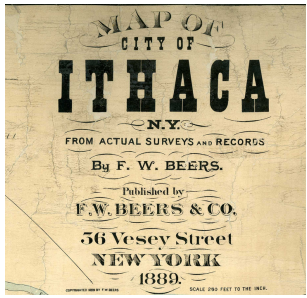




# The Tale of Caesar Grimalkin



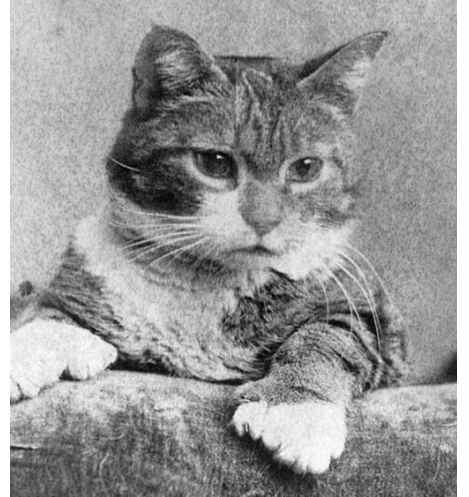
The History Center in Tompkins County, Map Published by F.W. Beers & Co. 1889

In 1888, Celia Mattison Smith (b.1852-1928) and William Hazlitt Smith (b.1853-1950, *Cornell class of 1873*) welcomed their first child, a little girl they nick-named Madge to their home at 116 Oak Avenue in Ithaca, New York. Celia and William were life-long residents of the Finger Lakes region of central New York. Both had family ties to the Town of Hector on the East side of Seneca Lake, and lived in Ithaca for the entirety of their adult lives. The Smiths were animal lovers, and were instrumental in founding the local chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in the 1890's. William served as the first president of the S.P.C.A. of Tompkins County, while also maintaining a legal practice in the city of Ithaca (*William retired at the age of 96 in 1950, making him the oldest practicing barrister in New York State*).

For their daughter Madge's first Christmas she received a toy Santa Claus doll made from scraps of fabric. Her mother Celia was quite inspired by the simplicity of the toy's design. As the family story goes, one day she was watching their cat, Caesar Grimalkin (*grimalkin is a Victorian English word for gray cat*), sitting in the sunlight, and exclaimed "I could make you out of three pieces of cloth!"

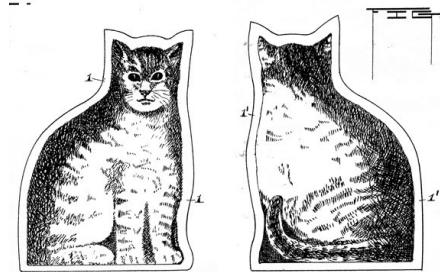
## Portraits, Patents & Paws

Celia developed an ingenious pattern that used three panels of cut calico (*a plain textile made from unbleached cotton popular for dress-making in the 1800's*), and a bit of pasting board at the base to ensure the toy would sit straight. At this point she enlisted the help of her sister-in-law Charity Smith, an accomplished local painter and children's book illustrator, to paint Caesar's likeness on the cloth. Caesar was quite the unwilling subject, and finally the women took him to Howes Photography studio on East State Street, where they were able to get the gray tabby to sit still long enough for a photograph. Ms. Madge Smith of Ithaca recalled her mother and aunt laughing at the memory of Caesar being held upside down as Charity attempted to capture his unique seven toed paws for the bottom panel (*known as polydactylism, this is a congenital physical anomaly which causes animals to be born with an unusual number of fingers or toes*).



The History Center in Tompkins County, Hinckley Family Collection, Portrait of Caesar Grimalkin, Howes Photography Studio 1892 V-63-9-8.2, #23

C. M. SMITH.  
TOY ANIMAL FIGURE.  
Patented Oct. 4, 1892.



The History Center in Tompkins County, Smith Collection, Tabby Cat Patent, October 4th 1892, V-2-3-12, #1

Celia and Charity had created a previous doll for baby Madge in 1889, the design of which was sold to Lawrence & Co. (*later Cocheco Manufacturing Co. of Boston*) where it became a popular seller. Celia and Charity were so excited about their new tabby cat pattern that they sent the design to the United States Patent and Trademark Office. The sisters decided however, that Caesar's seven-toed paws were too unusual for a toy, so Charity painted a second version with the paws of a non-polydactyl cat. The "Tabby Cat" design was patented on July 5th and October 4th 1892. Arnold Print Works of Massachusetts offered a flat fee of \$25 for the design which Celia turned down. As a counter-offer she requested one cent per printed yard (*at the time plain calico cost two cents per yard*). Arnold Print Works agreed to Celia's terms and took on the production and marketing of the toy, and the Tabby Cat was ready for sale by Christmas.

## A Well Traveled Cat

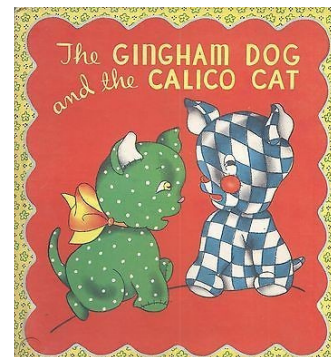
The toy was sold from Maine to California and was an immediate success. The Wanamaker Department Store in Philadelphia requested 500 Tabby Cats to be made up per day throughout the holiday season. The toy was soon sold in toy stores across the world. In her later years, Margaret Upton recalled taking her toy Tabby Cat "Buzzy" with her on holiday to South America, where she was then surprised and delighted to find Tabby Cats available in all the shops. The toy was mentioned in hundreds of newspapers and periodicals around the world and was known as the "Ithaca Kitty," "Tabby Cat," and the "Arnold Tabby" depending on the writer. Celia and Charity patented over 20 more toy designs, including four "Tabby Kittens" (*patented October 4th 1892*) which were displayed as a family with the original Tabby Cat at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The toy maintained its popularity until well after World War I (1914-1918).



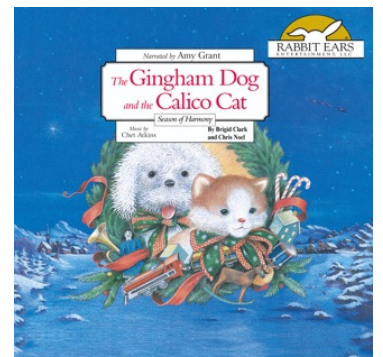
Smithsonian Design Museum Archival Collection, Cooper Hewitt, Textile, Tabby's Kittens 1892, 1964-53-3

## Inspired by Calico

American humorist and poet Eugene Field (b.1850 -1895) credited the "Arnold Tabby" as his inspiration for his popular poem "The Duel," which featured a gingham dog and a calico cat who fought in front of a Dutch clock and Chinese plate. This poem was recorded as a children's nursery song in 1960, and in 1993 inspired a children's book by Brigid Clark & Chris Noel entitled "The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat." This book became a narrated Christmas film and album the following year (*performed by Chet Atkins & Amy Grant*).



Field, Eugene, *The Duel*, [1892] 1944, Print.



*The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat*, Directed by C.W. Rogers, Starring Amy Grant, Chet Atkins, Laszlo Kubinyi, Rabbit Ears Entertainment, 1993



Ithaca Kitty Toy circa. 2017

## A Uniquely Ithacan Cat

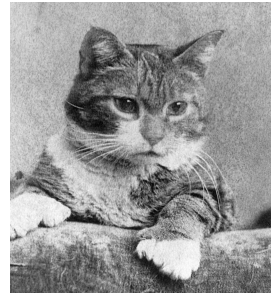
In the 1970's the DeWitt Historical Society (*now The History Center in Tompkins County*) sold a re-print of the Tabby Cat as a "Sew Your Own Ithaca Kitty" kit with the original printed design. In 2017, History Center volunteers unearthed a photograph of Caesar Grimalkin which highlights his polydactyl front paws, in addition to the Tabby Cat patents and related papers which had been collected by the Henry Hinckley Museum (1969-2000). In collaboration with local artist Stan Bowman, the bottom panel was re-designed to more authentically represent Caesar's polydactyl paws. All Ithaca Kitties available for purchase at The History Center in Tompkins County are now hand sewn by community volunteers. The History Center in Tompkins County is excited to share this piece of Ithaca-made history, and honor the artistic and entrepreneurial spirit of the two Ithaca women; Celia Mattison Smith and Charity Smith, who first created the world famous Tabby Cat, and the uniquely pawed IthaCat, Caesar Grimalkin, who inspired them.



# The Tale of Caesar Grimalkin

## Who is Caesar Grimalkin?

Caesar Grimalkin was a gray IthaCat with seven toes on each of his front paws who lived in Ithaca New York in the late 1800's. His owner Celia Mattison Smith designed a toy made to look like him that she named the "Tabby Cat." She first designed the toy for her baby daughter Madge who was born in 1888. She enlisted the help of her sister-in-law Charity Smith, an accomplished local artist, to paint the toy to look like Caesar. Celia and Charity sent their design to the United States Patent and Trademark Office and the "Tabby Cat" was officially patented on July 5th and October 4th 1892. Arnold Print Works in Massachusetts bought the pattern and sold the Tabby Cat print to toy shops and department stores across the United States, and even in Europe and South America! The Tabby Cat was such popular toy it was displayed at the Worlds Fair in Chicago in 1893 along with four toy Tabby Kittens that Celia and Charity designed and patented in the fall of 1892.



The History Center in Tompkins County, Hinckley Family Collection, Portrait of Caesar Grimalkin, Howes Photography Studio Unknown, V-63-9-8.2, #23

## What is an IthaCat?

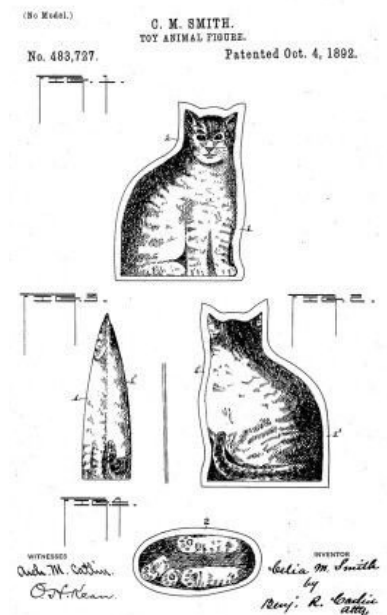
IthaCat's or Hemingway Cat's are nicknames for polydactyl (meaning "many-toed") felines. IthaCat's can have as many as nine toes on each paw (versus five toes on regularly pawed cats). This a physical anomaly common in house cats descended from ship-faring cats who traveled on boats from Western Europe to the East Coast of North America and along the Erie Canal. It was thought that the extra toes helped the cats balance on slippery ship decks.



The History Center in Tompkins County, Hinckley Family Collection, Portrait of a Young Girl with Tabby Cat, Unknown, V-63-9-8.2, #23



Ithaca Kitty Toy circa. 2020



The History Center in Tompkins County, Smith Collection, Tabby Cat Patent, October 4th 1892, V-2-3-12, #1