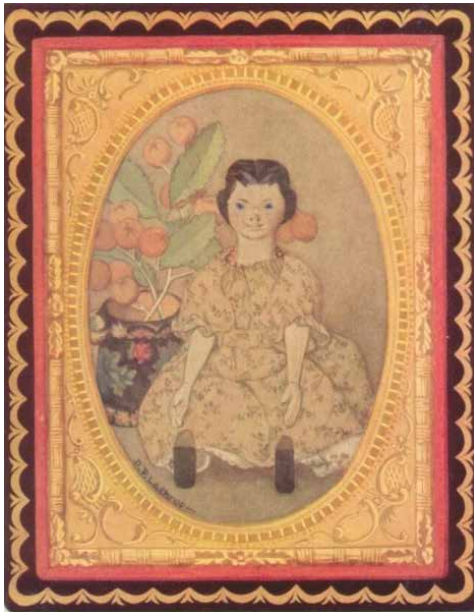


# Who is Hitty?

by Wendi Dunn

I first read *Hitty: Her First Hundred Years* by Rachel Field when I was a teenager, and I still have the somewhat battered hardcover copy which I purchased used for \$1. The edition was printed in October, 1943, and it had the colored frontispiece of Hitty sitting for her daguerreotype, illustrated by Dorothy P. Lathrop. I remember thinking at the time that it was a really good story, and as a young doll collector, I would have loved to have my own Hitty doll. But few people were making Hitty dolls at that time.



*Illustration by Dorothy P. Lathrop for the frontispiece of Hitty: Her First Hundred Years*

The real Hitty is located at the Stockbridge Library Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where Rachel Field grew up. In 1928, Rachel found Hitty in an antique shop on West Eighth Street in New York City's Greenwich Village. Thinking that the doll must have had a long and interesting history, Rachel decided to write her story. She collaborated with illustrator Dorothy P. Lathrop, whose delightful illustrations of Hitty helped to tell the tale. The result was the book, *Hitty: Her First Hundred Years*, published in 1929 (see [How Hitty Happened](#)).

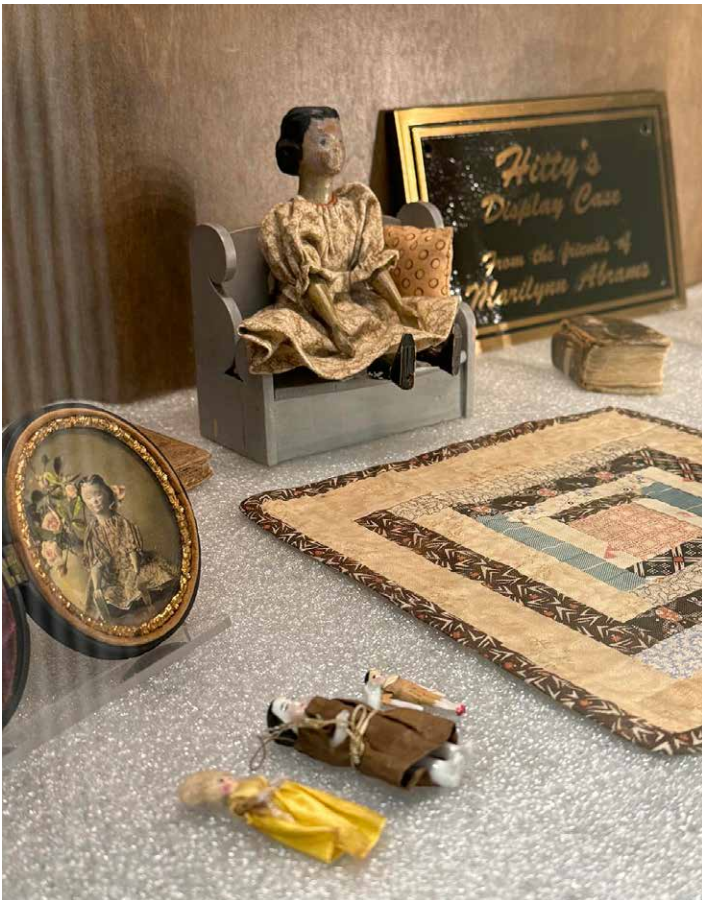
Admirers of the antique doll often refer to her as "Ancestor Hitty," since she was the catalyst and inspiration for all of her Hitty sisters to come.



*Above: Photo of the real Hitty in the Stockbridge Library Museum in 2024 (courtesy of Beth Anne Hall)*

*Below: Hitty in 2019, in her original glass case, wearing a replica of her antique sprig dress, made by Martha Cramer (courtesy of Beth Anne Hall)*





*Above: Hitty on display at the Stockbridge Library Museum in 2024 (courtesy of Beth Anne Hall)*

The Stockbridge Library Museum underwent renovations in 2023. Hitty is now featured in a much larger display case in a more prominent part of the library. Her possessions have been spread out on two shelves inside the display.



*Above: Hitty's desk and rug (courtesy of Beth Anne Hall)*

One of Hitty's most beautiful pieces of furniture is a lovely maple desk, displayed next to a tiny hooked rug with a whale motif.

In the book, *Hitty: Her First Hundred Years*, an old peddler, traveling through Maine in the middle of winter, took refuge at the Preble house during a storm. He ended up staying there to help Mrs. Preble around the house while her husband, Captain Preble, was at sea. During his time with the Prebles, the peddler carved Hitty from a small piece of mountain ash wood as a gift for seven-year-old Phoebe Preble. The doll's original name was "Mehitabel," but that was too much of a mouthful for Phoebe to say, and so she became, "Hitty."

Rachel's book won the Newbery Medal for children's literature in 1930, making her the first woman to receive this prestigious award. Rachel became a celebrity, and so did the antique doll. Rachel traveled to locations across the country, with Hitty safely locked in a glass case, to be viewed in schools, libraries and shops (see [Hitty in the Bookshop](#)).



In this closeup of Hitty's face, note the timeworn appearance, which gives her so much character and appeal. She is wearing a necklace of coral beads.

*Left: Closeup of Hitty (courtesy of Beth Anne Hall)*

Many articles about Hitty have been published over the years. The first one I remember reading was called, "Where is Hitty?" This article by Dottie Baker appeared in the February/March 1986 issue of *Doll Reader* magazine. The article described a miniature four-poster canopy bed that belonged to Hitty. Along with the doll, which was missing at that time, it also mentioned various other items for Hitty which had disappeared.

Two years later, in 1988, *Doll Reader* printed an article called, "Hitty' Is Found!" by Nancy Reinhart Charlton. Apparently, Hitty had been bequeathed to the illustrator, Dorothy Lathrop, after Rachel Field died at the young age of 47. Then after Dorothy died many years later, Hitty became the property of Dorothy's distant cousin, Roger B. Linscott, of Pittsfield, MA. He donated Hitty to the Stockbridge Library Association in January 1988.

The article showed Hitty wearing a plum colored cotton dress, made by Dorothy from antique fabric. But where is this dress today? That is a mystery I am trying to solve. (see [Hitty's Library Dress](#)).

I made a replica of the missing dress and donated it to the Stockbridge Library Museum. You can see it on display along with some of Hitty's original clothing.



*Above: Hitty's antique sprig dress (courtesy of Beth Anne Hall)*



*Above: Hitty's dresses in the library (courtesy of Beth Anne Hall)*

The next photo shows a closeup of Hitty's antique sprig print dress, made from a tube of fabric which was hand-gathered at the top. The dress is sometimes referred to as the daguerreotype dress, since Hitty was wearing it in her antique photo. Next to the dress is a hardcover copy of the book.

The state of Maine played an important part in the book. In fact, the book was dedicated "to the State of Maine and Abbie Evans." Abbie Evans was a poet and naturalist who was a friend of Rachel Field. In July of 1928, she helped Dorothy and Rachel brainstorm ideas about Hitty's timeline for the book, during a summer visit to Rachel's cottage, "Bunchberry Bungalow." The cottage was located on Sutton Island, one of Maine's Cranberry Islands, and Rachel's history there is well researched in the book *The Field House: A Writer's Life Lost and Found on an Island in Maine* by [Robin Clifford Wood](#).

The Great Cranberry Island Historical Society ([GCHIS](#)) operates a museum and maintains archives related to Hitty, including a collection of books by and about Rachel Field along with some of her letters. The museum even has a restaurant called, "Hitty's Cafe." Hitty's fictional birthplace was based on a real house located on Great Cranberry Island. It was built in 1827 by Captain Samuel Hadlock, Jr. Although the Preble family in the book is fictional, there was a real Preble family who lived in the house for generations.



Above: the historic Preble house on Great Cranberry Island, Maine (courtesy of Becca Green)

In addition to the charm of the original book, much of Hitty's appeal in modern times can be explained by the many admirers who collect or make their own small travel dolls inspired by Hitty, taking them on new adventures. The [Hittygirls group](#) was founded in 2001 by Julie Old Crow and Sara. On the [Hittygirls website](#) you can find a wealth of information about Hitty. Although the website has not been updated recently, the photos are still fun to look at.

Another good place to find Hitty enthusiasts is the [Hitty & Friends Facebook group](#). If you have a Facebook account and are accepted to the group, you will be able to view the posts by members as they share the daily adventures of their Hitty dolls. Members also have access to patterns and articles about Hitty in the files section of the group. Several group members have shared their photos and videos of the real Hitty in the Stockbridge Library Museum.

Most Hitty dolls are hand-carved or hand-made, often by the collectors themselves. Back in 2013, I decided to carve my own Hitty doll. I have to say that carving takes a LOT of practice, but it can be quite fun. Especially when you can connect with other carvers through carving classes, either in person or online. A few years ago, I was lucky enough to find an online Hitty carving class with [Janet Denton Cordell](#), who is well known for her realistically carved wooden dolls with charming expressions. Janet generously shares her carving tips with others. She has a video tutorial for carving a Hitty which is available for members of the Woodcarving Academy.

If you would like to try carving your own replica of Ancestor Hitty, you will need a pattern with accurate measurements. I created a list of her measurements along with photos of my Michael Langton Hitty, made from a 3D scan of Ancestor Hitty (see [Hitty Dimensions](#)).



Above: Two Michael Langton Hitty Dolls

Of course, not all Hittys are copies of the antique, and the dolls aren't always wooden... which is part of the fun of the Hitty world. Hittys can be made from cloth, paper mache, china or polymer clay. They can even be knitted, crocheted or perhaps someday soon... 3D printed (see [Virtual Kitty](#)). The important thing is for the doll to have Hitty's adventurous spirit. Playing with Hitty means having no limits on imagination.

Some might argue that playing with dolls is a form of escapism. My reply to them is, what's wrong with that? When I wrote "[The Ginger Club](#)," it was fun to imagine all my red-headed dolls having a reunion to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Ginger Club member Kelsey is my newest doll, made from a Gail Wilson kit.

I think we can all benefit from the gentle pleasures that a doll like Hitty provides. If you agree, take a look at my [Hitty Fun](#) page which features links to all the posts about Hitty and Kitty. The world of Hitty keeps growing and shows no signs of stopping, and I think I know why. When Hitty dolls and their owners share their stories and adventures, they make friendships which are priceless. Now I feel privileged to be able to share the story of Hitty with others, through my book, *A Tale of Two Hittys*. Will you join me on my journey?



Above: Hand-carved Maeve (2021) and Mabel (2019) with Kitty, my antique doll

### Links:

[A Tale of Two Hittys](https://ataleoftwohittys.com/): <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/>

[Gail Wilson Designs](https://www.gailwilsondesigns.com/): <https://www.gailwilsondesigns.com/>

[Hitty & Friends Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/hittfansandfriends): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/hittfansandfriends>

[Hitty Dimensions](https://ataleoftwohittys.com/hitty-dimensions/): <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/hitty-dimensions/>

[Hitty Fun](https://ataleoftwohittys.com/hitty-fun/): <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/hitty-fun/>

[Hitty in The Horn Book Magazine](https://ataleoftwohittys.com/hitty-in-the-horn-book-magazine/): <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/hitty-in-the-horn-book-magazine/>

[Hittygirls group on Groups.io](https://groups.io/g/Hittygirls): <https://groups.io/g/Hittygirls>

[Hittygirls website](https://www.hittygirls.com/): <https://www.hittygirls.com/>

[Janet Denton Cordell](https://woodcarvingacademy.com/teachers/janet-cordell/): <https://woodcarvingacademy.com/teachers/janet-cordell/>

[Robin Clifford Wood](https://www.robincliffordwood.com/): <https://www.robincliffordwood.com/>

[The Ginger Club](https://ataleoftwohittys.com/the-ginger-club/): <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/the-ginger-club/>

[Virtual Kitty](https://ataleoftwohittys.com/virtual-kitty/): <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/virtual-kitty/>

[Who is Hitty?](https://ataleoftwohittys.com/who-is-hitty/) <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/who-is-hitty/>



Above: [The Ginger Club](#) includes (left to right) Maeve, Shannon Rose, Kelsey, Kitty and Olivia.

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Adapted from blog post: <https://ataleoftwohittys.com/who-is-hitty/>

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