

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

9-21-89

Vol. XI

No. 38

FERTILITY, PENNSYLVANIA STYLE

For those of you who do not know her, I'd like you to meet my third cousin once removed, Virginia Lattin Morrison from Gaines. Recently she gave the Cobblestone Museum at Childs this unusual artifact she is holding, with a most unusual and intriguing story connected with it. It is an antique miniature wooden cradle obviously fashioned by a competent craftsman of long ago. Your first thought is that it is a child's toy for a doll. But Virginia's story is quite to the contrary.

It seems back in the late 1850s a young woman from Pennsylvania Dutch Country came up to Gaines to teach in one of the rural district schools. Her name was Mary Elizabeth Haak. While she was teaching, she met Joseph Wood Lattin, my first cousin three times removed. A romance ensued and 1859 they were married. Now it seems that the Pennsylvanian Dutch had a custom that when newlyweds were married, the parents of the bride gave the young couple a miniature empty cradle. The symbolism suggesting they were supposed to fill it. Symbolically, they filled it twice with two sons, Cary B. Lattin, who died as a young man and Frank H. Lattin, who became a physician, fruit farmer, Orleans County Assemblyman and father of Virginia Lattin Morrison.

As a child, she remembers this cradle in her grandmother's home in Gaines. Mary Elizabeth Haak Lattin always kept it empty at the foot of her bed, not in a corner of the parlor. It was not a toy! And the children were not supposed to play with it because of its sentiment to her as a fertility symbol.



.....God said to them, "Be fruitful; multiply; fill the earth and subdue it....."

Gen. 1:28