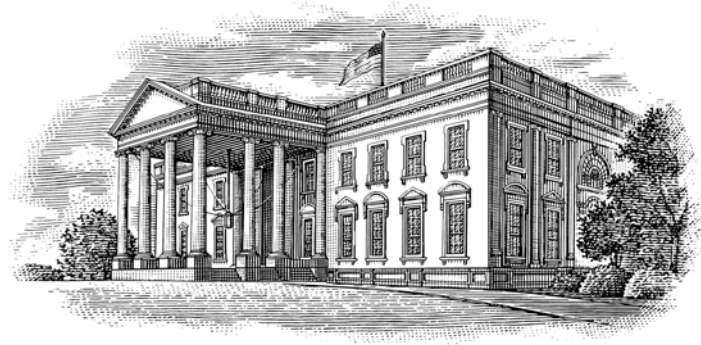


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Backgrounder

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Michael Melton Discusses 29 Years of the
White House Historical Association Ornament Program

A Marvelous Holiday Tradition Continues

People worldwide collect the White House ornaments, give them as gifts to family and friends, and decorate their Christmas tree with them, just like the tree in the Blue Room of the White House. The annual White House holiday ornaments, which have been produced by the White House Historical Association since 1981, honor the presidents of the United States and reflect on the history and events that have taken place in the President's House.

Michael Melton answers queries about the ornament program he supervises.

Can you tell us how the association's holiday ornament program began and how the first design was developed?

In 1981, Bernard Meyer, the Executive Vice President of the White House Historical Association, was exploring the feasibility of producing an ornament to generate funds to assist the association in accomplishing its educational mission. A high quality copper weather vane was developed and proposed for the design of the first ornament. Weather vanes crowned many of this country's historic buildings, including Mount Vernon and Independence Hall. An interpretative brochure was written to accompany the ornament. The association's Board of Directors reviewed and approved the design, and the ornament program was born. It became an immediate success.

Many people enjoy collecting the ornaments. Can back issues be purchased from the association?

Only the first ornaments produced in 1981 and 1982 really can be considered rare collectibles. They were made of copper with a patina finish, a process to give the copper a weathered look. All of the ornaments in the series, including gold plated copies of the original two, can be

purchased. We have finished the ornaments in 24 karat gold or pure gold to keep them bright and untarnished for years to come.

When did the tradition of placing the association holiday ornament on the Blue Room tree begin and why was the ornament such an immediate hit?

Chief Usher Rex Scouten arranged for the 1981 ornament to be placed on the Blue Room tree for the public to see. Now is an established tradition to have the current year ornament hung on the tree. We were fortunate with the early promotion of the ornament. The National Park Service approached Willard Scott of NBC television, and he agreed to display the ornament during one of his Today Show spots on the Ellipse covering the annual Pageant of Peace. Mail orders from all parts of the country soon poured in.

What is one of your most favorite memories of the ornament program?

It's not one favorite memory, but the general sense of satisfaction I have gotten from the program over the years. Every year, after the "winning" ornament design is selected,

I work with the manufacturer to create a finished product. I am always a bit nervous to see how the ornaments will be received when they go on sale. To watch a customer walk into the gift shop and see the new ornament, then to observe their eyes light up and a smile appear on their face, that moment makes the work from all involved well worth the effort.



Michael Melton is a native of California who now resides in Virginia. He moved to the east coast in 1978 to work for the White House Liaison Office, National Park Service. An experienced administrator and manager, Mike joined the association staff in 1989 as its first Administrative Officer. He has supervised the holiday ornament program since 1991 and has written an administrative history of the first decade of program for the association.