

A HOLIDAY SEASON WITH MARJORIE MERRIWEATHER POST

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Marjorie Merriweather Post often spent the holiday season at Mar-A-Lago. Photographs in Hillwood's archives document holiday decorations at Mar-A-Lago, Palm Beach and Tregaron, Washington D.C. in the 1940s, as well as at the American Embassy in Brussels, Belgium in 1938. Post also documented the décor on board the *Sea Cloud* in 1947, her "first Christmas on the ship" as she wrote in her scrapbook.¹ Marjorie Post described the tree on the yacht as "very gay with lights".² (fig. 1-2).



Fig. 1: Tree on board the *Sea Cloud*, 1947, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens, Archives and Special Collections



Fig. 2: Marjorie Post and family on board the *Sea Cloud* for the holiday, 1947, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives and Special Collections

When celebrated at home, Post's Christmas tree was even bigger and surrounded by many gifts, all carefully wrapped. Photographs from the 1948 holiday season at Tregaron, Post's home from 1940-55, show the house and property covered with snow, the family celebrating in the French drawing room where the tree was set, and the dining room with a beautifully set table (fig. 3-4).

Marjorie Post liked to set her holiday tables with small trees as the table's centerpiece. She used this extravagant décor as early as 1938 on the table of the American Embassy in Brussels (fig. 5). She would repeat this setting in many homes, sometimes replacing the small trees with aluminum ones as shown in a photograph of the holiday table at Mar-A-Lago in 1947. Post's loved ones, including family members and friends, are sitting around the table in their elegant outfits and many wearing festive red Santa hats (fig. 6).

¹ Scrapbook, SB_016, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives and Special Collections.

² *Ibid.*



Fig. 3: Tregaron, Washington, DC, 1948, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives and Special Collections



Fig. 4: Marjorie Post and granddaughter Marjorie Post Dye at Tregaron, Washington DC, 1948, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives and Special Collections



Fig. 5: Holiday table at the American Embassy, Brussels, Christmas 1938, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives and Special Collections



Fig. 6: Holiday table at Mar-A-Lago, Christmas 1947, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives and Special Collections

The holiday season was an opportunity to exchange many gifts. Hillwood's collection includes several works of art that were presented to Post by her successive husbands, children, and friends. The earliest piece documented as a Christmas gift is a small silver spoon from 1896 (acc. no. 12.526). The souvenir pieces bears the name of Battle Creek where C.W. Post founded the family company and the date "Dec. 25, 1896".

Gifts to Marjorie Post were epitomes of her taste, carefully chosen by her loved ones to please her and included porcelain, icons, royal and imperial portraits, pieces by Fabergé, and jewelry. Some of them are among the well-known highlights of Hillwood's collection such as the portraits of Empress Alexandra and Empress Catherine II both offered by Joe Davies for Christmas in 1939 and 1950 respectively (fig. 7-8).



Fig. 7: Portrait of Empress Alexandra, Russia, 1906-07, oil on canvas, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens (51.81)



Fig. 8: Portrait of Empress Catherine II, attr. to Dmitry Levitsky, (Russian, 1735-1822), c. 1788, oil on canvas, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens (51.56)