

Elizabeth – Colonial Rag Doll – 24” x 15”

During the Colonial period, rag dolls were handmade from household scraps, reflecting the thrift and ingenuity practiced by early American families. Constructed of homespun fabric, these dolls often represented adults and were dressed in the familiar styles worn by their mothers. Far more than simple playthings, rag dolls served as comfort objects while also teaching young girls nurturing behaviors and essential domestic skills.

Most dolls were intentionally plain. They were faceless or simply stitched, without noise-making features, reflecting the values of modesty and restraint common in Colonial life. Other dolls, referred to as “rational toys,” were sold undressed so that girls could practice sewing and garment construction—skills considered necessary for both household management and personal responsibility.

This doll, named in honor of Betsy Ross, is faceless and was created using a borrowed pattern and entirely from reclaimed materials, honoring the same resourcefulness demonstrated by Colonial women. No new supplies were purchased. The homespun fabric used is lightweight cotton, often rustic in appearance and texture. During the American Revolution, homespun became a powerful patriotic symbol. By producing and wearing their own cloth, women actively participated in the homespun movement, protesting British taxation on imported goods and expressing loyalty to the cause of independence.

The doll’s body is stuffed with fabric remnants from a hanging quilt created by the Shelby Chapter, NSDAR, connecting this piece to a shared legacy of remembrance and service. All fabric, lace, and materials were reused from previous projects, much as they would have been during the Colonial era. The apron was repurposed from a discarded, half-embroidered pillowcase, and the dress and bonnet were fashioned from patterned cotton fabric, accented with lace and ribbon.

Like the dolls of the Colonial period, this doll carries more than stitches and cloth—it carries the values of thrift, patriotism, and the enduring creativity of women whose everyday efforts supported the ideals on which our nation was founded.