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by Bill Steely

For collectors of antique Christmas, their favorite holiday coming once a year just won't do. The decorations with their vintage patina, the soft glow of early lighting, the cookies, the carols and the laughter all go by too quickly it seems. Luckily for those people there is The Golden Glow of Christmas Past, a collector's organization devoted to antique Christmas, whose convention falls mid-way through the year.

While not *exactly* another Christmas, there is certainly an abundance of spirit, good cheer, and the trappings of Christmas past to be enjoyed at a Glow convention. For 4 days (many people spend the week) members meet to buy, sell, attend lectures and workshops, be entertained and dine together. Out of 1,200 or so members, who also receive a monthly newsletter for the \$50 annual dues, about 700 usually attend the annual convention, and they come from all over the United States and Europe.

For Golden Glow members the anticipation of the next convention begins as soon as the last one ends. It is held in a different U.S. city every year, usually close to where the convention hosts live. In 2011 it will be held in Rye Brook, N.Y., at the Rye Town Hilton, and what follows is a glimpse from one of the hosts of what is in store for the 31st annual Glow convention: "It's Christmas Time in the City."

The official start to the convention is on Wednesday evening, but the activity begins before then. On Tuesday morning of convention week a bus will bring those who sign up on a trip to the Thomas Nast Museum in Morristown, N.J., where they will view a collection of Nast's drawings of Santa that appeared in Harper's Weekly in the last quarter of the 19th century. Another tour will run in the afternoon to Sunnyside, the home of Washington Irving that will include readings from Irving's texts which helped to form many of our modern day Christmas traditions. And for those not wishing to leave the hotel they may register for a feather tree making workshop, with all the materials needed to make an 18" tree from goose feathers dyed green, similar to the ones that originated in Germany in the 19th century.

On Wednesday morning some members will opt to go to the Radko factory to be treated to a history of glass ornament production and receive an ornament signed by the artist. They will return in time to attend a Christkindlemarkt, where members will sell their hand crafted Christmas items, similar to what can be found at the markets throughout Germany of the same name at Christmas time. That 3-hour sale will be followed by a first-timer's welcome, where members who are attending their first convention receive an orientation about what is to come, and how to take it all in. And then the official start—the welcome reception. In Rye it will be a Dutch welcome, in honor of the people who settled the Hudson Valley and the Christmas customs they brought to the area. Don't be surprised to encounter Sinterklaas and Swarte Pete! There will also be a hat contest for the best expression of the convention theme. After the official start, only pre-1966 Christmas items are allowed.

Thursday brings an early start for vendors in the sales room. About 100 people will set up for this event, where only antique Christmas items may be sold. This convention highlight is an opportunity for many to add to their collections—or start collecting something entirely different! Such was the case when my daughter and I started collecting Krampus figures at the 2002 convention.

This is also the day when the museum rooms open. For three days each summer, the Glow hosts the largest collection of antique Christmas anywhere in the world. It is when members bring parts of their collections to display for other members to enjoy. The museum rooms are filled with rare and wonderful treasures of every imaginable kind.

In addition to a room with 50 glass showcases, the N.Y. convention will feature a tree museum (parlor and table-top trees with glass, Dresden, Sebnitz, kugels, patriotics and more). A separate room will display an “under the tree” museum, for anything that was displayed under a pre-1966 tree, be it toys or a putz scene. Members will vote for their favorites, and prizes will be awarded to the winners.

In the afternoon hours on Thursday we will be attending feature lectures. Speakers will come from the Norman Rockwell Museum, a Macy’s historian will tell about the origins of the parade, and principals of Spaeth design will talk about what goes into creating the magical department store windows in N.Y. at Christmas time. In between museum viewing and lectures, attendees will be able to munch Christmas cookies made and brought by members, and sip coffee or tea while watching clips from old movies such as Miracle on 34th Street and Christmas in Connecticut in our hospitality suite. And if you haven’t gotten your photo taken with Santa yet, now would be a good time to do it. He has a treat for you!

On each of Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, following carols and cocktails, will be a banquet meal followed by entertainment. In N.Y. the tables will be adorned by centerpieces made by a master artisan, to be auctioned after Saturday’s banquet. The entertainment is a surprise, but in the N.Y. tradition it will be spectacular. But it won’t be the end of the evening.

There is something else that takes place in the evenings that most members can’t wait for—room hopping. Several hotel floors are reserved exclusively for those wishing to sell from their rooms. Each room, its own small store, some with lights blinking, Santas nodding, music playing, all open with people streaming in and out, meeting new friends and reconnecting with old, finding things they wouldn’t find anywhere else. This happens as soon as people arrive, and goes on until the convention ends.

Friday morning is reserved for the annual membership meeting. The Board of Directors, elected by the members, report on club progress made throughout the year and take input, feedback and Q&A from members. The afternoon is filled with educational talks on a wide variety of topics, such as insuring a collection, Dresden ornament production, how to spot a reproduction, etc.

The final day of the convention is Saturday. We will start the day with an auction preview, followed by auctioning 250 lots, all vintage Christmas, all brought by Glow members. In the afternoon members can attend round table discussions, where information is shared using objects displayed for educational purposes.

The Saturday evening banquet is often traditional, and Rye will be no exception. Attendees will hold lighted candles and sing Silent Night/Stille Nacht led by members from some of New York’s finest choirs. But before that point the table centerpieces will be auctioned, as will an original watercolor of the convention logo, painted by designer and author Michael Storings. The winners of the cookie, door decorating and under the tree contests will be announced, and prizes awarded. The raffle will be held and someone will go home with a hand-made white feather topiary tree fully decorated with Radko Company ornaments.

As things wind down, people will say their goodbyes to friends, many seen just once a year. Then they will travel back to their homes with treasures, to put out at Christmas or maybe even display all year. Because having Christmas just once a year is unthinkable for some.