

Historic American Indian Dolls
and the children who played with them



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Drawing after Frederic Remington

Forward

During a quiet evening, when a gentle breeze was there, the sound of an aspen limb rubbing against the adobe parapet on my office roof provided a predictable, raspy, cadenced tone that annoyed my wife. When I explained to her, in my characteristic, placid voice, that the sound was merely Nature's way of reminding us to look and hear in ways that might otherwise go unnoticed or untried, she got up and went to bed.

So, as I sat there past midnight in the solitude I had grown to treasure, I heard a different sound, faint but somehow compelling. *What could it be?* I thought. Beside my desk at banco level there came the infrequent whispers from the failing fire, but they could not have been the cause of my distraction. Then I glanced over at the dolls. They were crowded on a table against the west wall, all fifty-eight of them, and they were staring at me as if they couldn't quite believe I was ignoring them. Suddenly I was convinced that I was seeing disappointment in their eyes. Was it their voices I had heard, quietly begging me to tell their story? It was at that instant that I decided to write this book.





Sioux doll with blond hair
plate 10



The great Quahada Comanche chief, Quanah Parker (1845-1911) had seven wives, five of them at the same time. This picture shows his fourth wife, Ah-Uh-Wuth-Takum, and her two daughters, Ester on the left and Needa, who holds a Kiowa-style miniature cradleboard.

For over fifty years I had collected old Indian dolls, and until that night they had been merely artifacts to me, curiosities I enjoyed looking at but had never bothered to study. I selected several and one at a time examined them in the candid light of an incandescent bulb; they seemed suddenly warm and somehow vital, as if they had stories they needed to tell. What did the Sioux warrior standing in the front row with his bit of blond human scalp stitched on the back of his head want me to say about him?

The dolls lived in a time when man and his ways were more easily accepted by his surroundings, and now in each I see an adventure. Surely one must have belonged to Standing Holy, the daughter of Sitting Bull or Quanah Parker's daughter Needa, who was pulled from a burning house by Aubra Birdsong, and later became his wife. Perhaps Needa's little girl, Anona, played with one of these dolls. At least it's fun to think about those things.

As the days passed and I became increasingly involved, the dolls seemed alive for me and conjured up visions of children playing together beside a teepee flap or down along the endless barrancas and river bottoms that punctuate the Western Plains. I felt the peace of these imagined scenes, the elders standing aside, smiling and nodding their approval. Life could be difficult, but it could also be sweet. Despite my saying on many occasions that the

good old days weren't worth a damn, and despite the possibility that my many imaginings may be regarded as wild and romantic, I still think I was born a hundred years too late. Through the objects and artifacts of those times I have lived vicariously.

I have tried to be as accurate in the doll descriptions and narratives as my own facility will allow, but anticipate that there may be some disagreements with regard to tribal attributions and dates, so of course I welcome comments and corrections from those whose expertise I failed to seek. How knowledgeable any of us are will very likely be a matter of academic dispute, because the separate trails these dolls traveled on their long journey into my care are lost to actual memory and mostly forgotten by history.

It is unfortunate that the names of those children who knew these dolls the best and played with them the most also have drifted away on the winds of time, long before their history would be written by others—by outsiders like me. ~



Playing teepee