



The White House Christmas Tree in the Blue Room will glow with historic toys such as this late 19th-century Bliss doll house.

House in a tree

See one at the White House

Many American families will enjoy a Christmas tree in their homes this year. But a trip to the White House may be necessary to enjoy a house in the Christmas tree.

This year, along with other ornaments, colorful and historic Bliss doll houses will be nestled among the branches of the White House Christmas tree.

The Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, which has one of the world's largest doll and doll house collections, will assist in decorating the traditional Blue Room tree. On moving day, Bliss houses and a load of miniature furniture will leave Rochester, N.Y., the museum's home, and head straight for the Executive Mansion.

The journey of the Bliss doll houses to the nation's capital began in the late 19th century. In those years, toy manufacturers in America and abroad produced doll houses and other playthings out of lithographed paper over wood. The miniature works of the R. Bliss Manufacturing Co. of Pawtucket, R.I., were some of the most diversified and widely popular in America.

lithographed right on the doll house, along with the bricks and stones, window frames and doorways and eye-appealing gingerbread ornamentation. "R. Bliss" was usually found over the front door.

"Historians love a piece of the past that is signed," doll house historian Flora Gill Jacobs observed, "and so do collectors." One of the first doll houses she acquired was a Bliss seaside cottage, found 30 years ago far from the sea in West Virginia.

Today, its home is on "Bliss Street" with other Bliss buildings in the Washington Dolls' House and Toy Museum in the nation's capital.

The toy trade magazine, Playthings, described the Bliss line in 1907: "All were made in American designs to suit the tastes of American children." The first Bliss doll house known to have been produced was the "Fairy Doll House" advertised in the 1889 Bliss catalog as "the best fifty-cent doll-house in the market." As years went by, the Fairy Doll House magically grew into a Bliss microcosmos. There were houses of all types: shops, churches, firehouses, armories, stables and warehouses.

THE BLISS name has lived on for a very good reason — it was almost always

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