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Exclusive Your State

VICTORIAN COOKIE JARS

Written by June Grayson, Photographed by Richard Grayson

They don't make cookies like they used to: cookies with sugar sparkling on top, thick and cake-like in the center, and crispy brown on the edges.

They don't make grandmothers like they used to: one who had time to make the cookies, wear a big apron, and stir hot coffee into milk for cookie dunking.

They don't make cookie jars like they used to, either: jars of the finest handblown art glass, or delicate hand-painted porcelain with a profusion of flowers, or cut glass lead crystal which rang like a bell when you tapped it with a spoon.

Grandmothers still make homemade cookies for visiting grandchildren - especially for holidays. Cookies are easy to make. You can stir up a batch and have them hot out of the oven in less than an hour. Although we don't know the name of the first cookie baker, all cultures that baked at all, baked some small treats that could be called cookies.

But unless you haunt the antique stores and flea markets, you won't find any cookie jars for sale to compare with the beauty of the Victorian biscuit jars.

And that's a pity. The Victorian china and glass manufacturers, as well as the silversmiths, made their "biscuit" and "cracker" jars in every conceivable color, shape and material - silver, glass, pottery, stoneware, earthenware, and porcelain.

The first jars were probably made after 1700. They became popular in England about 1865, when serving tea became a national tradition. A family displayed its prettiest biscuit jar with

the silver tea service on the dining room sideboard. They used that one for "company." The plainer jars were used for everyday.

Surprisingly, it was the American silver manufacturers who popularized the biscuit jar here and advertised them in their silver trade catalogs. They made the silver plates, rims, and handles. They imported the glass jars from France and England until American glass and pottery makers took over. You can see the advertisements in the old trade catalogs preserved in historical museums and reproduced in reference books about antiques. WAVE CREST, The Glass of C. F. Monroe, contains several pages of these advertisements. Manufacturers also produced humidors, pickle jars, and ginger jars just as opulently designed as the cracker jars. Sometimes a creamer and sugar bowl were made to match the biscuit jar.

For twenty years, George and Mary Keyser, advanced collectors of Chicago, bought antique biscuit jars for their own pleasure, amassing one of the most complete collections in the United States. They had 125 jars and no two were alike.

The Smithsonian has no biscuit jar collection. The Strong Museum at Rochester, N. Y., has five biscuit jars. According to Mr. Keyser, "Even the Victoria and Albert Museum in London

had only six biscuit jars on display when we visited there.

We have seen a few in Germany and Austria but none in Italy."

When Mrs. Keyser died seven years ago, Mr. Keyser began to give away his collection. "If I sell them to a dealer, how do I know who gets to buy and enjoy them? If I give them to a museum, they might be stored unseen in some basement. This way, I get to see my friends and family enjoy them." explains Keyser. "I go into their homes and can see that they display and appreciate my treasures."

The Keyzers bought their first biscuit jar in Connecticut in 1962 when they traveled east for a family wedding. They paid \$12.00 for it. From then on, every outing at home or abroad included a stop at an antique store. Unlike some collectors who store their treasures in boxes, the Keyzers displayed every biscuit jar either in a cabinet or on tables and chests throughout their large Victorian home.

Since they both had English ancestors, some of their favorite jars were bought in England. Hannah Barlow, an English artist, designed their Barlow jar, which soared five-fold in value right after they bought it. Though probably they have no relationship to Hannah, Barlow is one of their family names.

Keyser, who majored in geology in college, also favors

an English Huntley and Palmer tin jar in the shape of a globe with a world map. The jars were used as promotions to sell cookies. If you can find one now, you will pay several hundred dollars for a Huntley and Palmer jar.

Can you start an antique biscuit jar collection today?

The hunt would be harder but no less rewarding. A quick tour of one suburb's antique displays found three for sale. One was oblong, silverplated, with the word, Biscuits, engraved on the front and priced at \$400.00.

Two other jars, with handles, looked like sugar bowls, only larger. Their price was \$42.00 each. According to Keyser, they may well be sugar bowls. "Before the automobile, traveling salesmen stayed at hotels built next to the train station. Each table in the hotel dining room had an oversized sugar bowl in the center of it."

The most ornate biscuit jar in a current issue of the Antique Trader is priced at \$799.00. Two other jars list for \$300.00. Undoubtedly, the most beautiful jars which survive to this day are in the hands of private collectors. They may only appear a few at a time at sales at the large auction houses.

The tea biscuits the Victorians served from their biscuit

jars were not the sweet treats we call cookies today. They were usually more like our crackers. Still, our appetite for treats of any kind, and the jars we serve them from, may well remain insatiable.

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