

VERMONT



HISTORY

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About the Cover Illustrations

Superior Craftsmanship on a Small Scale

Lucy Pfeiffer must have been a perfectionist. The Vermont Historical Society museum collection of thirty-two figurines (not dolls!) she made are exquisitely detailed, finely sewn, and beautifully costumed. Each figure is about thirteen inches tall and dressed in period clothing ranging from a medieval courtier to 1970s hippies. Three of the figurines are currently on exhibit at the Vermont History Center in Barre; but further proof of Pfeiffer's meticulous attention to detail and careful research was brought to my attention by museum volunteer Anita Rogers. She recently helped catalog all the paper documentation of the Pfeiffer collection for the library. It is clear from the numerous notes, drawings, and newspaper clippings in the collection that Pfeiffer spent at least as much time researching as crafting her subjects.

Lucille Rivelis was born on June 16, 1912, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While in high school, she took private lessons in oil painting and attended classes at the Graphic Sketch Club. After high school, she studied in Paris (one year) and spent four years in Vienna, Austria, where she attended the Wiener Frauen Akademie (the Vienna Women's Academy) studying commercial art. At this school, she also had the opportunity to design costumes for the balls in Vienna. While in Vienna, she met and married Gerhard F. Pfeiffer (1907-1982), a chemist. They left Austria in 1935, just before the outbreak of war, and returned to the United States, eventually settling in Chester County, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia.

Obviously well trained in art and design, Pfeiffer was told that if she wanted to work in clothing design, she needed to learn sewing. She took a two-year course in dressmaking at the School for Home Economics and Commerce in Philadelphia. Subsequently, she did some apron and quilt designs for the *Farm Journal* and also started making dolls. Initially she made stuffed dolls but wasn't able to earn any money and wasn't happy with their unrealistic faces. She consulted a book written by a sculptor to instruct her in making figurines using a wire arma-

ture and layers of newspapers. After much experimentation, she eventually developed a figure made of papier maché over a wire armature. On that base she painted the skin tone and facial features, adding appropriate makeup, and then the costume, including the undergarments.

In 1966 the Pfeiffers retired and moved to Vermont, where they settled on a farm in East Montpelier. It was there that Lucy Pfeiffer perfected her figurines. In a 1975 newspaper article she said, “My ambition has been one of artistic endeavor, to combine the many handcrafts needed to make the accurate historical costume with the skill needed to model a lifelike little figure and create a work of art.” In 1982, the same year her husband died, Pfeiffer stopped making the figurines. Gerhard Pfeiffer always encouraged his wife’s work and even built custom cases for each figurine. Surprisingly, she never sold any of her work (though she did give a few figurines away), hoping it would someday become part of a museum collection. Pfeiffer died in 2002.

Following Pfeiffer’s wishes, Agathe McQueston, the executrix of her estate, donated the collection to VHS in 2003.

JACQUELINE CALDER, *Museum Curator*

Front cover: “The Shopper.” Figurine made by Lucy Pfeiffer, modeled on a 1970s Montpelier shopper.

Back cover: Lucy Pfeiffer working on one of her figurines in 1972.

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