

ROLE PLAYING WITH CHILDREN

By Kathy MacGregor

GRADE LEVEL: Elementary

Prepared in partial fulfillment of requirements for
"INDIANA AND THE NEW NATION, 1776-1876"
a project of the Historic Southern Indiana Project
of the University of Southern Indiana
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FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

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"INDIANA AND THE NEW NATION"

January 25, 1991

National Endowment for the Humanities Grant

1989-1991

MARTHA JENKINS - INDIANA HOUSEWIFE

A presentation by Katherine MacGregor

I. Summary of the Character:

Martha Jenkins was born in North Carolina in 1811. Her family moved to Butler County, Kentucky where she married Thomas Jenkins. A son, George, was born in 1834. Thomas and Martha moved to Indiana sometime before 1842. The Pike County census for 1860 shows Thomas and Martha owning a farm valued at \$1955. Their household in 1860 included: Sarah, Thomas's mother, who was born in New Jersey c.1785; daughter, Julia, born in Indiana in 1842; son, Squire, born in Indiana in 1845; son, Joseph, born in Indiana in 1846; and son, F.C., born in Indiana in 1854.

The older son, George, is listed with their household with his son, Silas, born in 1856.

II. How I chose this Character:

I selected Martha because she is my great-great-great grandmother and I was familiar with her from my genealogy research. I filled in the facts of her life with family stories and research on Indiana in 1850.

III. Costume:

My costume was made from McCall's Pattern 2056. (I had ordered an authentic pattern catalog but it did not arrive in time).

My goal in role-playing was to inspire students to do role-playing of a character in Indiana in 1850. The students were divided into "families" according to occupations. For example, we had the doctor's family, the farmer's family, the preacher's family, the schoolmaster's family etc. Each group researched information according to their occupation. Because of the large amount of material and a shortage of time, each family was responsible only for their stories and shared information with the other groups. Costumes for the children were made up according to pictures in old books and in costume books. We were more concerned to avoid the obvious like wristwatches, and gym shoes than perfect period clothing. Lunch for the day was carried in baskets and old containers and was not supposed to be pre-packaged. The children were encouraged to personalize their character with family stories and names. Many were enthusiastic over characters from their family histories. We worked very hard to think of every aspect of everyday life in 1850 and to discuss how we would handle it. Left alone with their "families" to organize, the children became the leaders and I became the observer. Our project was a tremendous success.

Resources for a project like this will vary according to the time period you choose and the facilities you have available. We used many Indiana history books and novels to build our background.

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