visiting and who is a former *Time/Life* researcher, also had input.

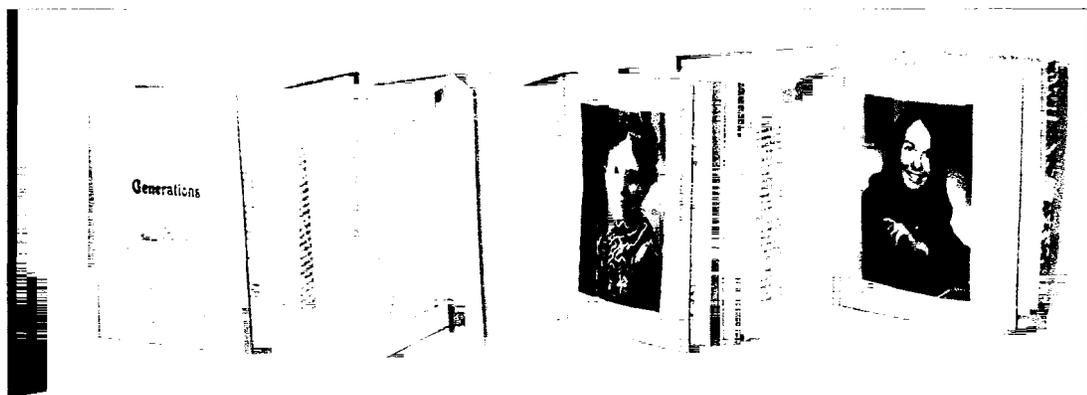


Figure 17: *Generations* traces the female line of my family over seven generations

I had always thought of using an accordion style format, but had thought it might open out to a huge page with parts unfolding off of other parts or using an accordion style format but with each page containing a pouch with a photograph and text on separate pages placed in the pouch. Eventually, I decided on the current format, accordion style, with signatures sewn into each accordion fold, one for each woman. The cover of each

signature has the photocopied silk transfer sewn on to heavier paper and embellished with beads and sequins passed down to me by my Mother who inherited them from Aunt Pauline and Cousin Polly. Aunt Pauline wasn't an actual blood relative but lived with my Aunt Muriel until her death. Cousin Polly was my Mother's cousin and had multiple sclerosis. The beads and sequins came to me in old glass pill bottles, Cousin Polly being an invalid.



Figure 18: Generations, showing the cover and slipcase, made of paste paper, antique lace, and buttons.

The text inside the signatures was printed on the computer and then taped on to paper and photocopied on to text weight paper so that the pages would be in the correct order when sewn into their signatures. The Title Page, Forward, and Colophon were printed on the heavier paper and then glued on to the accordion pages.

For the cover, I experimented with applying antique lace, again from my Mother, to the paste paper, and then attaching buttons to the finished covers. The hands represent the historically nurturing qualities of women and the buttons and beads again were in the collection from my Mother.

CONCLUSION

The next book in this series will be about my Aunt Mary, my Mother's older sister. There is a diary from Aunt Mary who spent a few years working her way around the world as a newspaperwoman right before the onset of World War II. She spent the first two years in South Africa, and her diary, which contains many photographs, dates from that time. I plan to use some part of this for a book.

So far there are six narratives from both my father and mother's sides of the family, containing information about ancestors as well as stories about their lives. As of today, there are about 850 ancestors and their descendants recorded in my family tree. This July, my husband and I will travel to Colorado to meet the western branch of the family for a reunion, an experience that may well yield even more data for the future. For this project I have taken information about the family that speaks to me and I have researched historical information pertaining to the particular event or time and have created a series of artist's books using a variety of formats that document, in part, who I am and where I come from.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Sarah Owen Tabor was born in Willimantic, Connecticut on December 19, 1948. She was raised in Storrs, Connecticut and graduated from Edwin O. Smith High School in 1966. She attended Colby College and graduated in 1970 with a Bachelor's degree in Art. Sarah was self-employed as a professional weaver from 1970 to 1983. She entered the School of Human Development graduate program at the University of Maine and received a Master of Science degree in Textile Design in 1983. In 1983 she took a job teaching art at Central Middle School and Central High School in East Corinth, Maine. In 1988, she began teaching art at Bangor High School, a position she continues to hold today. Sarah is a member of Phi Kappa Phi, the National Education Association, Maine Education Association, National Art Education Association, Maine Art Education Association, Bangor Education Association (Executive Board Member 1994-2002), Maine Alliance for Arts Education, Art in the Heart of Maine, Maine Crafts Association, American Crafts Council, and Handweaver's Guild of America. Sarah is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Liberal Studies from The University of Maine in August, 2002.