

Cresco Convergence

Editor Stuart A. Hessney samples the edible treats and painted metal goodies at the latest Toy Soldier Museum open house

Text and Photos: Stuart A. Hessney

About 60 collectors converged on Cresco, Pa., USA, for The Toy Soldier Museum's autumn open house Saturday, Nov. 2, 2013.

Proprietor James H. Hillestad played the perfect host along with his wife, Carol, who dished up delicacies such as grilled hot dogs, split pea soup, cookies and more.

The good turnout was a dramatic upswing from the autumn 2012 edition, when power outages and travel hazards caused by Superstorm Sandy wrought havoc. This time attendees came from across the United States from as far away as Texas (Oonagh and Steve Rhea), as well as Canada, Denmark and the United Kingdom.

Many of the vendors and visitors were en route to the next day's 31st Annual East Coast Toy Soldier Show & Sale in Hackensack, N.J. It was canceled last year due to the hurricane.

RED BARON'S BROTHER

Exhibitors who held court on the second floor of the museum included Al Green from Green's Collectibles in Denville, N.J. He's a friendly and fantastic source of figures by a host of makers.

Nearby Tedtoy Miniatures of Owensboro, Ky., was represented by Ted



Deddens and his daughter, Abby. They had new 54-mm items from W. Britain and Monarch Regalia Production along with examples of Ted's own craftsmanship like a charming Christmas set with Santa Claus.

Crown Military Miniatures proprietor Nicholas Cameron traveled from Salem, N.H., for the toy soldier event staged in the Paradise Valley of the Pocono Mountains. He had tables set up right



TOP: A hanger crafted by Nicholas Cameron complements a John Jenkins model of a WWI Fokker Dr. I triplane.

MIDDLE: The Toy Soldier Museum's specially released set for Christmas 2013 is "Please Tell Santa."

BOTTOM LEFT: Sword in hand, Col. William Prescott tells rebel troops, "Do not fire until you see the whites of their eyes" in a Battle of Bunker Hill diorama.



outside the museum in Mr. and Mrs. Hillestad's beautiful and expansive garden.

Cameron's offerings included products from Flag Dude and scenic items highlighted by an aircraft hanger that he painstakingly crafted himself. It was a perfect complement to a John Jenkins Designs 1:30-scale model of the World War I Fokker Dr.1 triplane flown by German ace Lothar-Siefried Freiherr von Richtofen.

Credited with 40 victories, Lothar was the younger brother of highest-scoring ace Manfred von Richthofen, the famous "Red Baron." Unlike his big brother, Lothar survived the Great War only to be killed in a plane crash in 1922.

While in the garden, Cameron stood out by wearing the uniform of a British Seaforth Highlanders officer. Inside the museum, any of his movements might have startled visitors in the midst of admiring some of the approximately 70 manikins dressed in military uniforms that are part of the proprietor's incredible collection of militaria.



ABOVE: Open house attendees included George Gregory from England, Canadian Don Ritchie and the Irish Toy Soldier Museum's Sam Watson (from left).



HISTORIC MILITIA UNIT

One of Jim Hillestad's "neighbors" is maker Martin Ritchie of U.S. Military Miniatures in Kunkletown, Pa. He displayed three attractive 54-mm sets re-creating the Veteran Corps of Artillery of the State of New York (VCASNY).

The historic militia unit is depicted by a gun crew manning a World War II-vintage pack howitzer, a six-piece field music set and a five-piece color party. The artillerymen and color party wear War of 1812-style U.S. Army uniforms made up of shakos, blue coats and white trousers. The fifers and drummers are dressed in red coats.

Veterans of Revolutionary War Gen. George Washington's Continental Army formed the VCASNY in Manhattan in 1790. Their original goal was preparedness to prevent another British invasion and occupation of New York City.

The VCASNY is the oldest military organization in New York state. Besides having served in various wars and conflicts throughout American history, VCASNY members traditionally fire artillery salutes and appear in parades in conjunction with patriotic and commemorative events in New York City.

HOME RULE CRISIS

After a too long and much regretted lapse, this writer was very happy to see Sam Watson once again. He is the owner of the Irish Toy Soldier Museum in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

For a man of his energy and charm, Sam has been lying relatively low in the hobby for a while due to various factors, particularly because he had to fight a thankfully successful battle against bowel cancer. However, he came to America

TOP: Martin Ritchie's VCASNY figures in War of 1812 uniforms include a color party, field music and gunners manning a WW2-vintage pack howitzer. (Photo by James H. Hillestad)

BOTTOM LEFT: Dealer Al Green with an Irish Guards uniform on display in the museum."

BOTTOM RIGHT: Ted and Abby Deddens traveled from Kentucky for the event.





ready, willing, able and armed with a few sets to show off in Cresco and Hackensack. And, he was accompanied by George Gregory, a good pal from England.

Highlights of Watson's wares included Irish Guards wolfhound mascot Cuchulainn with a handler and a five-piece Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers colour party. As usual, everything from the faces to the flags are very nicely detailed on his 54-mm, matt-painted figures.

Watson was particularly proud to show off a pair of new seven-figure sets based on the Home Rule Crisis.

After the British House of Commons passed legislation in 1912 that would give Ireland limited independence by 1914, Ulster Protestants feared losing their strong ties to Britain and local sway while being ruled by a Catholic-dominated parliament based in Dublin. Unionists bent on blocking Home Rule formed the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in 1913. Alarmed by these developments, Irish nationalists joined the National Volunteers. Both sides smuggled rifles and ammunition into Ireland.

A civil war seemed imminent, but was averted by the outbreak of World War I and Britain's declaration of war against Germany Aug. 4, 1914. The men of Ireland closed ranks to fight a common enemy. Members of Sir Edward Carson's loyalist UVF formed the British Army's 36th (Ulster) Division. Thousands of National Volunteers enlisted in existing

regiments to form the 10th (Irish) and 16th (Irish) Divisions.

"Within four years the number of Ulstermen and Irishmen who were to give their lives totaled 35,000," Watson recounted. "And, in many battles – at the Somme, Messines and elsewhere – they would shed their blood fighting side by side."

The figures in both of Watson's Home Rule Crisis sets wear civilian dress, haversacks and bandoliers of bullets while marching with their rifles at the trail. Distinctions include the UVF's Union Jack standard-bearer and flat caps. The Nationalist Volunteers wear slouch hats pinned up at one side and march under a

fluttering green harp flag.

Earlier in 2013, thousands of people – many of them in period costume

TOP LEFT: Irish Guards mascot and handler from the Irish Toy Soldier Museum.

TOP RIGHT: Nicholas Cameron in Seaforth Highlanders uniform and host Jim Hillestad (from left).

BOTTOM LEFT: Sets from a British Raj series by Sarum Soldiers.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Colour Party from the Irish Toy Soldier Museum.





TOP LEFT: Sam Watson's Home Rule Crisis figures depict the Ulster Volunteer Force and Irish National Volunteers (from left).

TOP RIGHT: AeroArt's spectacular new figure of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III.

BOTTOM: British Nile River gunboat crafted by Hicks Atwell.



-- marched in Belfast parades to mark the centenary of the original UVF's establishment, the 101st anniversary of the Ulster Covenant and Ulster Day. Organizers insisted the historical commemorations had no ties to the modern-day organization also called the UVF, which has been designated as a terrorist group in the United Kingdom and is proscribed in the Republic of Ireland.

EMPEROR FREDERICK III

Amongst the 30,000 or so figures exhibited in the museum was a brand new and spectacular equestrian model of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III (1415-1493) for sale from The AeroArt St. Petersburg Collection. Frederick was an Austrian Hapsburg and the last Emperor whose coronation was held in Rome.

"His rule was characterized by some as being sluggish and indecisive, while others felt his lethargic resistance to change was commendable," AeroArt owner Thor Johnson observed in background notes accompanying the figure. "A former member of Frederick's court once described him as a person who wanted to conquer the world while remaining seated."

Ha! Well, this 54-mm Frederick is seated on a war horse and carries his standard. The intricate detailing is spectacular, especially on the armor complete with a helmet visor that can be raised to reveal the Emperor's face.

Made in Russia, this connoisseur-quality masterpiece has a \$600 U.S. price reflective of its stature as a miniature work of art.

SANTA & DIORAMAS

Besides his usual stunning array of dioramas, Jim Hillestad showcased "Please Tell Santa," his Christmas 2013 set specially made in England by John Eden. The Victorian vignette depicts a mother and her children window shopping at a detailed, half-timbered toy store. The charming set costs \$235.

Across the garden in Carol's studio cottage was a stunning array of sets produced in England by Patrick Willis of Sarum Soldiers. They included selections from his "Wild West Show," "Officers' Mess 1900" and British India series.

A detailed British Nile River gunboat of the 19th century crafted by Hicks Atwell of Boston around 1990 was on offer complete with soldiers made by Trophy Miniatures of Wales Ltd., sailors created by Pennsylvanian Robert Shoulberg and a display case. It was very reasonably priced and set sail for home with yours truly.

Nearby were two of Jim's diorama depicting the ARW's early Battles of Lexington and Concord as well as the Battle of Bunker Hill. Both dioramas are animated by figures from W. Britain.

The Bunker Hill diorama includes a figure of Col. William Prescott, an ancestor of former W. Britain General Manager. Prescott is famous for telling rebel troops staring down advancing Redcoats, "Do not fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

If I can make it there myself, I hope to see the whites of the eyes of many friends, acquaintances and TS&MF readers at the next open house scheduled for springtime Thursday, May 8, 2014. That's the day before the Miniature Figure Collectors of America Show and Mart gets under way in King of Prussia, Pa.

In addition to the biannual open houses, Jim's museum/shop is always open by appointment. A visit is always time well spent.

