

North Carolina - Annie Hooper - Bible Figures

BIOGRAPHY

- 1897 On February 26 Annie was born. For much of her life she lived at Buxton (Cape Hatteras) in the Outer Banks.
- ca.1917? She married John Hooper, who was a fisherman for his young adult life during their early years of marriage. Every day while he was fishing, Annie tried to write a poem for him. Eventually John built and managed the Lighthouse Hotel, once he gave up fishing.
- 1949? When she was about 52 (by her own recollection) Annie suffered some traumatic event which induced mental illness. This illness caused her to experience amnesia, blackouts, and hearing voices. At the Dorothea Dix Mental Hospital in Raleigh she apparently underwent electro-shock therapy.
- 1950's Once she returned to the Outer Banks, she was encouraged by her voices to begin her art works. She was then in her mid 60's. According to Roger Manley, when she approached electrical outlets, she heard voices and angels guiding her to create figures. The creation of these figures were to reveal the more pleasant, life-affirming aspects of Christian story-telling. A devout Christian, Annie served as Lay Speaker and a teacher of an adult class for her church, duties she would fulfill for 30 years.

Out of driftwood and English putty/cement, she created 5,000 Bible story figures. The figures represented: hundreds of sheep, birds, angels; Children of Israel; animals from the Valley of the Shadow of Death; the Exodus from Egypt; Daniel in the Lions' Den; the Sermon from the Mount, among other important Christian events. Some of her rooms were draped with tinsel and artificial flowers, other rooms were so crowded with her Bible figures that Annie needed a yardstick to reach her light. Her figures perched on stove burners, hid in corners, or boldly confronted the artist and viewer. Varying in size and weight, a few of the figures weighed more than two times Annie's own weight.

Encouraging visitors Annie presented her works by "animating" them, holding a figure in each hand, and providing the narration or dialogue.

- 1982? John died an invalid when Annie was about 85 years old.
- 1985 The Jargon Society hired a folklorist, Catherine Peck (?) to spend two months with Annie. Every figure and scene was carefully labeled and documented, accompanied by Annie's tape recorded narration.
- 1986 On January 11 Annie died "after slipping off her wedding ring and handing it to her granddaughter" (see NL # 3). She remained a humble servant to Her Creator and a loving wife devoted to her husband's memory.
- 1988 Annie Hooper's work and vision were the subjects of the North Carolina State University exhibition and symposia, "A Blessing from the Source: the Annie Hooper Bequest".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Manley, Roger

- 1985 "Ten Environments in the Carolinas", SPACES Newsletter (#2), pp. 6-7 *

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1986 "Annie Hooper" (Cover story on Annie's death), SPACES Newsletter (#3), pp. 1, 5 *

(* - references in SPACES archives)

EXHIBITIONS

"A Blessing from the Source: the Annie Hooper Bequest", Visual Arts Programs, North Carolina State University, April 23 - June 30, 1988 (Roger Manley served as Guest Curator and Moderator of the Symposia).

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