

Willow...A Love Story Convention 2012

Submitted by Jeff Siptak

Get a big willow bowl, throw in about 75 collectors, some delicious chocolate, and about four days of fun ... what do you get? A willow convention, of course! Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a stone's throw from Hershey, was host city to the 27th Annual Willow Collectors Convention, July 12-15. Chairs Bernie & Suzie Crist and Jennifer Cather welcomed collectors from across the country, and as far away as Australia, for the much-anticipated event.

Next to all the willow, Hershey chocolate was in most abundance at every event, and helped set the stage for the convention's theme: *Willow... A Love Story*. All the fun things planned by the chairs showcased and brought together our love for willow—from a sweetheart's ball to willow valentines.

The convention got off to a tasty start with a special Thursday, pre-convention chocolate tour in Hershey. Many who came back from the tour carried bags of freshly-made sweets. By Thursday afternoon, everyone had registered and enjoyed time in the hospitality room. During the official welcome, Connie Rogers surprised each person with a special gift—a willow plate from her personal collection, each identified on the back as being from her collection, along with the manufacturer. Thank you, Connie! Attendees then shared their passion for willow by bringing some of their most unusual pieces for show & tell, and then capped off the evening with a wonderful chocolate bar filled with everything ... well, chocolate!

Friday morning began bright and early with a lecture by Jeff Siptak entitled: *Magic and the Willow Pattern*. In his lecture, he started with a brief history of magic, and then introduced several famous magicians who actually used willow pattern plates in their illusions, as well as the willow design in their promotional materials. He shared examples of their posters, photos of scenes and settings from their acts, and museum displays that showcased these well-known illusionists from the early 1900s through the 1950s, including one who was actually killed while holding a blue willow plate during his performance of the bullet-catching trick. Jeff ended his talk with a trick of his own—making a covered table, which appeared to be filled with willow, instantly turn into a completely empty table with a flash of the hands in front of everyone's eyes!

With a little magic still lingering in the air, attendees headed into the Flea Market room, where willow, all priced under \$25, was displayed on at least a dozen tables. It was the first buying opportunity of the weekend and everyone was searching for something special.

An afternoon business meeting was held, called to order for the last time by outgoing president Brenda Nottingham. New president, Carole Cordle, and new vice president, Marianne Johnson, were introduced. Convention attendance pins were awarded to those who marked special milestone conventions, from five to twenty-five years. Five-year pins were awarded to Carole Cordle, Bernie Crist, Evelyn Stephens and Ruth Swartz; a 10-year pin to Jennifer Cather; 15-year pins to Daisy Eden and Louise Loehr; 20-year pins to Helen Daniels, Joyce LaFont and Jeff Siptak; and a 25-year pin to Nancee Rogers. (Cont'd)





A special event at the business meeting was a willow play discovered and presented by Australian collector, Lyn Nolan. As she led a narration of the willow story, several members (Jennifer Cather, Kathy Sykes, David Broering and Hugh Sykes) read scripts and acted out the roles made famous in the pattern.

With the business meeting adjourned, it was then time for the much-anticipated IWC auction, where more than 325 lots of willow fell under



the gavel held by auctioneer Harry Hall. Along with his team of helpers, who entered the auction room as the figures on the willow pattern, bidding was brisk and fun, and everyone went home with some new pieces to add to their collections. A boxed dinner was served, and several held money prizes in the bottom, which is just what every collector needs more of, right?



Saturday was “Valentine’s Day,” which began with red willow valentines slid under everyone’s door inviting them to the day’s events (and redeemable for a candy treat). The morning began with the popular place setting competition, where tables were set with willow for a famous couple. Winners were announced before lunch by Suzie Crist: Jennifer Cather, first place; Daisy Eden, second place; and Melinda Johnson, third place. A fun touch was the place setting prizes: gold-wrapped Hershey Kisses (almond) for first place, silver-wrapped Kisses for second (traditional), and bronze-wrapped Kisses for third (caramel).



After lunch attendees welcomed speaker Jennifer Cather as she presented an interesting lecture: Once Upon a Time... Here she featured the love we all have and share for willow, by showing the various legend stories that have appeared over the decades, even showing several videos relating to the legend that are on the Internet. Did you know that Atari made a willow pattern game? She led attendees in an interactive comparison of the legends’ similarities and differences and a few were even called upon to read some of these unique stories. Of course, being a huge Disney fan, she was excited to announce that even



Walt Disney had an early film version of the willow pattern story!

Table centerpieces for lunch featured red willow paper-wrapped jars filled with Hershey Kisses and those around the table were asked to guess how many were in each jar, the closest person guessing won the jar. Part of the Valentine’s Day lunch was also a special love song game, where songs submitted by couples with their registration were played. Couples stood when their song was played and attendees were asked to “Name That Love Song.” Chocolate prizes were given out to those with the correct answers.

As soon as the desserts were finished everyone headed to the room next door for the big willow sale. (Cont’d)

No convention has been complete without this favorite event. Dealers filled close to 30 tables with special items for the willow collector in all of us. If you were looking for it, you could probably find it here—from small trinkets to large treasures.

After a couple of hours, with arms full, attendees headed back to their rooms to get ready for the evening dinner banquet, or as this year's convention chairs called it... the Sweetheart Ball. In the centers of the dinner tables were red willow mandarin and wife salt and pepper shakers and glass Hershey

Kisses jars filled with chocolate (can we ever get enough, really?). At dinner, Brenda Nottingham was recognized and thanked for her service as president, as were others for their help with the convention. The evening's highlight was most likely the crowning of the Sweetheart Ball's King and Queen, Jay Johnson and Jessie Hall; and Princess, Sarah Sykes. After dinner a wonderful band graciously (and voluntarily) played and sang a variety of songs, and attendees enjoyed dancing the night away! Everyone left the banquet with souvenirs, too... wine glasses featuring the 2012 theme design in red.

Sunday morning seemed to come quickly as the convention marked its final day. A worship service was led by Daisy Eden (husband, Tom, had a death in the family and was in Tennessee). A farewell brunch was served as the convention chairs thanked those who volunteered, as well those attending.

With newly acquired willow packed away for the trip home, everyone departed and was already talking about next year, when once again we'll come together for another chapter in our willow love story.

A special thanks again to the Pennsylvania Willow Society for creating and hosting such a wonderful weekend!

