

Extras

Teething Sticks for the Baby's Sore Gums

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As we all know, with any hobby there are numerous go-withs that are also highly collectible. In our hobby of baby bottle collecting there are baby rattles, baby feeding cups and dishes, infant or invalid feeders, photos, magazine advertisements, and baby teethingers. It seems like this list can go on and on.

I am going to try and enlighten "y'all" on a special class of teethingers. As we all know, when a baby is teething he/she is going to chew on anything that they can get their little hands on. This is where so many baby swallowing accidents originate from, whether it is a loose coin found on the floor or just some little object picked up off of the coffee table in the middle of the living room.

Teething is a universal and painful problem that is common to all peoples and animals that have teeth in their mouths. Come to think of it, I think that this is why God gave us a set of "Wisdom Teeth," so that we could well be reminded of our early years as a child when we were cutting our own teeth. Isn't God an ingenious being? We give our pet dogs a leather chew-bone, which they decimate in a matter of hours, if not minutes. Later on we give them bone scraps from the dinner table.

Well, we as humans supposedly are somewhat more sanitary with our children than we are with our pets. But let's go back a little ways in time to our very distant ancestors. In fact, let's go all the way back to the cave men. They had the same

problem with their offspring's teeth as we do today.

I don't know for sure, but I would assume that they either gave their teething children sticks, stones or pieces of bone to chew on as teethingers if they hadn't already picked up such things off the floor of the cave. As time and skills progressed amongst the cave peoples we can safely assume that the parents began to fashion these items into recognizable and useful objects that they were familiar with. This is the same way that sticks and rocks eventually became the beautiful arrows and spears that are so highly revered by collectors today.

As time still progressed the Europeans and Asians began to be artistic in their carving of bone, horn and ivory. Many beautifully preserved pieces of this type of art and sculpture have come out of these areas, some dating back to the period of Christ, the Greeks and the Romans. Eventually the American artisans began to create their works of art in bone and ivory.

The enclosed photos are some of these American, British and French made teethingers of bone and ivory. They were obtained as sets, one set per photo. As I have found out by observations and by talking to collectors at both baby bottle and Civil War shows, it seems that these teethingers come from two major sources. The first of these sources is that they were made by French or British prisoners of war while sitting in the enemy's jails, just looking for

something to do with all that spare time on their hands. Many of these sets of bone and ivory teethingers do come from France and England. The second source is very similar to the first in that the American and British sailors also had a lot of spare time on their hands while at sea for months at a time. It is believed that many of these sets of teethingers were fashioned by them while thinking about their wives and small children at home. This also holds water in that this is also the major source of carved and scrimshawed walrus tusks and whale's teeth.

I believe **Figure 1** to be the oldest of the series as the items are simpler in design and are more generic in form — just simple bone sticks with designs carved into their edges or surfaces. The most creative of this set is the fish teether.

Figure 2 contains all items that would be found in a carpenter's chest. They were either made for a boy child, or, in my opinion, made by a carpenter for his child, whatever its sex. You know us men; we don't know much about those feminine things that the girl children would play with.

Figure 3 contains items very similar to those in the previous photo, except that there is an attempt to include more household items such as a fork (4 o'clock), table knife (3 o'clock) and shaving razor (2 o'clock) in the set of teethingers.

Figure 4 is actually a dated set of teethingers. Tied to the set by the string is an 1886 British silver 3 Farthing coin in near mint condition, most likely the year of the infant's birth. The bone teethingers are very generic in design, but wonderfully aged and beautiful patina.

Figure 5 is a set of bone items to be avoided by the collector of teethingers since



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

they are not such. The set of three fish are actually some form of a game counter, similar to poker chips. Note that they do not have holes in them so that they could be tied onto a string or ribbon as one would do with a teether or modern pacifier. This does not prevent swallowing, but it does help in the recovery if it is accidentally swallowed, kind of like a circus sword swallower does in his act.

The teethers of times gone by should be revered and sought after as a very valid part of one's collection, just as any other go-withs would be. As with anything else, please be careful of modern reproductions. For one, they don't have that aged patina of the older bone and ivory items.

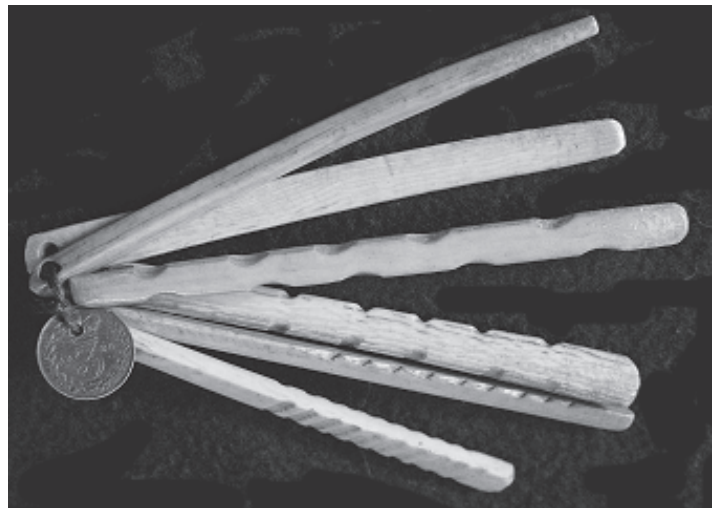


Figure 4



Figure 4 Close-up



Figure 5