

St. Louis Blues...Convention 2011

Convention Highlights

Collectors who headed to St. Louis July 7-10 “caught the blues” during the 26th Annual International Willow Collectors Convention. Hosted by chairs Joyce LaFont, Carole Parson and Mary Lou Piepergerdes, the convention weekend was filled with events enjoyed by the more than 70 who attended.



The convention got off to a fun start with a special Thursday tour of St. Louis featuring stops at the Missouri Botanical Gardens and the famed Anheuser-Busch Brewery. Read more about the tour later in this article. After registering Thursday afternoon, attendees spent time in the hospitality room, enjoyed show & tell where everyone displayed their UFOs (Unusual Finds of Willow) and then in the evening gathered for a Milestone Reception, which honored those attending who had milestone events in

2011 with coffee and a special cake.

Friday morning began with the annual business meeting, followed by lectures from Hugh Sykes and Jeff Siptak. Hugh offered a special tour of Willowland, and Jeff took attendees back to the discovery of porcelain in Dresden, Germany. You can read more about these lectures later in the article.

After lunch, set-up began for the auction and many attended the craft session, led by Brenda Nottingham and Kathy Sykes, which resulted in some beautiful willow bracelets. By the afternoon it was time to preview the more than 350 auction items and attendees took notes on their favorite items. At 5 p.m. it was time for the auction to begin, but not before a special musical introduction by the Blue Brothers! Everyone clapped to the well-known “Soul Man” song and Harry Hall once again held the gavel as auctioneer.



Dealers began Saturday morning by setting up for the sale, and several attendees set up their tea setting displays for the competition which was to feature a tea setting for a famous person from St. Louis. Jeff Siptak won with his display for George Brown, founder of Brown Shoes and the person behind using the famed Buster Brown character for his



company. Jeff used many Buster Brown child's pieces from his collection in his display.

More speakers filled Saturday with Ken Kowen's presentation on the serving pieces you'd find on a tea table, and Irene Black, with the help of husband Ford Nashett, on where some of the elements of the Willow Pattern might have originated. Read about their lectures later in this article, too. The sale doors opened at 1 p.m. and attendees enjoyed several hours of shopping the more than 20 tables filled with willow. (Cont'd)



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It was a busy day and there was no better way to end it than by joining friends both old and new for the dinner banquet. James Gail was the after dinner speaker and had the room rolling with laughter as he recalled and shared some of his favorite stories about life, learning and collecting.



Convention attendance pins were handed out; the new board was introduced with Daisy Eden as the board's new secretary; and Rose Gray was thanked for her service as she left the board, having served as Vice President, President and, most recently, as secretary. Also during the banquet, Harry Hall and Jeff Siptak were presented emeritus status, and joined Connie Rogers as IWC lifetime members. At the end of the banquet Jeff Siptak presented a photo slide video of the first 25 years of IWC conventions.

Sunday morning's worship service was led by Tom and Daisy Eden and everyone then gathered for breakfast and closing remarks from Joyce LaFont, bringing the willow weekend to a close.

2011 St. Louis IWC Tour

Thirty-two willow people left the Renaissance Airport hotel in St. Louis on a trolley at 8:15 on Thursday, July 7. Our trolley driver was a lively and friendly person named Esther.



Esther kept us laughing throughout the tour with her politically "incorrect" assessment of St. Louis and the "little people" who settled the city. She was quite a gem and we loved her. Our first stop was the Botanical Gardens where we boarded a tram for a 20-minute ride around the gardens to familiarize us with the park. After the ride, we all went our separate ways to find our favorite piece of this beautiful place.



I headed for the Climatron to cool off in this covered, atrium building. It was like being in a rain forest, with birds flying through all the labeled plants and trees. On the way to the Tower Grove

House (home of founder Henry Shaw) we walked past fountains with Walla Walla sweet onion sculptures floating on the water. At the Tower Grove House we found a hidden treasure – a dining table set with flow blue willow. Our tour guide, Esther, had warned us that no tour would be complete without a dead body—which we found in the mausoleum (none other than Harry Shaw).

We hopped back on the trolley and our next stop was lunch at Rigazzi's on the Hill. This famous Italian buffet was phenomenal with everything from stuffed chicken breast to pasta Caggiano (shell pasta with shrimp, chicken, sausage, etc.) to fish and chips served English style. Esther thought we might be bored with the 1-1/2 hour Anheuser-Busch Brewery tour so she said she'd take us on a broader tour of St. Louis. We drove through many ethnic sections of St. Louis (Italian, French, old



sections with lots of upscale restaurants, old mansions, zoo, etc.) Then we had an unexpected stop at the Cathedral Basilica (Esther said that no one should come to St. Louis without seeing this landmark—even Pope John came from Rome to see it) and we hopped off the tram and went inside this most incredible cathedral—we thought we were in Europe!

So from cathedral to the brewery we went. We took a short tour of the Clydesdale stable—even saw Cindy, the horse that kicked the football in the commercials. We ended our tour in the hospitality room for our limit of two beer samples per person. It was great beer—even raspberry and lime flavored beer—yum!!

We did not arrive back at the hotel until after 4:30 p.m.—and missed the Ted Drew's ice cream store—but we were happy, because somehow "beer floats" didn't seem right at that time of day. Our willow journey had begun. – Rose Gray



2011 Convention Speakers

Jeff Siptak, Ford Nashett, Irene Black, Ken Kowen, Hugh Sykes and James Cail

*"Willowland" - Dubbo New South Wales, Australia
Hugh Sykes Lecture*



The lecture this year was accompanied by a brochure showing us the joys of touring Willowland that showcases all things Willow. It began with a little reprise of the lecture from 2010 with Roger Whittaker singing "Good Morning" "Hello Willow". The focus of Hugh's presentation was to give a brief overview of "Current Exhibits & Themes" at Willowland.

Willow for Sale featured Prices at the time for a 1989 Buffet Set, 1939 Allerton, 1938 Allerton and Japan and 1926 Montgomery Ward & Co. willow offerings.

Children's Willow overlooked the ceramic pieces this time in favor of the Ohio Art Co. 31 pc. tin set from the 1920s. This is the same company that produced the world famous Etch-a-Sketch.

Willow Reports is an exhibit in Willowland showing examples of all the various newsletters produced over the years featuring the willow pattern. We saw The Blue Willow Notebook from Oregon and California, The Willow Transfer Quarterly from Toronto, the American Willow Report from Ohio and the Willow Word from Texas.

Occupied Japan Willow, 1947-52. A brief history of this prized Japanese willow was given.

Breweriana Willow Advertising This is an area where Willowland has such an array of pieces not found elsewhere in the world including advertising wares re Guinness, Schweppes, Scotch and a new arrival: a Donald Fisher tip tray.

Hans Christian Andersen's Sandman Story finds a soft spot in the hearts of all children and willow

collectors. Hugh showed the two variations of the 1971 Wedgwood story plate as well as a special edition plate. The story with captions opened like a book before us on the screen.

Unusual Willow is an exhibition that is constantly changing as new things are found. Two of the treasures seen were a flour sifter from Australia and a bread bin.

The Willowland Movie House features this month the Disney 1931 classic "The China Plate" and brought back by popular demand (16 requests from last year and 27 emails), the Lennon Sisters performing the "Willow Pattern Plate", c. 1956, in costume with willow backdrops.

The presentation ended after seeing an old movie poster of Star Trek "Search for Children's Willow" and a return of the Mount Morgan Scouts Jeff and Harry. – *Connie Rogers*

"The Arcanum: White Gold to Blue Perfection"
Jeff Siptak Lecture



Using a format that has served him well in recent years for his lectures to the IWC, Jeff issued tickets for "one more trip" – this time to the World's Fair in St. Louis, 1904. It was a most successful World's fair with 20 million visitors to the country's 4th largest city. While at the fair, we were taken on a Meissen History Tour.

We traveled back to the 17th century when the Arcanum or great secret for turning base metal into gold was central in the minds of alchemists who sought the substance by which this could be done. Augustus, the Strong was king of Poland and the elector of Saxony from 1693-1733. He was amassing a large collection of Chinese blue and white and became short on cash. He had spent three million in the first year of his reign! Porcelain, then called white gold, was his great love. It is said that if you have a longing for white gold or gold itself, you never have enough. Augustus needed a way to get more gold. Bottger, a young apprentice, said he could change metal into gold. Augustus captured him November 28, 1701, and imprisoned him until he could produce gold. There was no success in four years.

In the meantime, a nobleman von Tschirnhaus was searching just as fervently for the formula for turning clay into porcelain. When von Tschirnhaus died, Bottger was moved to Albrechtsburg castle to produce porcelain. In about 15 years he had succeeded in firing red, first and then white porcelain. He became very ill from his living conditions and the materials with which he was working. Augustus released him at age 32, and three years later he died. The secrets to his production of porcelain were not found in his effects; however, gradually others were able to produce white porcelain – later with underglaze blue. The Meissen factory near Dresden produced more and more porcelain as the years went by, and Augustus was the main recipient. The aim of Augustus, the Strong, was to establish himself as the most powerful ruler in Germany. Augustus ran out of places to put his porcelain, and in 1725 ordered the Japanese Palace to be built to hold his collection. Augustus died in 1733, and the palace was not finished.

In 1744 Frederick the Great attacked the Meissen factory, looted and/or destroyed porcelain. He sold half for cash for the needs of his army. Meissen lost its preeminent place in the production of porcelain as a result of the raids of Frederick the Great, allowing other rival factories to begin production in Germany as well as the growth of the factory of Louis XV which moved from Vincennes to Sevres in 1756. After World War II, the Swinger Palace was restored. It displays only one-tenth of the surviving pieces that once belonged to Augustus.

Jeff's focus on this unique story was to share the beginning of porcelain in Europe which laid the foundation for future blue and white production, including the Willow Pattern. Jeff commented that there is a lot of us in AugustUS...and then ended his talk with radio personality Paul Harvey's famous line... "And now you know the rest of the story." – *Connie Rogers*

"Let's Set a Cream Tea Table"
Ken Kowen Lecture



Ken showed us what pieces of china and silverware implements we would need to set a cream tea. A cream tea is a mid-afternoon tea serving only sweets (no savory) food with the tea. A high tea is a more formal, sit-down tea that includes both sweet and savory foods.

The tea was stored in a tea caddy and a tea caddy spoon would be used for the tea. The tea was loose tea. Water was stored in the hot water kettle and would be poured into the tea pot which was usually covered with a tea cozy to keep it hot. A tea strainer was used to strain the steeped tea into the tea cup. Also used would be a slops bowl.

Serving pieces included a butter dish with butter knife, lemon dish, a jam pot, tea plate for serving, sucrier (sugar) and milk pot. A spoon dish would usually be placed in the middle of the table for each person to rest their individual spoons on. Other items that might be used would be soup spoons, a moat spoon (for cleaning out loose tea from the spout of the tea pot), tea forks, dessert (pie) fork and a lemon fork.

The place settings would include a tea plate, tea bowl, cup plate (the English and Europeans did not use this, only Americans), and tea saucer. Silver service for each setting would be only a tea-spoon and butter knife as foods served are finger foods. The knife is placed to the left of the tea plate and the spoon on the right. The tea bowl is placed on the tea saucer and placed at the top left of the tea plate while the cup plate would be placed at the top right.

Of course I cannot show you the wonderful slides that accompanied this exciting lecture on how to set the tea table. One of the slides showed a wonderful collection of early tea caddies, sugar boxes and tea bags for loose tea. – *Brenda Nottingham*

"Birth of a Pattern"
Irene Black and Ford Nashett Lecture



Irene's lecture was about dissecting the various elements of the willow pattern and how they may have come about. Various pieces of the puzzle that brought about these elements are history, culture, art, literature, innovation (such as the creation of paper to make the pattern transfers) and markets. She went on to explain how these elements may have affected the creation of the elements in the willow pattern.

Irene used the fish rows, bow knots and willow tree elements of our willow pattern as examples. The "fish row" element of the design appears on the oldest known English willow pieces. They could have been derived from the round circles with dots in a 15th century woodcut. Those round circles are the bottoms of bottles that were used in windows in the place of glass panes, to provide light which was a common practice.

The bow knots were similar to the Elizabethan knot garden layouts that were so familiar to the English. Irene suspects a book our early willow designer was familiar with was printed in 1718 (fifty years before the first willow pattern) because so many of the willow pattern elements appear on its pages including the willow tree.

Even the famous story of the lovers from the willow pattern could have had its origin in the tragic romance of a King's wife and son, Tristan and Iseult. – *Brenda Nottingham*

More Convention Photos!

