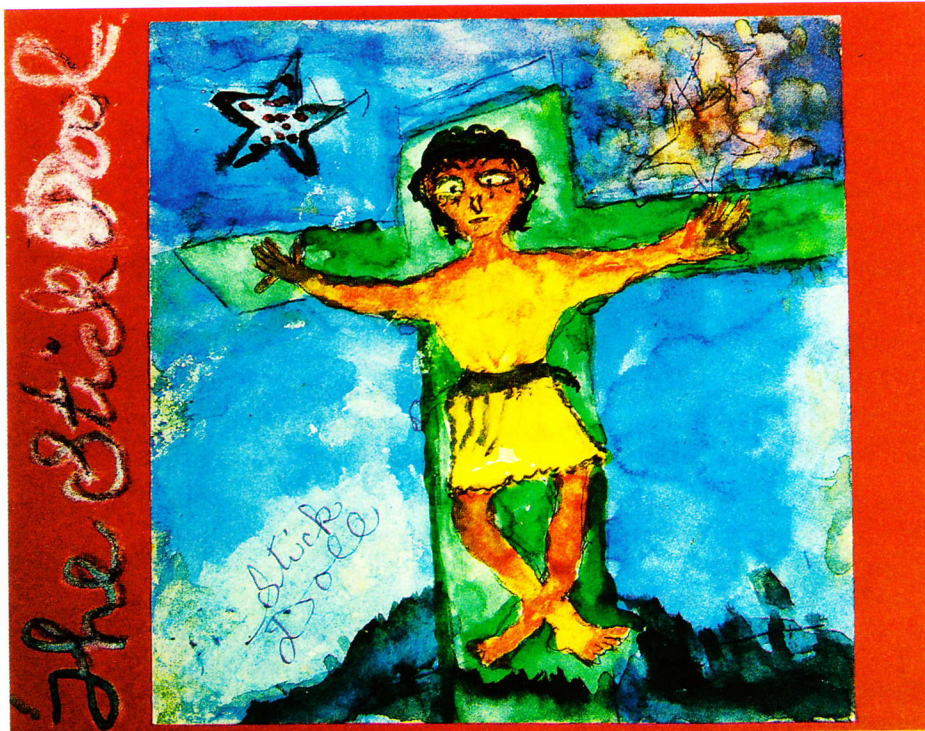


Speaking of TEXAS

HISTORY, FOLKLORE, AND FASCINATING FACTS



Naomi Polk's watercolor *Stick Doll* embodies the self-taught Houston artist's deep Christian faith, reflects her African heritage, and recalls the stick dolls her mother made for her as a youngster.

NAOMI POLK

Naomi Polk never considered her art "quite good enough to share with the outside world." Yet in 2004, one of her paintings sold at auction for \$3,900.

She was born in 1892 in Houston's Fourth Ward, where thousands of slaves fled after Emancipation. Her maternal grandmother and mother were freed slaves, whose stories influenced her poetry and paintings.

Naomi was in her forties when she began decorating discarded orange juice cans with flowers and butterflies. The twice-widowed mother of three filled the cans with flowers and sold them around the neighborhood to supplement her small government check. She wrote poetry in the early morning, and fashioned paintings with oil-based enamel, watercolor, crayon, and felt-tip marker on canvases of scavenged material. Inspired by her African-American heritage and deep religious conviction, her art soon became her life's work.

After Naomi's death in 1984, her

daughter, Rosalie Taylor, helped gain recognition for her mother's work. In 1989, the paintings appeared alongside those of five other Texas artists in an important traveling exhibit sponsored by the Huntington Art Gallery (now the Blanton Museum of Art) at the University of Texas at Austin. The exhibit showcased black folk artists whose work reflects generations of oral and visual traditions. Naomi Polk, her daughter said, would have been "both surprised and pleased."

—Ann Kelton, Austin

MICKY RATHBONE

Some might say that Milton E. "Mickey" Rathbone Jr. of Eldorado got his showboat athletic style from his trumpet-playing father,

Milton Sr., who played for a time with Lawrence Welk. As quarterback for the San Angelo High School Bobcats, Mickey led his underdog team to a big upset victory over the Highland Park Scots of Dallas in the state semifinals in December 1943.

Nine thousand frenzied fans witnessed that semifinal game. With his team down 20 to 14, seven yards from the goal line, and with time running out, Mickey's final call fooled the Scots' defense and even the referee, Ab Curtis, who accidentally got between Mickey and Milford Taft, the intended receiver. The ball hit Curtis in the face, causing him to fall to the ground. As he fell, the ball bounced off his stomach and then his foot. Seeing his opportunity, Mickey scooped up the ball and ran it in. The Bobcats won 21-20, and went on to trounce Lufkin 26-13 the following week for that year's state football championship.

Many of those who attended the semifinal game remember it to this day and recall how Mickey kept future Hall of Famers Bobby Layne and Doak Walker—both of whom were on the Highland Park team—out of the championship. Yet Rathbone says he ran because of fear more than anything else. "I never did like being hit," he says. "If I got the ball, I would run like hell."

For Rathbone, who soon shipped out with the U.S. Navy to serve in World War II, the celebration was short-lived. But not forgotten: In May of last year, Mickey, along with eight other Texas high-school footballers, was inducted into the Texas High School Football Hall of Fame in Waco.

Mickey, now 79, and his wife, Myrta, still go to all the Bobcat games as season-ticket holders. As for exercise, Mickey hunts, checks on his cattle regularly, and lets his dog, Tiger, retrieve the golf balls his master chips around the backyard in Eldorado.

—Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe, Argyle