

Highland County Historical Society celebrates 50th anniversary, Part XLIX

**By Pamela Nickell
H.C. Historical Society**

Now, here is an item in the Highland House Museum that I just bet you have never noticed. It quite amazes once you do! Is it a bowl or a basket?

Most likely a basket since it could not hold liquid. But it is bowl-shaped and full of large, exotic looking dried seeds and pods. It is a very appropriate vessel for these seeds and pods but they make the basket itself not so visible. It is sitting on the stand of the floor-length pier mirror in the Music Room.

You would probably glance over it, subconsciously appreciate it, and move on to the very many other more showy items such as large portraits of Mr. and Mrs. James Cummings, antique furniture, porcelain figures in the very large corner cupboard, many musical instruments large and small (especially the beautiful 1865 rosewood Decker Grand Piano), the stylishly dressed mannequin and now the really beautiful Santa Claus, Christmas tree and other decorative delights created by Mary Fetro, daughters, Kathy and Julie, and granddaughter, Emily.

But back to our humble (not so much) basket, which is not made of the usual vine, reeds or cloth but of wood. Wood baskets are rather common, but this one is definitely unique. It is made of hand-whittled walnut pieces fitted together without glue or fixative of any kind. It is held together by the way the pieces are interwoven. The bottom is a round piece of thin wood fitted in to the first row of tiny pieces. Then, seven (by my best count – it isn't real easy to discern) circular rows of the whittled pieces are reversed in direction and with varying numbers creating different diameters of the circles to create the bowl shape.

So, we're talking here about the craftsman being able to hold many very small pieces in place while interconnecting them, actually weaving them together. =Unimaginable to me. I have trouble with Legos. We do not know who made this amazing basket but our records show that it was originally owned by Willa Neff Wise of Greenfield and was donated to the Highland County Historical Society for placement in the Highland House by Mrs. George Sheely of Cedarville, Ohio. Mrs. Sheely is the granddaughter of Mrs. Wise. It was accessioned by the museum on July 23, 1999.

Each time a visitor recognizes this unique item for all its detail, beauty and complexity, it becomes a gift all over again.

Speaking of items in the room that pop out to more readily claim your attention, the stylishly dressed mannequin mentioned above (Refer also to picture in article No. 3 where she is shown in front of the pier mirror coincidentally with this basket in place.)



now stands by the Decker piano and wears a white fur coat and hat with a large red poinsettia stunningly placed on her shoulder.

This ensemble was worn by Irene Parr, mother of Mary Fetro, the year she was grand marshal of the Christmas Parade she had directed for many years. Last weekend, while I was at the museum, a family with two girls were visiting. The youngest daughter, maybe 6 or so, went behind the mannequin, hugged her gently from behind and with one hand on the fur covered arm, Miss Abby Lynn peeked around and dreamily but with certainty said, "I am going to be her!" Of course, I took a picture, with her parents' permission. You'll see it sometime, somewhere.

Please keep in touch with the HCHS, but in the immediate future visit the beautifully Christmas adorned Highland House. It closes for winter break at 4 p.m. Dec. 20, after which annual cleaning and planning for 2016 begins.

Even more importantly record your own history – and share it with others.