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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>The Saralee Negro dolls, 1951.</th>
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<td><strong>Call Number</strong></td>
<td>JWJ MSS 124</td>
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<td><strong>Creator</strong></td>
<td>Von Hesse, Maxeda Ferguson.</td>
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The James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of
Negro Arts & Letters
Founded by Carl Van Vechten
1941

Gift of
Maxine von Hesse
THE SARALEE NEGRO DOLLS

Out of her extensive work in inter-racial relations on an over-all community basis, Sara Lee Creech found that there were no quality Negro dolls manufactured and offered to the colored and white children of this country.

This discovery led to a survey being made of the retail merchants and was verified again when Miss Creech and Maxeda von Hesse covered the wholesale toy market of the United States. NO TOP QUALITY COLORED DOLLS ARE AVAILABLE TO AMERICAN CHILDREN REGARDLESS OF RACE. The few Negro dolls being manufactured are an insult to the colored race and an equal insult to every white person who has a friendship for and an appreciation of the American Negroes. These few colored dolls mentioned are, without exception, factory rejects and discards of white dolls; they have been manufactured cheaply, painted cheaply with inferior wigs being used AND SOLD AT TOP QUALITY PRICES.

When these facts were proved by Miss Creech and Miss von Hesse, they decided upon a course of action feeling strongly that EQUALITY OF QUALITY must start with and extend through children at play.
The first step Miss Creech and Miss von Hesse took was to employ the services of a top-flight professional sculptor who had won many honors and awards with her work. Mrs. Sheila Burlingame, the sculptor, is best represented in the Urban League headquarters building at St. Louis with the statue of a young Negro boy praying. The Urban League purchased this figure after it won an award. It was on a basis of this work that Mrs. Burlingame was selected to model the heads of the Saralee Dolls.

These instructions were given to Mrs. Burlingame at the outset:—“Capture in these children’s heads the sweetness, the simplicity, and the natural dignity of the finest type of our colored children. Model the heads so attractive and true, without the taint of caricature or the grotesque, so that these dolls will be loved for themselves as children above thought of race.”

This the sculptor achieved, as will be seen in the following pictures of the doll models.

As one leading Negro educator said on seeing the actual models, “Why, these are the same little faces that look up to me every day.” The president of an outstanding university viewed the models and said, “They look just like my grandchildren. Do you think I could get the dolls for this Christmas?”
Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Dr. Ralph Bunche, to mention only two of the eminent men and women who have seen the models, have expressed unanimously their appreciation and approval and said, “How can I help you bring these dolls to children?” Without thought of race, as we intended the dolls to be, people who have seen them have reached out with almost an affection to pat their heads and turn them to view them from all sides.

Again without exception all who have seen the Saralee Dolls have asked how they can help to make them available to every child in America, speeding the understanding and appreciation of each other we need and want in living and working and playing together.
While the best professional craftsman was employed to do the casting and finishing of these models, and the best professional wig maker was used, two details of the Saralee Dolls are not satisfactory, but will be when they are perfected for production. We refer to the eyes which in the finished doll will be movable, and entirely natural and lustrous (the eyes now perforce had to be painted in and thus are not right). The second item to be changed is the color of the dolls which will be selected, prior to production, by a jury of colored leaders. Please bear in mind that we are cognisant of these faults. The details of the lips, nose and ears will of course be cleaner in detail as these heads are only the original rough models.
SARA LEE CREECH
with
the assistance of
MAXEDA von HESSE
and
SHEILA BURLINGAME
have the pleasure to present
the following members
of
THE SARALEE DOLL FAMILY
SARA LEE CREECH

Miss Sara Lee Creech is a young woman who is an outstanding civic leader in her home community of Belle Glade, in Palm Beach County, State of Florida. She has been President of the Florida Federation of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.; Editor-in-Chief of the magazine, "The Florida Business Woman"; Director of the Florida State Chamber of Commerce; Palm Beach County Resource Development (serving on County Zoning Committee); is a member of her town zoning council; a member of the city planning commission; and is best known within and outside of her state, as a founder and leading spirit in her community Inter-Racial Council.

This past year, through the Inter-Racial Council, she has been instrumental in bringing to Belle Glade, one of the most modern and finest Negro elementary schools in the entire South. In addition to this, she has been influential in obtaining a colored playground and athletic field with supervised recreation.

Her home and businesses are in Belle Glade, Florida where she owns and operates an insurance agency and florist business. Her judgement, her integrity and her opinions are respected and admired beyond the limits of her town and state. It is largely Miss Creech's foresight which is responsible for the entire venture of bringing quality colored dolls to American children. Those persons who think in terms of monetary gain only may be astonished to know that the Saralee Dolls have been brought to reality with the thought and purpose first and foremost of aiding Inter-Racial Relations. White and Negro leaders in all fields of public service have recognized this integrity in her thinking and actions. It is through such white Southerners that the whole of racial understanding and appreciation can be and is helped and extended in scope.

The Saralee Dolls are a venture based upon mutual benefit.
MAXEDA FERGUSON VON HESSE

Maxeda Ferguson von Hesse is an author, lecturer and the Director of the von Hesse Studios of Effective Speech and Human Relations in New York City. For years her interest and work have been in the promotion, through effective use of words spoken and written of understanding between peoples of our nation.

Miss von Hesse’s students include outstanding men and women in all fields of activity in business, industry, education, the arts and sciences, and government.

A personal friend of Miss Creech’s, she has assisted her in bringing the Saralee Dolls into being.

Maxeda Ferguson von Hesse...... (See “Who’s Who in the East”)


SHEILA BURLINGAME

One of the outstanding American sculptors, Sheila Burlingame gained prominence originally as a Western artist. She trained as a student in the Art Students League of New York, Le Grande Chaumiere of Paris and studied and traveled extensively in Italy, Sweden, Finland, and Mexico ..., working under the tutelage of these countries’ leading sculptors.

Mrs. Burlingame has taught, as well, being at one time supervisor of The Taylor School and Community School of St. Louis, Mo.; she worked for a time as staff artist of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Portraits of famous men and women of the Mid-West have been done by Mrs. Burlingame. Her work is in numerous museums and private collections throughout the United States and England. Some of her ecclesiastical sculpture may be seen in St. Mark’s Church of St. Louis, St. Mary’s Church in Faragould, Arkansas and the Church of the Ascension in Denver, Colorado. Garden sculpture of Mrs. Burlingame’s may be seen in innumerable gardens from coast to coast and border to border. One of her statues is in the garden of Miss Linda Darnell of Hollywood.

Mrs. Burlingame has held three one-man shows in New York. She has exhibited in Fairmont Park in Philadelphia, in the International Sculpture Show, in the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, in the Art Institute of Chicago, National Academy of Art in New York, in Chappell House, Denver, Colorado, in Kansas City Art Museum, St. Louis Art Museum, the Albright Galleries of Buffalo, New York, and the Wichita, Kansas Art Museum, to mention only a few.

Some of the prizes and awards won by Sheila Burlingame are: The Gold Medal of the Midwestern Artists, awarded several times the First and Second Prizes in the St. Louis Artists’ Guild, the same recognition given her in the St. Louis Art League and Garden Sculpture exhibits of St. Louis, winner of the Amelia Peabody Prize of the National Women’s Painters and Sculptors of New York, winner of the Sculpture Prize of Professional Artists of New York City, the Founder’s Prize of Pen & Brush Club, and many others.
In the United States, we have thousands of talented men and women. Talent, per se, is not too uncommon. Artists, however, are rare for to be an artist is to have a disciplined and trained talent. Sheila Burlingame is an outstanding American artist and artisan. At the present time she is preparing a one-man show at the Architectural League, an unusual honor to come to any sculptor.

Memberships in: The Architectural League, the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, the National Sculptors' Society and the Pen and Brush Club.