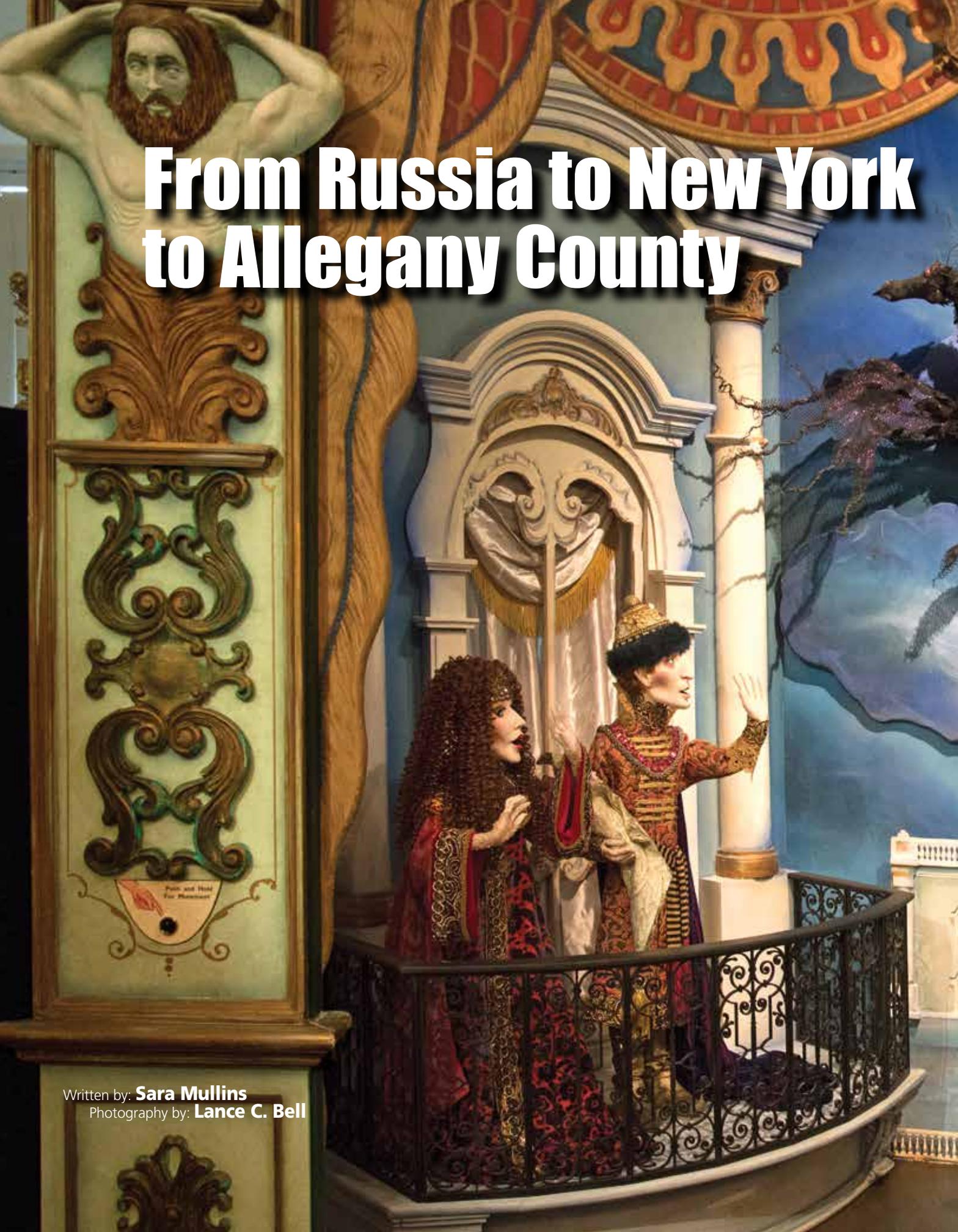


From Russia to New York to Allegany County

Written by: **Sara Mullins**
Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**



Sleeping Beauty Casts a Spell in the Allegany Museum



The wicked fairy, Carabosse, placing a curse on baby Princess Aurora.



The four scenes of *Sleeping Beauty* at Allegany Museum.

Insets below and facing page: Close-ups of two of the characters reveal the excellent craftsmanship and attention to detail, as well as the fine needle work on all of the figures' clothes.

Every year, during the Christmas holiday season, the windows of New York City's elite department stores come alive with lavish, animated displays designed to dazzle and entertain. It's usually a short run lasting about six weeks until the displays are dismantled and their parts sold or discarded.

Thanks to an unusual chain of events, one such display with an especially intriguing history has survived and is now housed on the third floor of the Allegany Museum in Cumberland, Maryland. In a series of four windows, the tale of *Sleeping Beauty* unfolds, highlighted by dramatic doll-like figures clad in lavishly decorated costumes reminiscent of czarist Russia. Each window resembles a theatrical stage set, with elaborately carved wings and heavy curtains in rich colors. In each scene, an open book with fairy-tale, stylized text and art summarizes the action displayed within each window. The figures come to life with the push of a button beside each window.

In the first scene, the story begins: "Once upon a time, on the magnificent stage of the Mariinsky Theatre, a story was told about a King and Queen who lived in the marvelous



Winter Palace with their beautiful daughter Aurora..." The royal couple celebrates their beloved child's christenings with the five good fairies they have invited. One of them, the Lilac Fairy, has the foresight to bestow the gift of "sleep against evil."

In the next scene, evil appears in the form of the wicked fairy Carabosse and her "familiar," a dragon. Angry that she



was excluded from the christening, Carabosse places a curse on Aurora, saying she would pierce her hand with a spindle and die, as her elegantly clad parents recoil in horror.

The story comes to a climax in the third scene. Aurora lies still in a 100-year sleep, saved by the Lilac Fairy's gift after she succumbs to the curse of Carabosse, who is disguised as an old woman. Unlike many depictions of the old woman, this version has wavy red hair topped by an elaborate headpiece and wears what appears to be a satin costume. She sits aside as the prince prepares to bestow his kiss of life upon the princess.

And the royal couple live happily ever after the celebratory fourth scene, in which the prince and princess perform a pas de deux atop a three-tiered wedding cake, accompanied by a ballerina en pointe and a Pierrot and fireworks in the background.



In 2003, these magical scenes made their debut in the windows of New York's Saks Fifth Avenue store to celebrate the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg, Russia. Created by the Mariinsky Theatre of St. Petersburg, the figures and scenes are handmade; even the beadwork adorning the figures' costumes, from their crowns to their shoes, is crafted by hand. Elements of Russian style abound, notably the headpieces.

The story of *Sleeping Beauty* was selected to highlight the legendary 1890 debut of the now classic ballet first performed at the Mariinsky Theatre. Two legendary talents – composer Peter Ilvich Tchaikovsky and choreographer Marius Petipa – joined forces to create what is now considered an artistic masterpiece. When approached by the the Director of the Imperial Theatres of Russia to create a score for *Sleeping Beauty*, Tchaikovsky



The Prince awakens sleeping beauty from her 100-year sleep.

initially refused because his first effort at composing for ballet, specifically *Swan Lake*, was panned by critics. But his childhood love of Charles Perrault fairy tales – among them, *Sleeping Beauty* – and his desire to work with Petipa, persuaded him to accept the commission. The result is now part of the grand legacy of Russian ballet that has inspired world-famous dancers like Mikhail Barishnikov, Anna Pavlova and George Balanchine.

A fortuitous discovery led to the display's eventual home in Cumberland. Its previous owner, Gary Baer of Meyersdale, came upon the display in Richmond, Virginia while looking for toy soldiers to stand by the entrance of a toy store he hoped to build. Baer and his wife, Elsie, both Meyersdale natives, had returned to town from Chicago after he retired. The current display at the Allegany Museum was made possible by Baer's generous gift.

To fully appreciate this enchanting exhibit designed to delight children of all ages, visit the Allegany Museum. For hours and directions, go online to www.allegany-museummd.org or call 301-777-7200. You just might be spellbound.

This story was taken in part from a December 16, 2002 article in the Times Herald-Record by Mitchell Uscher.



**Right: The royal couple celebrate atop their wedding cake as they live "happily ever after."
Note the ballet influence in the character's poses.**



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