

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

Have you ever thought you'd like to start a collection? If you haven't, you're probably among a tiny minority because the collecting urge is one characteristic that differentiates most people from most animals.

Even some animals are collectors; you may have heard a person referred to as a magpie. A black and white bird, related to jays, a magpie takes things home and keeps them. Bits of mica, jewelry, marble pebbles, shards of glass, any small shiny object may be hoarded by a magpie.

Among people, there're almost as many sorts of collectors as there are things. There are those who collect boxes: carved boxes, painted boxes, big boxes, little boxes, boxes that once had specific purposes, and boxes that are purely decorative.

There are those who collect stamps: some collect only those issued by the United States government; some, only foreign issues; some, commemoratives.

There are those who collect coins; they collect rare coins, not just money, though there are people, too, who seem bent on simply collecting money for its own sake, not for future appreciation.

People collect antiques, books, guns, shells, pitchers, plants, pewter, bottles and sculpture. They collect silver, glassware, precious gems, pottery, porcelain, plates of a certain color, types of tableware made by certain manufacturers.

There are collections of matchbooks, playing cards, picture post cards, comic books, and collections of quilts, thimbles, autographs, old clothing, lighting fixtures, tools, and cooking implements.

When it comes right down to it, it might be safe to say there's nothing that someone, somewhere, doesn't collect. There are few things in this world that are unique -- of which there is only one and there isn't another like it anywhere.

That too, the very fact that such a thing is unique, makes it a collector's item, and if it's not already there, it probably will end up in the Smithsonian.

The last few years has been a grand period for beginning a collection. The bicentennial brought forth a spate of collectables; some have been more attractive than others; some may someday be valuable.

That's the fun of collecting. When you start out, if you pick something as a specialty that's connected with a particular historical event, you can usually find many samples of things that commemorate the moment. As the years pass, the items tend to gain in value.

It's not possible to tell, ahead of time, which ones will be the more valuable, since it doesn't depend on beauty. It depends on scarcity. And it doesn't depend on scarcity at the time the item was available to the public. It depends on scarcity at some indeterminate time in the future.

Pressed or molded pieces of Sandwich Glass are valued highly by collectors today. They've become so sought-after that even chipped or cracked specimens bring excellent prices in antique shops and auctions.

For the most part, at the time it was manufactured, the pressed pieces of glass from the Sandwich works were given away; they were included in boxes of soap, as premiums, to help sell the soap.

Only long years after the glass factory went out of business, and many of the pieces had been thrown away, broken, discarded as worthless, did the goblets, cup plates, platters, bowls, salts, door knobs, drawer pulls, lamp bases, pitchers and vases take on value.

As the years passed the values increased, doubled and re-doubled, and doubled again.

It's never too late to begin a collection.

You might start to collect memorabilia or the bicentennial. You might find a glass jar that contained olives last year, and it might be decorated with 1776 symbols. You may find a brand of coffee that's sold in a free commemorative storage jar, with 1776 molded into the glass and with a plastic screw top.

Don't disparage the plastic screw top. Certainly there are billions of them. And most will be thrown away. If you're collecting things in 1976 connected with 1776, retain the entire item.

Who can tell? The plastic screw top may be replaced in a year or so with something more efficient, something that self-destructs to reduce pollution problems, something that's yet to be conceived by the minds of men.

It's not all that long ago -- many remember perfectly well -- when nothing was made of plastic because plastic hadn't been invented yet. There was something called celluloid that was used for some of the purposes plastic is now, but most things that are plastic today were made of metal or wood thirty or forty years ago.

Nothing, you say, will ever replace plastic? Don't you believe it. There were those who believed nothing would ever replace the buggy whip, you know. Buggy whip company stock isn't worth much on the open market today. I wonder if anyone collects stock certificates of companies that have gone out of business? Probably.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to bring a collector. The greatest disadvantage is the need to store your collection. If, over the years, it becomes valuable, protecting it from harm, theft, fire, or any form of deterioration to which it may be subject, can be a problem.

The larger the collection, and the larger each item that's a part of it, the larger the space problem you'll face. Some collections can safely be part of the family's daily living pattern. Metal pieces usually suffer least in such use, but even these may be lost or melted accidentally.

Just as little girls collect dolls and little boys amass armies of toy soldiers, their adult counterparts are, even now, beginning to create new values in multiples of items such as Avon cologne bottles, glass, pottery and plastic items depicting celebration of the country's 200th birthday.

Some are specializing, perhaps, in a priceless group of paintings of the Tall Ships, while others are investing in commemorative stamps, coins, or ingots of gold and silver, struck by private mints, to celebrate the occasion.

Who knows which will, in years to come, be worth the most? Nobody knows. That plastic turkey platter one of the banks gave away to new savings account customers might turn out to be worth a small fortune, fifty or sixty years from now.

One of the most fascinating and intriguing things about collecting, whether it's butterflies or Battersea snuff boxes, is that no one knows which thing will turn out to be the better investment in years to come.

Perhaps the nicest part of being a collector is the opportunity it affords to meet other people who share your special interest in a certain kind of collectable. An interest in common can develop friendships that will span oceans and overcome barriers of language and custom.

Become a collector of something, even on the smallest scale, just for the fun of it. You'll find you've entered a world of pleasure you never dreamed could exist.