

Silhouette artists are rare nowadays, good ones are rarer still, and only a handful are still around who can produce the once-common full-length or group silhouette portrait.

When Illinois silhouette artist Sally Newcomb takes scissors in hand, she is ready to produce either the customary "head shot" or the far more demanding full-length silhouette. One of the few highly skilled profile cutters in this country, Mrs. Newcomb has travelled the U.S. and Europe in the footsteps of the "papyrotomists" or "scissargraphists" of the 18th and 19th centuries. 2006 marked her 50th year in pursuit of the perfect likeness.

"People are always saying, 'Amazing, what a talent!' Much as I love compliments, it isn't a talent, really, it's more an obsession."

On visits to such historic sites as Greenfield Village, the Nantucket Historical Association, Mystic Seaport, Strawberry Bank, Shelburne



Museum or Boscobel Restoration, Newcomb enthusiastically describes

and demonstrates her draw-and-cut technique, one of the actual methods of 18th and 19th century "shade making." Visitors leave with a new understanding of this bit of traditional Americana, as well as with appropriate remembrances of the place and occasion—silhouettes that become part of family history.

"For the especially wiggly child: 'We just let them orbit and I pretty much catch them on the fly.'"

In past visits to Scotland, England, and Denmark, and now to department stores, children's shops, and church and school fund-raisers, Newcomb's appointment lists fills up rapidly with a parade of customers, many of whom return year after year. It is not uncommon for a grandparent, mother and child to make a festive day of it, including shopping, lunch, and portraits by "the silhouette lady."



As onlookers watch, Newcomb sketches her subject's face in about 5 minutes, or the figure in 10, first establishing what special toy or implement or stance might help to individuate the person. Another few minutes goes for careful cutting with 7" sewing scissors.

"People who go on about special scissors are sometimes trying to sell them to you." Her trademark full-length silhouettes take 20 minutes in all—the head-and-shoulders variety take only ten minutes.

Family groups present no challenge. She poses the whole group together, then releases all but the one family member she is concentrating on.

These groups or "conversations" as they were once called, celebrate family life in a special way. To further personalize the silhouette, Newcomb likes to include pets, toys, furniture and other things unique to a family.

"Prices for pets are variable, depending on size, behavior, and hairiness."



- The usual head silhouette fits in a 5"x7" frame.
- Oval and rectangular wood frames in various sizes and colors, but not framing service, are for sale at point of purchase.
- You are welcome to telephone Mrs. Newcomb to schedule an appointment at her home, or to learn about upcoming events.

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