

A TOAST

To Collecting Diversity

Ralph Finch, a little crusty, explains:



I like different and odd. Janet adds: “*That’s why I love you.*” She thinks she’s cute.

Once, many years ago, I interviewed Michigan’s King of Toasters. (Perhaps the Toaster King of other states, too, but those statistics are hard to research. Maybe I should’ve checked with the *Guinness Book of Records*.)

Anyway, the King had one room filled with nothing but toasters. From floor to ceiling, toasters after toasters.

After that, I met other toaster collectors, and even went to a toaster auction, and now have several nice ones. We met with others warmed by the knowledge that they have a few, including Michigan’s John and Liz Pastor, Mary and Tim Kokles of Texas, and Jodi and Jim Hall of Illinois.

“Vintage” toasters from 1940 and up usually run around \$15, but super-rare examples can burn up a few thousand dollars.

On top of that, I later bought, at another auction, “*Lot 693, an assortment of 35 Miscellaneous Toaster Electric Cords, estimated*



A peek at the Finch toaster collection; note that one toaster has its own toaster rack. Photo Janet Finch.

\$25-\$50.” Nearly three dozen toaster cords? Aren’t they all the same?

Nope. We got them at a reasonable price and were able to find different cords for our different toasters. See, what’s odd about early electric toasters is that when they first came out in about 1900, there was no uniformity. Every toaster came with its specific cord, some with two prongs, three prongs, flat prongs, round prongs, etc. One rare cord has a switch built into the plug.

After we bought the large box of cords, we were contacted by someone who had a rare toaster sans cord, and we had the correct cord. He gave us \$85 for it, and he was a happy toaster. You should have seen his face light up...he practically beamed.

A little history from the Internet and Google: *“That lofty goal in cuisine was given a boost in 1906 when 35-year-old Detroit-er George J. Schneider of the American Electrical Heater Co. registered the first American patent for an electric toaster (using Albert Marsh’s wire) that he described as an ‘electric cooker.’”*

On the Internet, I warmed up to the well-worth-visiting Hagley Museum website, which explains (edited): *“Toast is a quick and easy breakfast that can be eaten on the go, but it wasn’t always so. Before the development of the electric toaster, hand-sliced bread had to be toasted on a long metal fork or in a metal frame held over a fire or on a gas stove.”*

“The technical challenge for the early toasters was developing a heating element that could sustain repeated high temperatures. In 1905, Albert Marsh created “Nichrome,” a filament wire with an alloy of nickel and chromium that was safe and durable when heated.”

“In 1906, the first U.S. patent application for an electric toaster was filed by George Schneider of the American Electrical Heater Co. of Detroit, using Marsh’s wire.”

“General Electric introduced its first electric toaster in 1909, using a competing alloy. The D-12 model, invented by Frank Shailor, was considered to be the first commercially successful electric toaster.”

“By 1913, the Copeman Electric Stove Co. introduced the “toast-er that turns toast,” a device that eliminated the need for the bread to be turned manually halfway through cooking.”

“It wasn’t until 1919 that a Minnesota mechanic named Charles Strite created an easy-to-use toaster designed for restaurants. In 1921, he received his patent for the automatic pop-up toaster.”

Now, don’t you feel warm and toasty with this new knowledge? I feel like a heel, and I also collect those large bottles shaped like (and called) “loaves of bread.”



"Toaster," Sidney Russell, 2002, Oil paint on painted canvas with yachting cord, 31 x 23 x 47 inches. Unique work. \$10,000



Loaf of Bread Demijohn, America, 1860-1880. Loaf of bread form, brilliant golden amber, applied sloping collared mouth, smooth base, height 8 5/8 inches, width 9 inches, depth 5 3/4 inches (minor interior stain). Beautiful color. Fine condition. — Heckler Auction 107, Lot 45



Nearly three dozen toaster cords. Lot 693, an assortment of 35 Miscellaneous Toaster Electric Cords, estimated \$25-\$50.



FYI: The most expensive collectible "toaster" is artwork designed by female artist Sidney Russell. It was offered in 2022 for \$10,000, and it is still available on the Internet.

Toast history... and complaints

The *Hagley.org* website has more history, photos and illustrations; do sample a slice of it.

Also worth a visit is the *Antique & Vintage Electric Toaster Sales* website. The day I looked in, there was a variety of toasters offered from around \$40 to a Blue Willow Toastrite for \$1,495—with correct cord—saying: *"The Blue Willow Toastrite electric toaster is one of the harder to find and rarest of all antique electric toasters, and ... made by Pan Electric of Cleveland Ohio. These decorated china toasters date from the late '20s, and production lasted just a few short years before the Depression hit."*

I've been fortunate to visit England at least 20 times. It is a beautiful land where, in AD 43, the Roman conquest of Britain began, and they maintained control of their province of Britannia until the early 5th century. The end of Roman rule in Britain facilitated the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, which historians often regard as the origin of England and the English people.

Now, the Romans, in their time, were among the most advanced cultures in the world. And England produced much for centuries,

and then it got distracted and created things like mushy peas and Spotted Dick (steamed pudding). But not toast.

In all my visits, I've never found even one screen window, even at Buckingham Palace, or two showers that work the same way. (Each one operates independently of another, and despite the fact that the Romans had hot natural baths in England, hot water is often...iffy.)



And toast? HOT toast? Forget it. The Beatles were hot; toast was never hot. In a hotel, it often will slowly come out of a big machine, and when the pile is large—and cool—it is then served. In nice restaurants, it is even served on open silver toast racks, designed, I think, to make toast even colder.

But toasts aren't for everyone. We once had people over for a Thanksgiving Day dinner, and at the meal, I said, "A toast to good friends," but one person declined. She said that in her "religion," she was not allowed to make a toast.

I refrain from commenting.

