Who hasn't heard of Mother Goose? As adults, we remember some of the more popular nursery rhyme lines: “Mary had a little lamb, Jack and Jill went up the hill,” or “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.” But most of us can’t quite remember our mothers reading those rhymes to us because we were so young. It might be said that Mother Goose, herself, repeated those old nursery jingles to us over and over again. Was it really Mother Goose’s hand that rocked the cradle?

There is not much known about the history of Mother Goose, and this book is not going to discuss the origins of Mother Goose, except through some of the old Mother Goose illustrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America.

Mother Goose of Yesteryear deals mostly with the art of book illustrations of long ago and the nursery rhymes that were being illustrated at that time. Also included are antique trade cards, postcards, newspapers, and magazine illustrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mother Goose was symbolized as either having a witchlike appearance, wearing bright colored clothing, or as an anthropomorphic goose, whom children gathered around to listen to her recitation of nursery rhymes and tales. All in all she was a storyteller, and a good one at that.

A few of her books began appearing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and by the end of the nineteenth century, they were becoming very popular. Many of the early illustrations were drawn anonymously. Book publishers didn’t give the illustrators of these drawings any recognition, and it wasn’t until after the turn of the twentieth century that artists began to gain acknowledgment. The Golden Age of Illustration began in the 1880s and lasted until the 1920s. Some of the more identifiable artists of that time are: Kate Greenaway, Walter Crane, Ethel Franklin Betts, Fanny Cory, Blanche Fisher Wright, Ella Dolebear Lee, Clara M. Burd, Frances Brundage, Chester Van Nortwick, Frederick Richardson, Eulalie Lenoki, and Arthur Rackham. Even Johnny Gruelle of Raggedy Ann fame illustrated a Mother Goose book, as well as Jesse Willcox Smith. You will come across many of these artists in this book.

Mother Goose of Yesteryear contains a lot of old nursery rhymes in the Rhyme Time section of this book. Of course, I couldn’t come anywhere close to including all the nursery jingles of old. As nursery rhymes were passed down through the centuries, some of the wording seemed to change, so you may not remember the rhymes as you learned them. Some of the jingles were crass in the focus of their rhymes; the old woman who lived in the shoe would probably be charged with child abuse today.

I hope you will enjoy and appreciate the vintage illustrations and pass this book on to your children as a reminder of the Mother Goose of yesteryear. So that Mother Goose and her nursery rhymes will be remembered in our hearts forever.