



Checkerboard

January, 2013

Reflections of a 40 Year Collector

by David Briggs

Introduction

Collecting American antique advertising began for me serendipitously some 40 years ago and periodically I happen to reflect back about what initially sparked my interest and how my collecting eye, knowledge and motivation evolved. This wasn't just a sudden realization that came over me but literally years of immersing myself into something that I gradually became passionate about.

What is it about this particular hobby that tends to draw each of us into its grasp and then propels us with overwhelming passion to pursue these rare and desirable objects of history? For me it's been a journey of acquiring a collection of historical objects that both speaks to and engages me and represents some of my values. Fortunately I've had a lot of help in this journey from friends, fellow collectors, dealers, auctioneers and, most importantly, my wife who shares the same, if not greater, enthusiasm.

Beginning Experiences

At first, collecting began as a novelty that represented an unusual form of decorative art but quickly transformed into a passion for better understanding our nation's early economic and social history. It was 1972 and I was with my former college roommate who I hadn't seen in several years. He had invited me to stop by his house while I was on a business trip and, after several hours of reminiscing about the good old times, I happened to notice these unusual pieces of advertising he had used as decorative objects. I was simply intrigued by their stunning visual appeal. When I returned home, I started traveling around to local antiques shops looking for

advertising items: signs, tins, boxes, just about anything that caught my eye. As I continued to seek out objects at antique shows, as well as auctions, I began to notice a much wider variety and occasionally more sophisticated objects that engaged my visual imagination even more. I recall the first auction of antique advertising I ever attended and how it was such a visual overload. I simply didn't realize the extent of what existed. How was I ever going to learn more about and understand these items of American history?

Influences and Evolution

In those early days I had little guidance except for my intuition and little understanding of what existed in the antique advertising world. In order to educate myself I began to comb the libraries and book stores for published material, but what I found were a few price guides. While somewhat helpful in exposing me to what existed, these guides didn't provide any historical insight or context into the objects themselves. Fortunately I came across an antique advertising dealer at a general antique show and began a conversation with him. He introduced me to the TCCA (forerunner of the AAAA) and the Indy Ad Show and strongly suggested that I join the organization and attend the show. Thus began my journey in building a better understanding of antique advertising and country store collectables. Attending the annual advertising conventions and periodic Indy Ad Shows, meeting fellow collectors and engaging in conversations about our common interest helped to build and extend my knowledge. Seeking out collectors in the vicinity of where I lived and visiting them and their collections also was helpful. All these contacts also helped to influence my thinking and challenge my collecting interests.

As the years rolled by I continued to seek out books as well as other antique/ephemera societies. I acquired and read just about any book that dealt with my interest in antique advertising and country store collectibles as well as companies and lithographers. While some of them were superficial, others gave me great insight into the economic, social and cultural statements that these objects make. It helped me appreciate the artistic qualities that were inherent in antique advertising and made me realize that these objects literally chronicled the times as well as aspects of peoples everyday lives. The people and firms that produced these objects used strong, subtle, emotional, idealized and imaginative messages and imagery to convey and pull the consumer into purchasing whatever they were selling. Just as they intended these messages and particularly the imagery to persuade the consumer, it is precisely these same messages and imagery that appeal to us as collectors today. The best advertisements that caught the attention of people in the 19th and early 20th century are also the best ones today from a collectors standpoint. Give me a powerful image with a persuasive message and you've got my attention, regardless of its form. If it has elements of economic and social history so much the better.

So what have I taken away from 40 years of experiences that might help other collectors regardless of whether they're old timers or just beginners? Well here's a few of those lessons that I learned and the things that are important to me.

- Understand why you collect and what motivates your collecting passions. Seems simple enough but how many of you have regularly given thought about and discussed this with others?
- Collect what speaks to you. If the object doesn't engage you and get you excited then seek out something else.
- Rarity and condition are important but shouldn't be the only drivers in building a collection.
- Preservation is each of our responsibility. Protect your collection through accepted conservation techniques and professional conservators.
- Restoration has its place and should be judiciously and sparingly employed by professionals. Many world renowned art masterpieces that sell for millions of dollars have been conserved and restored without affecting their value or desirability.
- Join a collectors club/ society, seek out experienced collectors and have a conversation about why and what they collect and their passions. Don't be afraid to talk about your interests and your collection; they're just as interested in your thoughts as you are in theirs.
- Be selective. The absence of unlimited amounts of money will help to focus your attention on building a great collection; its presence doesn't guarantee one.
- Relying, in part, on a network of experienced, knowledgeable and ethical dealers can help you build a quality collection.
- Your collection is more impressive to you than others..... that's exactly the way it should be.
- Trust your instincts because they are the best indicator of what you should do.
- Admire and appreciate other collections. I don't collect upright tobacco pocket tins but I can revel in their beauty and admire the passion, time and enthusiasm that it took to build the collection.

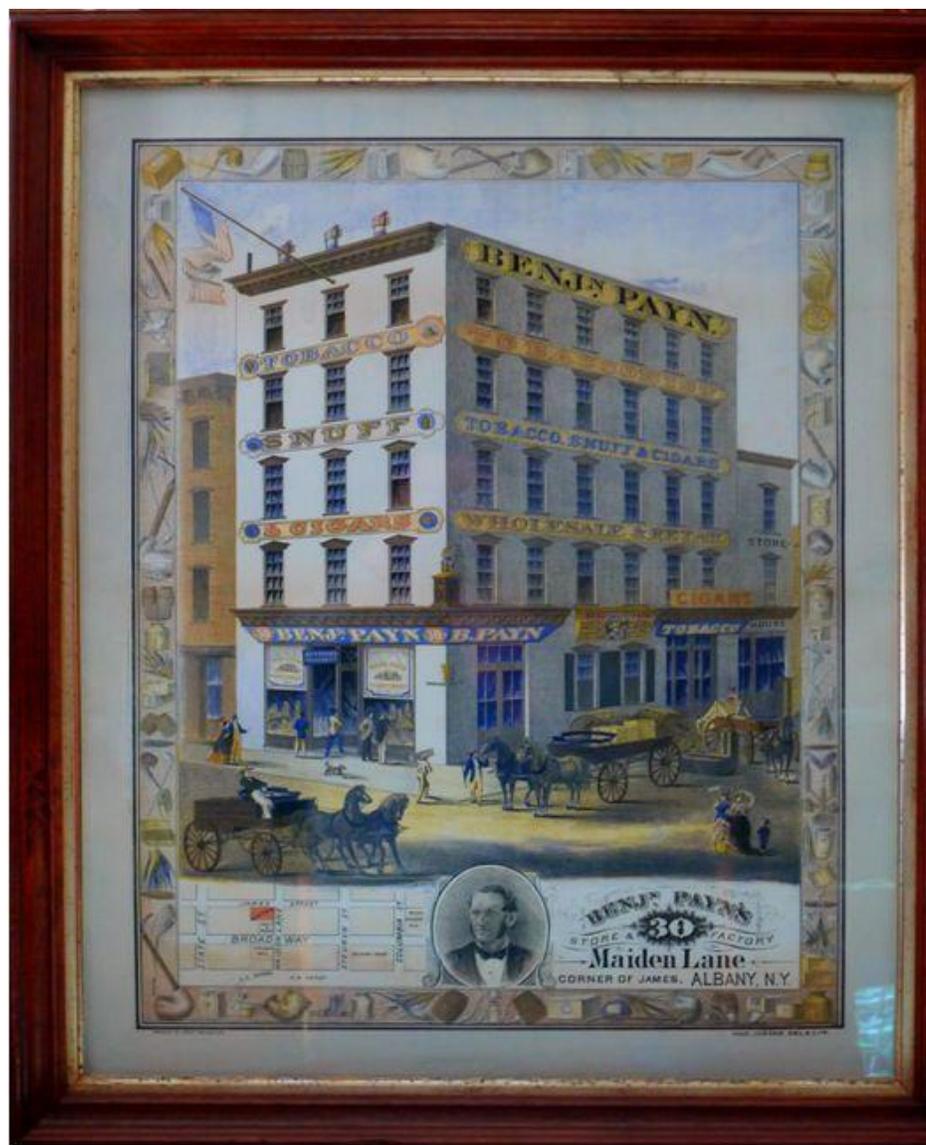
Selections from Our Collection

If you've been patient enough to get to this point then you'll understand in part what excites me and my wife about antique collecting and collections. Our primary interest and focus is on 19th century chromolithographed posters--both paper and tin. In addition, we collect other historical objects including square corner tobacco tins, 5 lb cough drop tins, small games, books, sundry country store objects and federal period American furniture. All of our collections have been acquired based upon historical significance with a special emphasis on rarity and condition.

Tobacco

Benjn. Payn, Tobacconist

Artist: Charles Juehne. Lithographer: Weed, Parsons & Co., Albany, about 1875



Benjamin Payn of Albany, in celebration of his success in the tobacco and chocolate business, had a poster created that featured his handsome building at the corner of Maiden Lane and James Street. A variety of pipes and tobacco and chocolate products ornament the border of the poster, printed just 2 blocks away at the plant of Weed, Parson & Co and identified on the map in the bottom left corner. Of special interest is the small scale cigar store figure set on the corner overhang between the 1st and 2nd floors. Most American shop figures are larger than that this, but Albany had already established a precedent in one of the earliest American cigar store Indians known. Less than 3 feet high and probably carved by Ezra Ames, a similar figure is owned by the Albany Institute of History and Art.

D. H. McAlpin Plug Tobacco
Lithographers: Donaldson Bros., NY about 1880



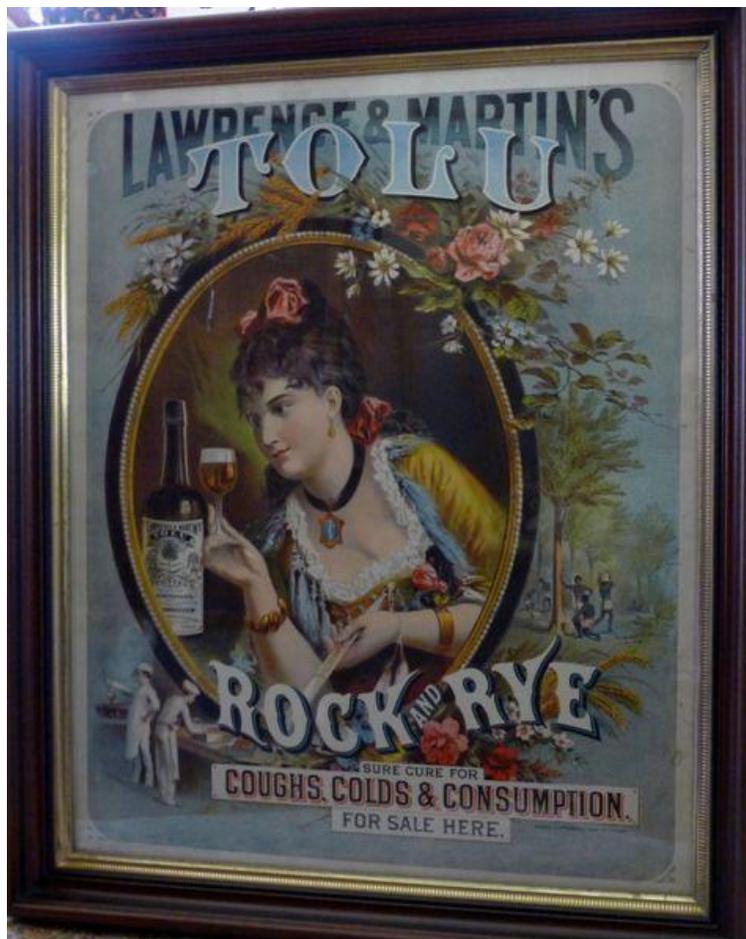
An idealized African, possibly a sharecropper, holds out to the plantation owner and

his family a leaf of Virginia tobacco as well as a full tobacco plug proudly exclaiming "Dis Yahs De Bacco Dat Dey All Want Now". A variety of D. H. McAlpin brand tobacco boxes with labels are displayed on the side panel of the poster as well as a full tobacco plug separated by tin tags at the bottom. David Hunter McAlpin was born in 1816, in Pleasant Valley, Dutchess County, N.Y. of Irish descent. In 1836 he came to New York City and opened a cigar store at 84 Catherine Street. Over the next few years he opened several more stores, and in 1857 became one of the partners of the firm of John Cornish & Co., tobacco manufacturers. In 1861, he purchased the interests held by his partners and established the firm of D.H. McAlpin & Co. His company was the first to introduce Virginia tobacco to the New York market, branding it *Virgin Leaf* which contributed to the firm's growth. In 1868, as the firm grew, McAlpin bought two entire blocks and built a large manufacturing facility at 150 Ave D (and 10th street) in Manhattan.

Medicine

Lawrence and Martin Tolu

Lithographer: Shober & Carqueville & Co. Chicago about 1880



A beautiful woman sips a demi-glass of Lawrence & Martin's Tolu Rock & Rye,

assured that it will cure her ailments whether it be a cough, cold or consumption. Two side vignettes, one of South American natives gathering the tolu resin from trees and the other chemists making the medicine from tolu provide a testimonial to its natural qualities. Tolu Rock and Rye had a short but glorious history. Lawrence & Martin are listed as wholesalers and wine, liquor and cigar importers in Chicago in 1878. They were in business between 1871 and 1882 when the partnership was dissolved. In 1880, they introduced Tolu as an appetizer and cure for consumption, coughs, colds and all diseases of the throat and lungs. While they sold large quantities of the product, it was short-lived when the Internal Revenue Service decided in 1881 that Tolu Rock and Rye more closely resembled a liquor even though the product contained tolu balsam in rye whiskey and was merely a clever way for the firm of Lawrence & Martin to avoid paying a federal revenue tax.

Allan's Anti-Fat

Lithographers: Gies & Co. Buffalo, NY about 1875



An overweight woman is attended to by a concerned companion who offers a sure remedy for her unattractive overweight condition implying that she too can be as slender and equally appealing as her group of friends. Little is known about J. C. Allan & Co., Buffalo, NY, a producer of patent medicines and in this case a remedy for corpulence. While Allan may have formulated other nostrums the company is principally know for it's Anti-Fat remedy. The product and formulation was sold to Dr R. V. Pierce's Family Medicines in the spring of 1874, who named the subsidiary company The Botanic Medicine Co. Dr Pierce's Family Medicines was a leading seller of mail-order patent medicines many of which were aimed at addressing "female illnesses" and often contained alcohol and opium.

Household

The Telegram

Lithographer: A. Hoen & Co., Baltimore MD about 1887



The Telegram was a short-lived Baltimore weekly newspaper that began publication in January 1887 and ceased December 29, 1906. Proclaiming opposition to

Radicalism and Puritanism and extolling itself as "The Great Southern Weekly" it undoubtedly had ambitious designs for distribution well beyond the city of Baltimore.

Estey Organ

Lithographer: J. Ottmann Litho NY about 1886



Late in the 19th century, the Estey Organ Co. advertised "the most extensive organ works in the World" and had been in business in Brattleboro, Vermont since about 1852. Beethoven's portrait graces the center of Estey's Cottage Organ while a painting of the founder, Jacob Estey, is prominently displayed above in a richly appointed Victorian parlor scene replete with carpet, draperies and furniture of the latest fashion. The small party gathering for a musical evening hear and see not only the superiority of the "tone, durability and finish" of the Estey organ, but are further entertained by selections from the Estey Organ Method while children admire the expansive Estey Organ industrial complex from the window.

(C) David Briggs, 2012. The material in this article is copyrighted and any reproduction in whole or in part is strictly prohibited without the expressed written permission of the author. The author may be contacted at briggsdavi@gmail.com.



Antique Checkerboards

By Paul Lefkovitz

What is more symbolic of the general store of yesteryear than the checkerboard that sat in front of the pot belly stove? No general store antique collection would be complete without one. These beautiful works of art, generally created from 1880 to 1930, are very scarce and hard to come by. Each hand-crafted beauty reflects the individual tastes of the artisan that brought it to life. Color, design, size, ornamentation, wood, and workmanship all made each piece unique. Searching out a checkerboard brings forth a flurry of challenges, including authenticity, cost, and the look you desire.



Authenticity

Authenticity is the greatest challenge in seeking out a checkerboard. There are far, far more reproductions than authentic examples in circulation. Many of the reproductions would fool even a seasoned antique collector. Below are examples of two checkerboards ethically being sold as reproductions by their manufacturers. However, once sold, they can easily be passed along as authentic by others.



Another type of reproduction involves a newly painted checkerboard on an authentic old board. The age of the wood can fool even a trained eye. Many of these are painted on vintage breadboards. Breadboards were rectangular pieces of wood that were used to make and cut bread. They frequently had strips of wood on each end. It is possible that some authentic pieces were painted on breadboards but all of those I have personally seen were newly painted. The example below depicts a newly painted checkerboard on an old breadboard.

Please note the wood strips at each end of the checkerboard, generally a tell-tale sign of a checkerboard reproduction. Unless you are very familiar with primitive antiques and can recognize old paint, it is always best to purchase a checkerboard from a reputable and experienced dealer.



Cost

Authentic checkerboards generally range from approximately \$200 for more simple

examples to well over \$1,000. The nice example dated 1919, illustrated at the beginning of this article, recently sold for \$305 on eBay.



The gorgeous red-and-black example illustrated above recently sold for \$1,400 on eBay. It reflects all of the desirable traits of a top-quality antique checkerboard.

The "Look"

Since checkerboards vary so much in appearance, you may find yourself struggling to find the "look" you like. The traditional weathered paint on pine is most popular look but other woods were occasionally used. Colors range from mustard yellow, red, black, blue, brown, green, and others. Decorative design also varies greatly, from none at all to highly elaborate. Even the medium can vary. Checkerboards were not only made of wood--some were made of reverse-painted glass or marble/glass squares, often with mother of

pearl accents. An example of this type of checkerboard appears below. If this type appeals to you, you are in luck, since they are often available at a lesser cost, from approximately \$150 to \$250.



Another important variation is the number of squares in the checkerboard. The traditional checkerboard design features 8 squares by 8 squares. However, 10 X 10 and 12 X 12 checkerboards are also known, although more scarce. The first board illustrated above is a 12 X 12. The story goes that these checkerboards come from Maine and Canada where the nights are longer. A larger game board with more squares would lead to longer games--helping the players pass by the long evening hours.

The craftsmanship and history that exude from each checkerboard make them a treasured piece in any collection of general store antiques.



Happy Hunting!

We all have our favorite places to hunt. They may be little out-of-the-way antique shops, large, modern antique malls, or entire antique "towns". These are exciting places where we can reasonably expect to locate some great antique and collectable advertising treasures. We love to visit them!

As a collector, should you hide these special places from others, like secret fishing holes? If you do, that is a big mistake. Sharing the "good word" with others helps everybody! How? The retailers recommended by you will certainly benefit from the extra business you will generate. Other collectors enlightened by you will benefit from the new sources of goodies. You and the entire hobby will benefit by supporting these retailers and helping them to grow their businesses. That means an even better selection of treasures for you and others! This kind of support is vital to keeping the doors of such business open, especially during challenging economic conditions.

Fishing holes do eventually become depleted--keep those to yourself. Antique retailers become stronger and can make more precious items available to you and others when business is robust. Spread the good word, help retailers out, and support the entire hobby!

To do its part in letting collectors know about great sources of antique and collectable advertising, the *AAAA Checkerboard* is launching this "Happy Hunting" segment. Each month, we will list establishments that carry a particularly good inventory of antique and collectable advertising items. To nominate a store, mall or whatever you would like to bring to the attention of others, please [click here](#) and provide the following information:

1. Name of establishment
2. Address, City, State
3. Telephone number, if known
4. Brief description (2-5 sentences)

OK, here are the first three listings:

White Lion Antiques

113 S. Main Street
Kirklin, Indiana
765-279-5777

The White Lion is an exceptionally charming antique store that specializes in vintage advertising and country store collectables so this is one you don't want to miss. It is about 20 minutes northwest of Indianapolis. It harkens back to an era where antique stores actually carried antiques and you never knew what treasures you might find there. Craig Unroe and Jeff Bailey, the owners, are knowledgeable and a pleasure to swap stories with. They are willing to negotiate so you can often leave with nice pieces at a good value. Their store is always chock full of treasures and inventory turns over quickly so repeat visits will be rewarded. The ambiance of this store is

closer to that of a general store than just about any other store out there. Many collectors visit this establishment prior to the Indy Ad Shows. Adding to the appeal is that several other antique stores have opened up in the past year on Kirklin's Main Street.

Peru Antique Mall

2702 May Road Peru, IL 61354
Peru, Illinois
815-224-9991

This large antique mall, which is in central Illinois, is a veritable bonanza for lovers of advertising and general store antiques. Of the 200 or so dealers in this large mall, many of them feature high quality and hard-to-find advertising and general store antiques. The variety and quantity of their inventory is very impressive. Dealers generally know what they have so you are not likely to get a steal but this is a great place to pick up a nice item at a fair price.

El Paso Antique Mall

800 W Main St
El Paso, Illinois
309-527-3705

This antique mall is only about 15 miles from the Peru Antique Mall noted above and is a must-see for fans of vintage advertising. A surprising number of the 110 dealers carry good quality advertising material, which places this mall head-and-shoulders above the typical antique mall.

Please send us your recommendations. Let's populate this list for all parts of the country!

The AAAA Checkerboard assumes no responsibility for these recommendations and is simply a conduit for the input of its members.

Wanted Items

In this column are those sought-after items of desire that seem to be elusive. If you know where any of these items can be acquired or if you have one available, please click the link to reply directly to the seeker. To place a listing in this column, [click here](#). There is no fee for AAAA members. Up to three listings per member is permitted.

Edmands Coffee Company, Edmands Tea Company, 1776 Coffee, American Beauty Tea, Japan Tea, Devonshire Tea, (imported by Edmands, Boston/Chicago): Any items such as tins, signs, paper, or anything else related to the Edmands family of companies in Boston is desired. To reply, [click here](#).

Heathman Bakery, Dayton, Ohio: Interested in any items related to this business. To

reply, [click here](#).

Indianapolis Brewing Company Ephemera: Circa 1920. Specifically looking for signed documents. To reply [click here](#).

Veterinary Advertising Collectibles: Pre-1930s veterinary posters, patent medicines, store displays, photographs, paper ephemera. To reply, [click here](#).

Spice Tins: Scarce, rare, or unusual spice tins. To reply, [click here](#).

Tobacco Tin Tags: Groups or collections of less common types wanted in good condition. To reply, [click here](#).

One (1) Pound FULL [Unopened, Sealed] Key-Wind Coffee Tins: To reply, [click here](#).

Near Mint English Biscuit Tins: 1880 to 1925 To reply, [click here](#).

Scarce or Rare Tobacco Pocket Tins: One or a collection. To reply: [click here](#).

The Celluloid Face for a Wrigley Gum Display: To reply, [click here](#).

Old Automobile Gear Shift Knobs: The kind that screwed on the gear shift that came through the floorboard. Many looked like a large marble. To reply, [click here](#).

Ben Bey Cigar Collectables: Any Ben Bey cigar collectable, other than tin containers. To reply [click here](#).

Antique Adver-Trivia

Here is the latest installment of antique advertising questions designed to test your Advertising IQ.

1. What were the traveling salesmen called who plied their wares to general stores?



- A. Loafers
- B. Drummers
- C. Bilbos
- D. Dreamers
- E. Pickers

2. What were spool cabinets constructed of?



- A. Oak planks
- B. Birds-eye maple
- C. Barn siding
- D. Cedar
- E. Remnants from the manufacture of spools

For the correct answers, [click here](#).

Do you have any fascinating factoids about antique and collectible advertising? If so, please share them with the AAAA *Checkerboard* so we can try to stump our members in future issues. Just [click here](#) and describe your adver-trivia.

2013 AAAA Convention: Reading, Pennsylvania!

The 2013 AAAA Convention will take place July 17-20, 2013 in Reading, Pennsylvania. This event promises to be one of the best ever! Innovative and fun new events are in store for you, as well as old favorites. The economy is waking up, eBay and auctions are showing new momentum, and this will be a great time to buy or sell! After the convention, take full advantage of being in the heart of the Antiques Capital, USA with malls and shops galore for miles around. To ensure a room within the AAAA room block, please register NOW to avoid disappointment! For complete details, just [click here](#).

The AAAA Checkerboard is a monthly e-newsletter that is made available to all AAAA members at no cost. The mission of the Checkerboard is to increase knowledge about antique and collectible advertising among AAAA members. The Checkerboard also provides news and updates about AAAA. It is produced each month with the exception of the four months per year when the award-winning Past Times print newsletter is published. Paul Lefkowitz (plfk@generalstoreantiques.com) serves as Editor of the AAAA Checkerboard.



[Join us on Facebook](#)



[Send us an Email](#)