

West Market Street United Methodist Church

THE TROXLER FAMILY NATIVITY SCENE

In the late 1960's, San Antonio's Christmas season was marked by a small but cherished tradition among downtown shoppers who stopped by the sidewalk showcases of two stores and gazed in awe at the marvelous Christmas Nativity exhibits produced by Mrs. Fern Deutsch and her aunt, Mrs. Besse McGee. These Nativity scenes were staged with hand-crafted dolls made from leather. They were so life-like that some folks were convinced they detected real movements in the figures. Using wire, plaster, plastic, padding, chamois, dabs of paint, hanks of hair, and bits of fabric and trinkets, the women created settings as pleasing to the eye as they were teasing to the imagination.

Mrs. Deutsch, the daughter of a successful window display designer, provided the inspiration for the arrangement of the individual figures, did the basic construction, and finished each figure with intricate details. Mrs. McGee's ingenuity is evident in the meticulous costuming and ornamentation of the dolls. Together they produced more than a dozen adoration groups, usually consisting of some 20 separate pieces.

A typical setting included the Holy Family, the Magi, shepherds and their flock, and angels and animals. Most exquisite among the figures were the Wise Men and their camels, each draped heavily with jewels, gold trim, silks, satins, and shiny leather. The faces and hands were of a secret composition, usually covered with kidskin and hand painted in oil.

Not only was the craft of Mrs. Deutsch and Mrs. McGee an unusual one in the days of manufactured dolls, but their works were highly prized because each was an original. The women employed no understudies to continue their style.

And now the part of the story that touches us as members of West Market Street United Methodist Church. Patricia and Jerry Troxler were long-time members of this church and were very active in many areas over the years. Patricia had been a doll collector all her life, and in 1971, joined a Federated Doll Club. Jerry supported and encouraged her involvement from the very beginning.

Shortly after joining the Doll Club, Patricia became friends with a lady who had the most beautiful and unique Nativity scene she had ever seen. Patricia and Jerry attended the friend's open house every Christmas and admired the Nativity. It was made by a National Doll artist from San Antonio, Texas, Fern Deutsch and her aunt, Besse McGee.

Patricia learned that Fern had made only five of these particular Nativity scenes—one for her church in San Antonio, another by special order of Patricia's friend, another was made for a gentleman in New York who owned a museum, the fourth was for Fern's son, and they do not know about the fifth one.

Over the years, Patricia and Jerry continued to admire their friend's set. One day they received a call from another friend who was a National Doll dealer who told them that the museum owner in New York was closing his museum. He had no family to pass his set to, so the Troxlers placed a bid and fortunately were able to purchase it. After their purchase, they had the great pleasure of meeting Fern Deutsch and Besse McGee. What a thrill that was!

Through the years, Patricia and Jerry enjoyed their Nativity Scene at home and on occasion shared it with others here at church. Today, we are pleased to share this Nativity Scene inside our Chancel, and you are invited to marvel at the beauty of the faces and elaborate costuming. Our thanks to the Troxler daughters, and we hope that this will become a special memory in your Christmas experience as we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.