

Washington Winter Wonderland — November 2010 to January 2011

Our holiday exhibit featured over one hundred and thirty vintage Steiff stuffed toy animals in whimsical displays throughout the Museum. Steiff is best known as the company that invented the Teddy bear. Local designers, Chris Zaima and Anne Chapin, decorated beautiful Christmas trees as well. John Pitts, former Scenic Artist at The Metropolitan Opera in New York City, painted a beautiful winter mural on the walls of the Museum. This enchanting exhibit ran from Thanksgiving 2010 through January 30, 2011. The exhibit was [reviewed here](#).



Steiff Appraisal Day — January 22, 2011

The public was invited to bring their Steiff bears and animals to the Museum to be evaluated by Sandy Booth and Shelley Smith, both long-time collectors whose toys were on display in the current exhibit. They answered questions and verbally appraised items for estimated age and value. This fun, informal event was free.

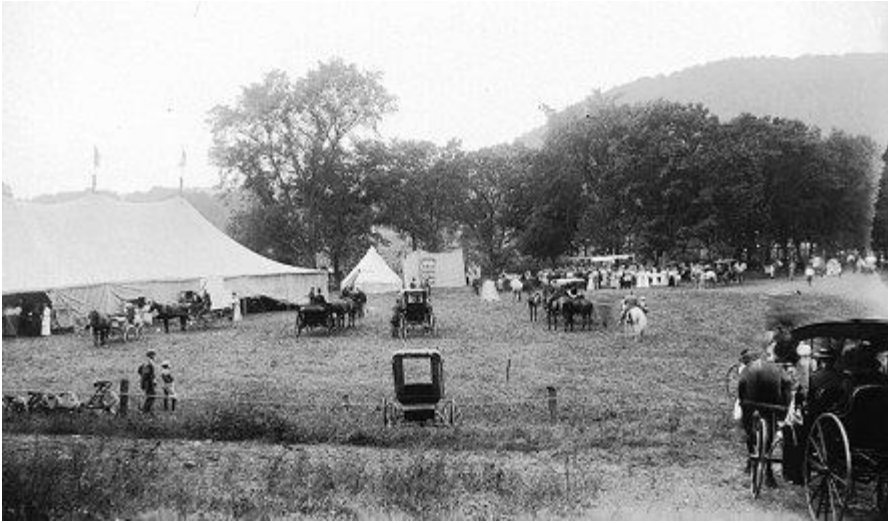
Dedication of the Georgianna

Middlebrook Room — November 28, 2010

We dedicated the main entrance gallery in the Museum in honor of Georgianna Middlebrook, a long-time Washington resident and supporter of the Gunn. The Georgianna Middlebrook Room will be dedicated to Washington history.

A History of the Washington Agricultural Fair

The Georgianna Middlebrook Room is dedicated to Washington history. Incorporated in 1779, Washington, Connecticut boasts a rich and diverse history. Through pictures, stories and artifacts, visitors are brought on a journey through Washington's unique history in this room, starting 10,000 years ago with the first inhabitants of the area, the Native Americans, to the modern day. Displays in this room rotate seasonally, highlighting different components of Washington's past. This 2011 display featured the history of Washington's Agricultural Fair along with a newly restored film of the Fair in 1950.



New Year's Tea Party at the Museum —January 2, 2011

We rang in the New Year with an old-fashion Victorian tea party at the Museum. Visitors viewed our holiday exhibit and socialized with friends in a festive setting as they enjoyed tea and refreshments.



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Washington's Winter Wonderland

Washington's Winter Wonderland - UPDATED!

The Gunn Historical Museum, Washington, Connecticut

By Mark B. Oliver | January 13, 2011

Christmas is a time of wonder and excitement for children and the latest exhibit at the Gunn Historical Museum evokes those memories in an inspired way.



A Well-loved Teddy Bear on Display

It has become a tradition at the museum to present a holiday themed exhibition each December. The last few years have seen such exhibits as dolls, toy fire trucks and last year, *Christmas Through the Ages*. It was this exhibit that gave Stephen Bartkus, the museum's curator, the idea for this year's *Washington's Winter Wonderland* exhibition.

“Last year we had scenes from a Victorian Christmas, Christmas in the 1930s and Christmas in the 1950s. Local resident Sandy Booth lent us some of her Steiff toys for the 1950s exhibit and they proved such a hit with visitors of all ages, that this year we decided to showcase her entire collection.”

While Steiff may not be a household name in New England, this German company changed the toy industry forever over 100 years ago with one extraordinary invention; the teddy bear.

The company was founded in 1880 by Margarete Steiff, a seamstress who was only able to sew with one hand having contracted polio earlier in her life. In 1902, Richard Steiff, a nephew of Margarete and a gifted artist-inventor himself, presented the idea of a teddy bear to Margarete. She was unenthusiastic at first, but Richard persisted and to the delight of children ever since, the first teddy bear was sold soon after.

All of Steiff's plush toys are distinguished by their "Button in Ear" trademark which was introduced by Franz Steiff, another of Margarete's nephews, in 1904. The company has gone on to become the oldest manufacturer of soft toys in the world and remains highly successful to this day.



Steiff Hand Puppets

Sandy Booth began collecting Steiff animals in the early 1990s when she was drawn to their beautiful craftsmanship and variety of characters. Sandy is a lifelong resident of Bethlehem.

Several other friends of the museum donated Steiff toys for display such as Shelley Smith, Dora Ehmer, Doreen Werling and Franklin Nichols.

The museum is in a relatively small house on Washington Green. The designers of the exhibit have turned this to a distinct advantage by making the individual rooms feel 'homey' which adds to the charm of the collection.



A Mural by Chris Zaima

Murals have been painted on the museum's walls by John Pitts. These are evocative of murals found in nurseries and their brilliance is in their simplicity. It is easy to see why Pitts had a distinguished career as a scenic artist and theatrical set designer before he retired locally.

The Steiff toys are grouped together into logical collections and many appear against painted backgrounds such as the collection of toys in a jungle setting.

The centerpiece of the exhibit is a collection of Steiff toys around a Christmas tree decorated with Kugel (pronounced "koo-gull") ornaments. Kugels are German in origin and were made as early as 1820 and were sold as decorations to be hung from the windows or ceilings of homes, perhaps to ward off evil spirits. In 1848 they were sold for the first time as holiday ornaments.

Although Kugel means "ball", they were made in other shapes such as grape clusters, berry clusters, pear, egg and ribbed balls. They are colored in shades of silver, gold, green, red, blue, bronze and amethyst. Heavier than modern-day decorations, Kugels have to be affixed to a tree with wire.

The Kugel decorated tree surrounded by Steiff toys (see main photo) is set against a red background which makes the exhibit 'pop' and there is much to be seen in this one room alone.



A Barbie Christmas Tree by Anne Chapin

The exhibition also features beautiful Christmas trees decorated by local designers Chris Zaima and Anne Chapin. One tree which may appeal to young girls is decorated with Barbie dolls.

UPDATE:

This enchanting exhibit has been extended due to its overwhelming popularity and will now run through **Sunday January 30, 2011** and is highly recommended for children and adults alike.

Additionally, on Saturday January 22, 2011, the Gunn Historical Museum will host a Steiff appraisal day for members of the public. Please contact the museum for further information.

Details:

The Gunn Historical Museum

5 Wykeham Road, Washington, CT 06793

(860) 868-7756

The Gunn Historical Museum [Website](#).

Opening Hours:

Thu - Sat: 10AM - 4PM

Sun: 12PM - 4PM

Entry to the museum is free but donations are of course welcome.