Magnolia Mound

New bandbox display provides its visitors with view of 1800s

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Gwen Edwards, director of Magnolia Mound Plantation, wants visitors to see life of the early 1800s in littlethings—bandboxes, for instance.

"To see the everyday things, we want the nitty gritty," Edwards said, pointing out the fly catcher, rosary and leech jar on display inside the house at 2161 Nicholson Drive.

Bandboxes were designed to hold men's collar bands. Women found the bandbox's shape useful in packing clothes, cosmetics, shoes, ribbons, jewelry and hats, the way women use tote bags today. The bandboxes were also used to store household items.

Chet Coles, chairman of Magnolia Mound's collections committee, saw the bandboxes in an antique auction catalog. He got in touch with the auction owner, who was familiar with the plantation and the time period it represents. Coles placed a bid by telephone.

"Our aim is to use the collection so people can really feel they are stepping back in time," Edwards said. "This is where the bandboxes come in."

The bandboxes were commonplace and relatively inexpensive, but attractive. A medium size bandbox would have cost 50 cents and a large one about $1. It was an easily reached price for the middle class. Magnolia Mound's auxiliary board paid $1,600 for the bandboxes.

The boxes are in a girl's bedroom at Magnolia Mound. The boxes are predominantly blue with details in white, brown, black and gold. The larger box depicts a classical Greek temple scene in an al fresco setting.

The smaller, oval box has a camel with its driver as the dominant scene. The lid shows classical scenes similar to the larger box.

Bandboxes were handmade of pasteboard and covered with decorated wallpaper. Some papers were one of a kind and handblocked, while others were mechanically roller printed.

The views, motifs and designs on the paper reflect the time and culture it came from," Edwards said.

Because camels were considered exotic animals, the camel motif was popular in the early 1800s.

People had little contact with exotic animals. They were fascinated by the traveling shows of rare and unusual beasts. Camels were imported to the U.S. in the 1830's for military use in Western outposts. After the Civil War, the animals were...