

GORGEOUS GLASS COOKIE JARS

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Photographed by Richard Grayson and June Grayson

I didn't want to collect cookie jars - or cracker or biscuit

jars as the Victorians called them. It meant defying my husband

and depleting my bank account. It also meant re-cluttering our home.

Our four children had grown up and left us; their pets had died. My husband had sold his 100 piece antique radio collection. I had even sold my antique doll collection so that I could buy Leica cameras for a new career as a writer and photographer.

Our home had never looked so nice.

But in 1986 George Keyser allowed us to photograph the 135 cracker jars that he and his wife Mary had collected in their travels throughout the United States and Europe before her death five years previously. I had never seen such an exquisite collection.

When our children were little and the house filled with dogs and cats, I had purposely avoided buying anything breakable for our home; that consideration no longer applied. The beautiful cookie jars reminded me of the best times of my own childhood and I wanted to relive them.

Many of us who grew up in the 30s and 40s during the Great Depression never realized at the time how poor we were. When I came home in winter after the dark had started to fall, I could see the inviting glow of our living room lamp with its pink shade shining through the window onto the snow. I knew that my mother

had hot chocolate and home-made cookies on the kitchen table.

(In those days, no "good" mother would think of serving "bought-en" cookies to her family). How could I help but try to recapture those happy childhood days by collecting cookie jars, too?

Andy Warhol, the recently deceased "pop" artist and also a cookie jar collector, called cookie jars "pieces of time." And so they are - hundreds of them with their own little story to tell and all adding up to an intriguing history of an entire age.

The English started it all around 1700. They had to eat something with the tea brought by the clipper ships from the Orient by the East India Company. Serving tea became a national tradition during the Victorian Age. A family displayed its prettiest biscuit jar on the dining room sideboard and reserved it for company. Simpler jars stayed in the kitchen.

Surprisingly, it was American silver manufacturers who popularized biscuit jars in the United States and advertised them in their silver trade catalogs. Silver manufacturers made the silver plates, rims, lids, and handles. They imported the glass jars from France and England until American glass and pottery makers arose to supply them.

Glass manufacturers produced humidors, pickle jars, and

ginger jars as lavishly designed and decorated as were their biscuit jars. Sometimes they made matching sugars, creamers, and spoon holders.

The tea biscuits the Victorians served from their biscuit jars were not the sweet treats we call cookies today. They were more like our crackers. You can still buy similar crackers imported from England in your grocery or department store. Victorian cookbooks did not even have a section for cookie recipes. The one or two cookie recipes to be found are in the "Cakes" section and are rolled sugar or molasses cookies.

Since then, American cooks have brought the art of cookie baking to its greatest glory.

You can still start a wonderful cookie jar collection. Collectors tend to specialize because of the sheer volume of cookie jars available. Prices for pottery figural jars have soared since the Sotheby auction of the Warhol collections in 1988. However, almost every antique store has one or more Victorian biscuit jars for sale. True, signed art glass jars from reputable antique dealers are expensive, but they are worth budgeting for. After you know the field, you will seldom come home from a flea market without a lovely, although modestly-priced, jar. And

there is always the chance of finding a real bargain at a local market or garage sale.

Beware, though, cookie jar collecting is truly addictive.

Our appetite for treats of any kind - cookies and the jars we keep them in - may well remain insatiable.

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Please write me at POB 167, St. Charles, Illinois, 60174, with any additions or corrections to the cookie jar captions in this article. I would especially like to know if you have seen any of these jars pictured in factory catalogs. This is almost the only way to substantiate the exact maker and the time of manufacture. I will incorporate such facts in a book I am writing on cookie jars.