



*Colonial Williamsburg*

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION



**ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER FOLK ART MUSEUM'S 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION CULMINATES IN ANNUAL FOLK ART CHRISTMAS TREE DISPLAY AND SPECIAL CAROLINA ROOM INSTALLATION**



A perennial favorite among guests of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, one of the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, its fabled folk art Christmas tree will be on glorious view once again for the holiday season Nov. 10 through Jan. 1, 2018 as a fitting conclusion to the museum's year-long diamond jubilee. In a year that brought highlights of the AARFAM collection to New York City as the loan exhibition to the Winter Antiques Show, the opening of two special exhibitions *We the People: American Folk Portraits* and *America's Folk Art*, and a celebratory day of festivities that included a lecture by "Antiques Roadshow" specialist Ken Farmer, the folk art tree is an annual thread that extends from the museum's earliest days in its original location to the present.

"Decorating Christmas trees is a Williamsburg tradition that dates back 175 years," said Mitchell B. Reiss,

president and CEO of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. “To continue annual holiday customs—especially those brought to this country by immigrants—reinforces our core mission to educate people on all facets of life in early America. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum’s handcrafted tree display perpetuates the beauty of the season in the same home-spun tradition that our early residents enjoyed.”

Christmas trees were introduced to Williamsburg by Charles Minnegerode, a German immigrant and political refugee who moved to the city in 1842 to teach at the College of William & Mary. He befriended Judge Nathaniel Beverley Tucker and stayed with him in his home on Nicholson Street. At Christmastime, Minnegerode shared with the Tucker children a German custom of decorating a small evergreen tree that they cut down, brought in the house and placed on a parlor table. They made their own decorations including strings of popcorn. By the following year, most families in Williamsburg had Christmas trees in their parlors.

Originally an eight-foot-tall tree that has filled the AARFAM lobby every holiday season since 1957, the folk art Christmas tree is decorated solely with handmade ornaments, initially made by staff and volunteers. At first, some of these ornaments were based on objects in the museum’s collection and others based on the makers’ own hand skills. Soon after, visitors began to leave their own handmade ornaments on the tree. In 1975, First Lady Betty Ford asked the museum staff to provide ornaments for the White House Blue Room’s Christmas tree. Honored with the opportunity, museum staff, volunteers and local community members created nearly 3,000 ornaments, and in addition to the hand-made decorations the AARFAM sent along some of its favorite 19<sup>th</sup>-century children’s portraits and antique toys to complete the display. The tree tradition has continued; since the museum moved to its current location in 2007, the tree has doubled in size and now fills Penny Court, the building’s two-story center atrium. It is topped with a replica of the rooster weathervane in the AARFAM collection (that is also the inspiration for the museum’s logo), which was hand forged by a local artist for the tree.

Adorned with what has grown to 2,000 ornaments filling its branches, each year three or four new ornament designs are handcrafted in multiples to grace the tree. In honor of the AARFAM’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a wooden bird ornament painted in bright colors has been created. It is inspired by wooden birds in the museum’s collection, one of which is from Mrs. Rockefeller’s original folk art collection. Another new ornament for 2017 is a miniature wreath crafted with a small wooden hoop and paper based on a paper-cutting Lord’s Prayer that is in the collection by early 19<sup>th</sup>-century American artist Martha Ann Honeywell. The artist was renowned not only for her artistic accomplishments but for the physical challenges she overcame: she was born without arms and used her teeth and toes to make the minutely detailed cutwork and embroidery.

As Jan Gilliam, Colonial Williamsburg’s manager of exhibitions and associate curator of toys, who oversees the folk art Christmas tree’s decoration, said of how the art inspires the ornaments, “With over 7,000 folk art objects to choose, we have no shortage of inspiration. Each piece of art is an individual expression of the person who created it. We might be drawn to the color or craftsmanship or interesting shapes of a piece that motivates us to create our own interpretation. During the process from idea to ornament, we take a close look at the original artwork and gain an even greater appreciation for the objects and those who created them.”

In addition to the folk art Christmas tree, the museum’s anniversary will also be acknowledged through this year’s holiday exhibit in its Carolina Room, the painted parlor of the Alexander and Sarah Shaw House, which was purchased by Colonial Williamsburg in 1956 in time for it to be installed in the AARFAM when it opened in 1957. The Shaw House was built about 1830 in Richmond (now Scotland) County, North Carolina, and fell into disrepair in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before the house was demolished, the painted wood work was saved. This year’s exhibit will have a 1930s theme; it was 1935 when Abby Aldrich Rockefeller first loaned her folk art collection to Colonial Williamsburg and it was displayed at the Ludwell-Paradise House. Nearly 100 years after the house was built, the Shaw family might have celebrated Christmas with a small table top tree and a few children’s toys. They would be amazed to see what Christmas would look like a century later: it was a time when colorful electric lights could be strung on the tree and family could sit around and listen to

holiday music on a large console radio. When children opened their colorfully wrapped presents, boys might have found a Lionel electric train or a Buck Rogers spaceship. These details and more will be seen in this charming exhibit.

“The Carolina Room is an outstanding example of folk-painted architectural woodwork from the 1830s, but this annual holiday installation gives the museum an opportunity to interpret it through time,” said Ronald L. Hurst, the Foundation’s Carlisle H. Humelsine chief curator and vice president for collections, conservation, and museums.

Visitors to the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum will have numerous opportunities to get in the holiday spirit this fall and winter, beginning on Nov. 10, when the 60<sup>th</sup> annual folk art Christmas tree is set up. Guests can watch as the tree is bedecked by artisans and hear stories about the inspiration, design and creation of the ornaments as well as participate in two special programs held that day. Additionally, museum-goers will have multiple opportunities to participate in holiday family programs and hands-on workshops beginning that day and running through late December. (For a full list of programs, please see the attached list).

For those who enjoy the beauty of the season and making their own ornaments but can’t get to the AARFAM for their own inspiration, they need look no further to recreate more than 30 different projects than *The Art-Full Tree: Ornaments to Make Inspired by the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum* by Colonial Williamsburg’s Jan Gilliam and Christina Westenberger (2011). The book features an image of the original work of art that inspired each project, information about the art and artist, as well as a step-by-step guide by the authors through the process of creating ornaments ranging from silhouettes to felt snowmen, from punch-needle hearts to paper doves, from cooper stars to cross-stitch stockings. Copies are \$16.95 and are available at [shop.colonialwilliamsburg.com](http://shop.colonialwilliamsburg.com).

Colonial Williamsburg and Art Museums tickets and additional information are available online at [colonialwilliamsburg.com](http://colonialwilliamsburg.com) by calling 855-296-6627 and by following Colonial Williamsburg on [Facebook](#) and [@colonialwmsburg](#) on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

## 2017 Holiday Folk Art Program Highlights

### **60th Annual Folk Art Museum Christmas Tree**

10 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday, Nov. 10

Watch as the museum’s enormous 60<sup>th</sup> annual folk art Christmas tree is decorated by artisans with 2,000 hand-crafted ornaments. The museum’s “elves” will share stories about the design and creation of these hand-crafted folk-art-inspired objects of beauty. Included in Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission.

### **The Art-Full Tree**

10:15 a.m. Friday, Nov. 10 and 2:45 p.m. Saturdays in December

Draw inspiration from the folk art on view and the handmade ornaments on the AARFAM Christmas Tree and then drop by the museum’s Education Studio and create a folk art ornament to take home. For families. Included in Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; approximately 90 min.

### **Folk Art Holiday Inspirations**

Noon, 2 and 3 p.m. Friday, Nov. 10

Learn about special folk art objects that have inspired holiday ornaments on the museum’s folk art Christmas tree while on a guided tour. Included in Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; approximately 90 min.

### **Decorate!**

2:45 p.m. Tuesdays in December

Drop in and create an inspiring decoration, based on the Art Museums’ historical collection, to celebrate Hanukkah and

Christmas. For families. Included in Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; approximately 90 min.

### **Scherenschnitte**

10:15 a.m. Mondays Nov. 27, Dec. 4, 11 and 18

Try your hand at the German art of scissor cutting. Special ticket required in addition to Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; \$15; approximately 90 min.

### **Hoop Art**

10:15 a.m. Friday, Dec. 1

Stitch a piece of art inspired by an object in the collection using felt and floss and then framed in an embroidery hoop. Special ticket required in addition to Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; \$15; approximately 90 min.

### **Gelli Plate Printing**

**10:15 a.m. Friday, Dec. 8**

Create mono-prints inspired from objects on exhibit with Gelli plate printing. Special ticket required in addition to Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; \$15; approximately 90 min.

### **Make 5 Ornaments**

10:15 a.m. Friday, Dec. 15

Make five Christmas ornaments inspired by a quilt in the collection. Special ticket required in addition to Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; \$15; approximately 90 min.

### **Decorate a Mini Christmas Tree**

10:15 a.m. Friday, Dec. 22

Create miniature ornaments inspired from the folk art collection to decorate a mini tree. Special ticket required in addition to Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; \$15; approximately 90 min.

### **Ragdolls**

10:15 a.m. Friday, Dec. 19

Rip and tie to create a ragdoll friend. Special ticket required in addition to Colonial Williamsburg or Art Museums admission; \$15; approximately 90 min.