

# Teapots & Trains...West Tennessee Traditions: Convention 2013

Submitted by Jeff Siptak

Before convention weekend Jackson, Tennessee, was most known as the birthplace of famed train engineer Casey Jones and hometown to rockabilly musician Carl Perkins. Leave it to almost 80 willow collectors to turn this town into a willow collector's paradise as Jackson played host to the 28th Annual Willow Collectors Convention, July 11-13. Chairs Joyce LaFont and Ken Kowen opened the doors to a convention that was fun, different and living up to all the down-home comforts of Southern hospitality and floor-stomping good times.

Collectors were buzzing around Jackson before the convention officially started with a Wednesday evening reception at the area's High Cotton Antique Mall. A little food, a little antiquing and a good time was had by all. Attendees also spent the day shopping the other antique malls during the "Jackson Antique Mall Crawl." The day ended at the home of Joyce and Don LaFont where everyone had the chance to see their extensive collection.

Thursday morning came early as a caravan of collectors left for nearby Bolivar, touring homes and other noted spots in the town's history before heading to Ken and Evelyn Kowen's to see their collection of willow... including an impressive collection of teapots, which Ken has a special love for.

Later that day it was another short trip for dinner at the Old Country Store Buffet... Southern cooking at its best. Everyone loosened their belts and wasn't one bit shy about passing the biscuits and sweet tea. Personally I am going back next chance I get...I was too full for even a small bowl of banana pudding!

After dinner everyone headed back to the hotel for Show & Tell, followed by a chocolate fondue reception. It was nice to see the willow everyone brought and to hear some great stories about their finds.

Thank you to everyone who brought something to show and for making this event a continued favorite. Before we called it a night Don LaFont gave a brief presentation setting the stage for the following day's special tour of the Freed Veilleuses-Theieres collection in nearby Trenton, so everyone would know the history of these pots before we made the trip. (cont'd)





Friday morning and the willow caravan once again hit the road to Trenton, Tennessee, billed as the home to the World's Largest Teapot Collection. But these aren't the teapots we know and love. The permanent exhibition on display, housed in the unassuming city hall, is recognized as the world's largest collection of porcelain veilleuses-theieres. A description from the Trenton website: *Although the porcelain veilleuses in the collection are often referred to as teapots, they are not representative of the teapots used today. The earliest veilleuses were made as food warmers with a bowl instead of a teapot on a stand; this was used for porridge, soup, or invalid's drink in sick*



*rooms or hospitals. Later the teapot replaced the bowl and veilleuse-theirres came into use. They represent a mode of brewing and serving floral or herb tea, or tisane to babies during the night hours. They offered the advantage not only of furnishing a warmed*



*medicament that would give comfort to a restless baby, but also afforded a light in the sick room long before the electricity was available. They were ornamental as well as useful. Most of them were translucent. For the benefit of families of distinction, and aristocrats, naturally they were made more ornate and decorative, some in the form of figurines or personages, some with insignia or crests. These began to appear first about 1830 in France. A short candle, nut or vegetable oils was the fuel used to provide the heat and light. A small boat-shaped or rounded vessel known as a "godet" was filled with oil, with a wick that was floated. The porcelain had been tempered to withstand heat for a long period of time. Many of the "potteries" in the early days did not use or affix identifying marks, therefore the "place of birth" of many veilleuses cannot be told with certainty.*

You can see by some of the photos shown here that many of the more than 500 examples on display resemble fine porcelain figures rather than teapots. But rest assured no matter how hidden they may seem...they each had a spout, handle and lid! The teapots were donated to the city by Dr. Frederick Freed in 1955.

Once we had our fill of teapots (sorry had to say it), some ventured to downtown Trenton for ice cream and window shopping. Everyone returned to the hotel for lunch and a presentation by Ken Kowen on the history of teapots. It was interesting to see that the basic design and purpose of the teapot has changed very little, if at all, during the centuries of its existence. As Ken told everyone, "a teapot, is a teapot, is a teapot."

Friday afternoon saw another presentation by Jeff Siptak titled "The Blue Plate: A Special American Icon," which took attendees on a train ride across America to discover the origins of the famous "Blue Plate Special,"



as well as the history behind the Buffalo Pottery (America's first willow), grill plates and the Blue Plate Fine Foods company which featured the willow pattern on its labels. Attendees were given train tickets which then were used to give away several Buffalo China grill plates. Everyone also took home a miniature jar of Blue Plate Strawberry Preserves! (cont'd)

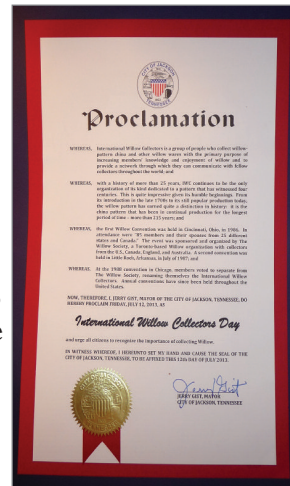
Kathy Sykes rounded up the afternoon with a special needlepoint craft workshop where everyone took to threading a needle for creating their own willow design, and then everyone got ready for the night's willow auction. More than 300 willow lots were up for bids and everyone enjoyed finding new and special pieces of willow to take home to their collection. Auctioneers Don LaFont and Ken Kowen lead the group in a fun evening. Who will forget Ken saying... "come on, it's just a few dollars more...you need this piece, don't let the other person get it..."



Saturday, the last day of the convention, started with our annual business meeting, called to order by president Carol Cordle. Convention attendance pins were handed out by Edie Cronk, who was then recognized herself for her many years as membership chairwoman. Jackson's mayor, Jerry Gist, also appeared at the business meeting with a special proclamation announcing July 12, 2013 as International Willow Collectors Day and handing Carol a key to the city. What a special recognition for IWC!



Hugh Sykes followed the meeting with a presentation centering on advertising willow he featured in his self-published book on the same subject. He quizzed attendees with examples of willow advertising and then the "who and what" they represented. A drawing was held for some delicious Australian chocolates, a brand which was one of the featured willow advertisers!



After lunch it was time for the table setting competition, which has become a popular event. This year the theme was "Teapots and Trains" and the willow settings were fabulous! Not long after, the long-awaited willow sale opened its doors as attendees shopped the tables of about a dozen dealers and around 30 tables to find special pieces of willow to call their own. The day ended with the annual evening banquet with musical entertainment by local group, Second Chance. The dinner table centerpieces featured floral arrangements in willow yard bird feeders fashioned by Ken from bud vases and willow cups and saucers, surrounded by jars of Blue Plate Mayonnaise for each person to take home. After a little "Rocky Top" through the speakers and a little clogging (or buck-dancing) by Judy Cail and Michael Curtner on the floor, the night came to an end with everyone having had a good time.



After an optional church service held on Sunday morning by Tom and Daisy Eden, everyone packed their new-found willow treasures and said their goodbyes until next year!



*A special thanks to Joyce and Don LaFont and Ken and Evelyn Kowen for showing us all a little West Tennessee hospitality. Truly, a great time was had by all.*

