

# CRAZY COLLECTORS? (Are you on this list?)

by **Ralph Finch** (who is on this list)

Put together by invaluable.com (and greatly edited), was this interesting and revealing article about people like you? Here is part of it (including unwarranted comments by me):

## 10 Unique Collections and the Psychology Behind Them

People collect innumerable types of objects, from postage stamps, coins, and dolls, to niche items like depression glass, oil cans, and vintage artwork.

Some collect as a relaxing hobby or to create a decorative space in their home. Others collect for the challenge and reward of finding rare, unique items from across the globe. The varying reasons people collect make the psychology behind collecting so fascinating. Studying how collecting evolved to become a modern hobby and evaluating why people begin to collect certain items helps us better understand this psychological impulse.

## History of collecting

It wasn't until humans gave up their nomadic lifestyle over 12,000 years ago that collecting became possible. In the 19th century, aristocratic collectors were the most common, as their collections were perceived as a status symbol. They amassed art, fossils, books, zoological specimens, and other objects that were popular at the time. The Victorian-era aristocracy kept these items in what was called a "cabinet of curiosities," a special curio or room designated for displaying and storing collectibles. Many of these cabinets contributed to the establishment of the first museums in Europe.

Since the introduction of the cabinet of curiosities, people all over the world have become curators of varied objects such as baseball cards, photographs, and stamps. Often, people start their collections as children and either grow out of them with time or keep up the tradition for years to come.

## Why do people collect things?

Previously, research suggested that people collected things because they felt an emotional connection to the subject matter. However, according to a recent study by Itamar Simonson, a professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business, people are more likely to begin a collection once they possess two of one item. Simonson says this is because people begin to associate owning the same objects with being wasteful or superfluous but don't want to get rid of something they enjoy. This redundancy becomes difficult to justify, and thus, a collection ensues. People also collect things for profit and for pleasure. Those who collect for profit are considered professional collectors. Anyone who collects for enjoyment is considered an amateur collector, though the categories are not mutually exclusive. Some reasons

people might collect for fun include nostalgia, connection to a historical period, or the prestige behind having the largest collection of something.

Other phenomena such as the "endowment effect" or "contagion" also point to why people collect things. The endowment effect describes people's tendency to value something the more they own it. Contagion is when people collect a celebrity's belongings, as they are seen to be imbued with the person's essence.

Some of the most fascinating aspects of collecting are the objects themselves. Learn about some of the most unique items people have collected over time, from sugar packets to erasers to back scratchers and tiny chairs.

**675** backscratchers. Collecting since 1970, Manfred Rothstein has them in his dermatology clinic in Fayetteville, N.C. Ever have one of those itches you can't scratch? Head to North Carolina.

**1,447** different shapes of confetti. (next time you are at a parade, grab a broom...unless the elephants and the circus are in town).

**19,571** erasers. Since I have never made a mistake, I've never needed an eraser.

**2,042** gnomes and pixies. Ann Atkin has them on her four-acre "Gnome Reserve" in the U.K. And at least half of them need dental attention.

**8,520** joker cards. No kidding, Donado de Santos had acquired this number back in 2009. There is no report of his total today; maybe his neighbors ran him out of town.

**3,000** miniature chairs. Barbara Hartsfield keeps them in her... miniature house (?) in Georgia. Is there a miniature chair club? Is she the chairwoman?

**125,866** napkins. A woman in Germany keeps her collection in boxes arranged by themes. If she needs a few with ketchup stains, I can send her some.

**1,331** soap bars. Another U.K. collector, and this one comes clean, admitting he likes unusual soaps, such as a cheese-cake-shaped one. The soap I remember from my childhood was Lava, which contains ground pumice. As a result of muttering a bad word, I discovered—and still remember—that Lava soap has a terrible taste.

**14,503** sugar packets. A guy named Ralf Schronder has 'em and says his older one dates back to the 1950s. Restaurants must lock the door when they see this guy coming. Ants must love him (I

don't know about his uncles.) Domino may be the biggest maker. (Fats loved 'em.)

**FYI:** For a spoonful of useless information: The sugar packet was invented by Benjamin Eisenstadt. Google says: "The hobby of collecting sugar packets is called sucrology." And I say, sweetly, who cares.

History adds: "On April 27, 1942, families registered for war ration books at their local elementary school. One book was issued for each family member and had to be surrendered upon death. Sugar was the first food item to be rationed." It makes you think back to when there was a shortage of toilet paper in 1973, and people were wiping the shelves clean.

This sugar packet item hits home. When my fading mom died while living in "the home," I had to clean out her room: there were sugar packets PLUS salt packets, crumbling crackers...and straws. One day I threw out a bent straw, and she complained. I went into her bathroom drawers and—I remember—counted 2,220 straws. Presenting them to her, I asked her if she thought 2,220 were enough! She said: "No." I sucked at winning arguments with her.

And I have 50 different rolls of antique toilet paper...I guess it runs in the family.

(And the Finches use an antique sugar bowl, purchased at one of Alan Blakeman's U.K. WinterNational bottle shows.

**137** traffic cones. Another U.K. wacko, David Morgan, says he owns nearly two-thirds of all cone types ever made. And, thanks to David, I bet traffic around his home is a mess.

And I wonder if Morgan has a poster showing Coneheads, the 1993 American film?

An important note: At the end of the article was this advice: "Whether you've been collecting for years or are looking to begin your first collection, there are many collectibles to choose from. Connect to the past with vintage watches or assemble blue and white porcelain for a stylish but practical option. Whatever you choose, take pleasure in the art of building a collection."

OK, admit it: If you collect any of the strange items mentioned above—or even worse, let me know at [rfinch@twmi.rr.com](mailto:rfinch@twmi.rr.com).

**Sources:** *Guinness World Records, Hobby Lark, National Psychologist, The Guardian, Stanford*

And another comment: Sugar, like salt, has had a long history. And with both topics,

variations of related items can be collected. I have amassed kitchen canisters with the blue-onion design and have some marked Sugar, Cut Sugar, Powdered Sugar, Granulated Sugar, Brown Sugar, and Loaf Sugar, among others.

Loaf Sugar is particularly interesting. And today, sugar is common. Today we have sugar cubes, but...sugar has been called White Gold and is indigenous to the South Pacific. It was first introduced to South America in 1493 by Christopher Columbus during his second voyage to the New World. Rapidly, sugar plantations, which were made profitable by African slave labor, and the industry became a major part of the world economy.

The sugar market triggered new habits in the lives of the European well-to-do. Sugar was initially limited to a wealthy elite who used it as a symbol of power and wealth. In the 16th century, "sugar banquets" arrived in the Netherlands. The well-to-do outdid each other by displaying magnificent sugar sculptures on their tables. Confectioners often mixed these sugar sculptures with other elements such as wax, plaster, textile, and later even porcelain.

A sugarloaf was the usual form in which refined sugar was

produced and sold until the late 19th century when granulated and cube sugars were introduced. The sugarloaf was also the sign of a grocer, often found outside his premises or in the window and sometimes found on his trade tokens.

A sugar bowl filled with sweet memories of England.  
Photo by Janet Finch

