

Ornaments: ‘I feel like they belong in a place like this’

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Wolford would spend the next 45 years seeking more to add to her collection. She was particularly fond of pre-World War II ornaments, and she’d frequent antique stores in search of them.

“For me, it’s exciting,” she said of the long hunt that yielded one or two ornaments at a time and even antique store visits that yielded none.

During that time, she also investigated how and where they were made. According to her research, figural glass Christmas ornaments originated in the small town of Lauscha, Germany. Gradually, other areas started producing them as well. T.W. Woolworth discovered these glass ornaments on a toy- and doll-buying trip to Sonnenburg, Germany, in the 1890s. He sold them in his five-and-10-cent stores in America, where they became more affordable to families.

A smaller bale—or opening and top hat used to hang the ornament—indicates it is older. As years passed, the bales on ornaments were made larger. Some of Wolford’s pieces date back to the early 1900s. Along with traditional glass ornaments, she also collected antique ornamental birds that could be clipped on the boughs of the tree.

Donating the ornaments

In 2019, by which time Wolford had moved to Seaside, she realized her collection had grown almost too large—especially since it contained antique pieces that didn’t quite resemble those on her grandmother’s tree.

“They’re not as sentimental to me, because they’re not the like ones I remember,” she added.

Looking to downsize,



Photos by Katherine Lacaze

Rachael Wolford collected numerous antique ornaments that are part of the Christmas tree decorations at the Butterfield Cottage.



LEFT: Wolford shares about the history of the Butterfield-era Christmas ornaments that she donated to the Seaside Museum & Historical Society. **RIGHT:** Wolford collected numerous antique ornaments that are part of the Christmas tree decorations at the Butterfield Cottage.

she approached the Seaside Museum & Historical Society, where she was serving as a docent, and asked if they wanted to cull from her collection. She donated about half of her ornaments, many of which come from the same era as the Butterfield Cottage.

“I feel like they belong in a place like this,” she said. “This is perfect.”

The ornaments first appeared on the tree during the museum’s annual Gingerbread Christmas Tea at the Butterfield Cottage in 2019. During 2020, when the tea was canceled because

of COVID-19, they stayed in a box.

However, they were brought back this year and incorporated into the Butterfield’s Christmas dressing—designed by curator Robin Montero. As she meticulously placed each one on the tree, “I was thor-

oughly enjoying them,” she said.

During 2021, Montero designed a logo and signage for the cottage and put together an exhibit depicting the cottage’s life as the House of Roberts Millinery and Hat Shop, run by Marion Roberts from 1958 to

1972. Montero eventually assumed the role of curator and started refreshing the displays and rearranging artifacts throughout the house, which is more than 100 years old and has had “many lives.”

While decorating the cottage for Christmas, she wanted to capture a specific style: “Simple, but elegant and comfortable.” In other words, she was thinking of how the Butterfields might have decorated their home during the Victorian era.

“I wanted to take it back to a certain point in time,” she said. “The focus is the ornaments and the feeling you get when you walk in the room.”

While the Gingerbread Christmas Tea will not take place again this year because of COVID restrictions, patrons can visit the museum from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and view “Christmas at the Cottage.”



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