

# Donation of the Month

## Fairy Lamps



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Although today they are sought after as collectables, Victorians used small candle lamps on a regular basis as nightlights and soft lighting that was safer and more decorative than using open candles. Nightlights made of short, squat candles were already being used, but in 1844, George Miller Clarke applied for a patent in London for his “improvements in night lights.”<sup>[1]</sup> It became a family affair when George’s relative Samuel Clarke also applied for a patent for his own designs of night lights in 1857.

Samuel Clarke called his brand of lamps Fairy Lamps because of the soft, gentle light they produced and their often small, delicate designs. Clarke also advertised the Pyramid candle and Cricklitt-style lamps. Other companies competed with the Clarkes by making their own candle lamps. Lamps of this type became commonly known as “fairy lamps.”

Although they were basically a holder for candles, fairy lamps were often small works of art made out of glass or metal. Most have a base to hold the candle and a shade to fit over it. This shade protected the flame from being blown out by a breeze and protected curtains and clothing from catching fire from brushing over the flame. They were also made in lovely colors and patterns and created a soft, delicate light that Victorians enjoyed.

The beauty of these lamps was in the designs made, especially in glass. Many different colors, shades, and patterns were used; one company dipped the glass in an acid bath to achieve a subdued luster. Some were made from swirled glass and still others had raised “hobnail” and diamond patterns. Many patterns were used in the glass with names like amberina, Nailsea, Burmese, cameo, mother of pearl, milk glass, porcelain, Vaseline, and diamond quilt.

These lamps came from the estate of Marcia Newitt of Rogers. Mrs. Newitt moved to Rogers in 1970 from Chicago. She and her sister, Christine, decided to retire in Rogers after previous visits to the area. Mrs. Newitt was a member of several organizations including the Natural Foods Association and the Ozark Society and served on the board of the Northwest Arkansas Archeological Society. She was an active collector of many things, including fairy lamps, which are now in the Museum’s collection. Four of these lamps currently decorate the 1895 Hawkins House. When visitors tour the house, they can imagine the

soft glow of small candles through exquisitely patterned and colored glass in the Victorian parlor or in the bedroom at night. From left to right: Burmese fairy lamp 1978.67.15; lamp with Clarke Pyramid candle 1978.67.22; blue satin swirl and amber glass fairy lamp 1978.67.18.

#### **CREDITS**

**MacSwiggan**, Amelia E. Fairy Lamps: Evening's Glow of Yesteryear, 1962; Poese, Bill. Lighting Through the Years, 1976; "Fairy Lamp Club" website featuring research and information related to Victorian and contemporary fairy lamps, [www.fairylampclub.com](http://www.fairylampclub.com) ; Object and Donor files; Rogers Historical Museum Research Library.