

The Willow Pattern on Paper: Convention 2018

Murfreesboro, Tennessee, just outside Nashville, was home to the 33rd annual Willow Collectors Convention, July 11-15, with convention chair, Jeff Siptak as host. The theme was: “The Willow Pattern on Paper,” which was carried throughout the centerpieces and events.

This year, Jeff began the convention one day earlier to allow more time for all the events planned. Things got underway on Wednesday, with a pre-convention tour of the Jack Daniel’s Distillery and lunch at Miss Mary Bobo’s in Lynchburg. The event sold out with 55 signing up to travel by chartered bus to this historic town, which ironically is in a “dry county.” The group learned more about the process of making whiskey, and then gathered for lunch at the Miss Bobo’s and enjoyed some of the best Southern cooking this side of Dixie. Miss Bobo’s is right at the small town square, so everyone had a chance to shop a bit, maybe take in some wine tasting or find a souvenir.

After a short ride back to the hotel, attendees wasted no time in reconnecting with friends and welcoming the nine first-timers who made this year their first convention. The Welcome Area had tables for chatting and a few tables were set up to display the dozens of great items donated to this year’s raffle.

At 6:00 p.m. Jeff opened the doors to the Red Mandarin Reception, which featured tables set with red Copeland Mandarin pattern plates from his collection, chopsticks and small paper treat boxes. He said if you are having a Red Mandarin Reception, you have to eat off real Mandarin plates, which he had bought over the last five years. A variety of hot appetizers were served and a mac and cheese bar was set up where you could create your own dish adding toppings, from sliced chicken and bacon to roasted peppers and chili, in small white Chinese food takeout boxes. Red paper lanterns and fortune cookies centered the tables. Jeff also created a special display with the most unusual red Mandarin items from his collection.

After an official welcome by Jeff, the show & tell portion of the evening started with introductions around the room. We had the chance to meet some of our first-timers and see and hear about some great pieces of willow brought to display. We also got to meet Maxine, a beautiful dachshund owned by first-timers Karen and Dave Stickler, who was immediately adopted as IWC’s mascot.





Thursday morning started with two of the convention's most fun events....the place setting and art contests. More than a dozen people participated in both and provided some wonderful and creative examples using willow. Judy Prophet and Jean Hull made sure the votes were counted. Winning the place setting contest (which was to create a table setting representing someone or something that put Nashville on the map) was Charles and Zeta Hollingsworth's place setting featuring black Royal Winton titled "That Old Black Magic." First-timer Kathy Stickler won the art contest with clothing she made from willow fabric. They, and second and third place winners, were given money certificates to spend at the Grand Willow Sale.



Hugh Sykes followed these events with a lecture titled "Everyday Willow." It featured a video that he, wife Kathy and daughter Sarah created that took us through their life in Hamilton, New Zealand. We saw their collection, followed them



shopping for antiques, observed a cooking demonstration and more.



A Mexican lunch followed with tacos, fajitas and all the trimmings. Centerpieces were flowers in cans wrapped with Blue Plate okra paper labels. Once everyone had their fill, we headed to the Willow Pavilion, a come-and-go event which featured Throwback Thursday: 1998 (see page 19); Hip Hues, a unique screen-printing company where everyone got to hand-screen their own souvenir tote bag or T-shirt; What's My Willow, with Connie Rogers, who offered her expert advice answering questions about willow; Angela Boudreaux of Antique Restoration Studio, who was on-hand for any willow repairs; and Jeff Siptak, who had a display with before-and-after examples and instructions on cleaning stained willow.



The evening ended with the willow auction, which this year featured 642 lots, the largest auction IWC has ever had. This year's auction paddles were folded copies of "Alice in Wonderland," which featured a willow pattern tea set on the cover and inside. Don LaFont and Nancee Rogers took turns as auctioneers, with a support team of volunteers who made the event a big success. A boxed dinner was served, and later a "Sweet Tooth Break" with cookies and brownies gave bidders a chance to refuel.



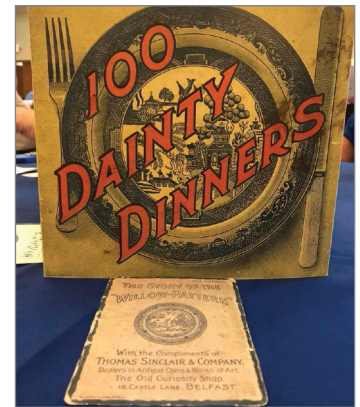
Friday's events began with willow flea market, where attendees shopped for items priced at \$30 or less. There were at least a dozen tables filled with willow bargains and everyone enjoyed finding something to add to their collection.

Jeff Siptak gave a lecture on willow paper and brought many examples from his collection to show, which included examples from Christmas, holidays, legends, advertising and scrapbook diecuts—all featuring the beloved willow pattern.

Lunch was a salad and 'build-your-own' potato bar with music-themed centerpieces on the tables, featuring greeting cards of sheet music, Victorian postcards of the Willow Serenaders and an oversized hand-drawn card from the early 1900s titled, "The Song of the Willow Pattern," one of Jeff's favorite pieces from his collection. Perhaps the most popular items on the table were the vanilla Tootsie Rolls scattered about. Following lunch, IWC held its annual business meeting, with outgoing president Kathy Sykes presiding.

The afternoon schedule offered some free time and gave attendees a chance to "Explore!" the area, with many venturing out to antique, shop and see the local sites.

Everyone gathered back at the hotel for dinner, which was a Southern buffet of baked chicken and fried catfish. Tables were decorated with copies of a cover from a book called "100 Dainty Dinners," which featured a willow plate alongside a fork and knife. Scattered around the centerpiece were copies of willow-related stories and legends. That's because the evening's entertainment featured some of our very own in a special storytelling event modeled after the popular Moth events. The Moth is a non-profit group based in New York City dedicated to the art and craft of storytelling, with live events held around the country. Since the moth (sometimes butterfly) is a featured element in our pattern, Jeff created IWC's first Moth event, with stories told by Jean Hull, Irene Black, James Cail and Angela Harland.





Saturday was our last full day and began with the Grand Willow Sale in the morning. What better way to begin your day, right? A large number of dealers set up tables with wonderful examples of willow. It was a busy room as attendees shopped and found pieces of willow to take home. Once everyone's bags were packed (some toting their 2018 souvenir bags), we took part in the first craft event. This was led by Carol Cordle and Marianne Johnson and showed attendees how to make their own bottle cap necklace and bottle cap keychain featuring their choice of willow images.

A fresh deli buffet had each person making sandwiches and the table decorations featured RC Colas and Moon Pies. A small sheet at each chair told the story of this famous pair. Following lunch, Kathy and Sarah Sykes had everyone busy with scissors and tape making willow paper boxes as our second craft.

Not long after, we gathered for The Willow Branch, a series of four speakers, each offering a mini lecture: Sandra Bladen, "Yorkshire Relish;" Christy Sturtevant, "A Willow Collector's Ultimate Find: The Toby;" Cheryl Schattall "Will You Be Prepared?" (insuring your collection); and Jeff Siptak, "Transfer Printing on Copper Plates."



Soon it was time to gather for the final big event, the Last-Night Banquet. The evening was magical—literally! It was called "A Night of Willow Magic." Guests were welcomed at the entrance with two posters featuring magicians who used the willow pattern in their acts and advertising. Table centerpieces were black hats with a rabbit, magic wand and willow playing cards on top of a placemat of cards. At each person's setting was a paper menu card (copied from an early 1900s diecut in Jeff's collection) featuring the night's dinner, as well as a fortune-telling fish.

Of course, what does a night of willow magic need? Local magician, Tim Friday, roamed the room with magic tricks during the pre-dinner Mix 'n' Mingle. Dinner consisted of a choice of sirloin steak or hazelnut crusted chicken. After dinner, Tim performed a magic act for everyone and enlisted the help of some of our fellow collectors to perform. He capped off his act with a special trick, the Willow Pattern Plate Mystery, which I don't think anyone had seen before. With it, he made the center design of the willow plate disappear.



After dinner, many gathered in the bar, as is tradition, for one last chance to visit before everyone heads their separate ways in the morning.

Sunday morning was actually Christmas in July morning, as attendees brought wrapped willow gifts for a game of "Dirty Santa." Angela Harland opened the event singing Christmas carols and led the group while we opened, and often time stole, presents until everyone went home with a nice gift. Thirty people participated and a willow nutcracker designed by Jeff and wife Robin was given to one lucky person who participated (see page 20). Afterwards, Tom and Daisy Eden led an uplifting church service of song and sermon, with a small group of our attendees participating and singing in the choir. They have provided a worship service on the last morning of the convention for many years, and it is appreciated by those who attend.



As everyone packed to go home, Willow Goodbye Brown Bags, a special thank you from Jeff, awaited in the hotel lobby with a copy of a greeting card attached that featured a willow plate with pansies and these words: *Remembrance, Pansies for thoughts for memories Willow Blue, reminding me of Happy Times I've spent with you.* Each bag was filled with a variety of snacks for the way home.

Everyone then packed their new willow finds, said their goodbyes and set out for home. It certainly won't be long until next summer's convention!

A few more convention photos from Tennessee!



