

JUNE 2007

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PREMIERE ISSUE



HIGH- INTEREST BANKS

Headed to auction, the
Steckbeck collection is
ready for its closeup

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Old, new and on the big screen

NEUMAN'S OWN

Construction sets for junior architects

WHISTLE STOP

Trains reign at Ambrose Bauer

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Ever heard the expression 'If you can dream it, you can build it'? It's meant to apply to architecture, but with the launch of *Toy Collector Magazine*, I've come to realize that this maxim applies to anything in life.

Around three years ago I began talking to a few very bright friends about the idea of a digital magazine format, which I felt one day would be the standard delivery system for printed news and entertainment. It had to happen – the handwriting was on the wall. Every

publisher I knew was feeling the pressure from ever-increasing costs of paper, printing and postage. And having been an editor for many years, I was, myself, acutely aware of the problems inherent to magazines or

newspapers with long lead times. Advertisers – especially auction houses – couldn't always get their ads prepared in time to make deadline, which

shortchanged both the advertiser and the reader. And sometimes news stories were outdated before they even reached the subscribers. This

was especially annoying when those news stories were my own 'scoops' and ended up running first in other publications with a shorter turnaround.

But timing is everything, and it has taken until now, June 2007, to pull together the ideas, software and, most importantly, the people to make this dream a reality.

Toy Collector Magazine is your magazine - written by collectors, for collectors. We have an all-star lineup of writers whose work you'll be enjoying each month in our pages, always free of charge. And in between issues, we hope you'll visit our Web site www.toycollectormagazine.com for the latest toy-related news and information.

Thank you for joining us, and let the fun begin!

— CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON



toycollector
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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON

CONTRIBUTORS
ALAN JAFFE, TOM HOEPF, EILEEN SMITH, CHUCK MILLER, KARLA KLEIN ALBERTSON, GENE FRIEDMAN, SHARON VERBETEN, KEN HALL, EILEEN SMITH

DESIGN
JAMES D. BUNTE

DESIGNER
LAUREN COON

QM4G
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PUBLISHERS
CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON
JAMES D. BUNTE

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT
CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON

VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS
JAMES D. BUNTE

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER
JAYNE SKEFF 626-296-6642

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BYLINES

J.C. VAUGHN is executive editor and associate publisher at Gemstone Publishing, where he works on such projects as *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, *Hake's Price Guide To Character Toys*, and the weekly e-mail newsletter *Scoop*. J.C. is a regular contributor to the *Journal of Antiques & Collectibles* and other leading trade publications. His comic-book work, including Fox's *24*, Harvey Award-nominated *Antiques: The Comic Strip*, and *Zombie-Proof*, has been featured in *TV Guide*, *Emmy®* magazine, *24 Magazine*, *Wizard* and elsewhere. Originally from Pittsburgh, Vaughn is an adopted expatriate Texan who presently lives near Baltimore.



TOM HOEPF has been writing about antiques and collectibles for more than 20 years. Among the items he enjoys collecting are cameras, baseball gloves, and glassware produced in his hometown of Tiffin, Ohio. He and his

wife, Marilyn, reside in Knightstown, Ind., in a 100-year-old home with their two Havanese dogs, Teddy and Sherman. In his spare time Tom is an usher for the Indianapolis Indians baseball team and secretary of the Hoosier Gym Community Center of Knightstown, the 1921 gymnasium that served as the home court of the Hickory Huskers in the movie *Hoosiers*.



ALAN JAFFE is a Philadelphia writer and editor, and the author of *J. Chein & Co.: A Collector's Guide to an American Toy-maker*. His in-depth articles on antiques, auctions and collecting have been carried by Gannett News Service and have appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Chicago Sun-Times* and other publications.

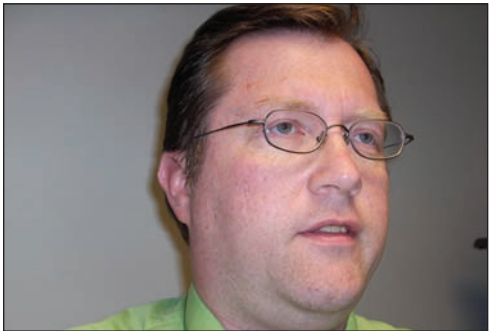
KARLA KLEIN ALBERTSON began her journalism career with an eye on antiquities, after receiving her master of arts degree in Classical Archaeology from Bryn Mawr College. For the past 10 years, she has written the Antiques column for the Home and Design section of the



BYLINES

Philadelphia Inquirer. She contributes regularly to *Maine Antique Digest*, *Early American Life* and other trade and collector publications. Decades of pop culture have made an impact as well, sparking Karla's interest in rock music history, Silver Age comics, martial arts, motion picture memorabilia and surf/skate/snowboard culture.

CHUCK MILLER is an award-winning freelance writer and author of *Warman's American Records* collector guides. He spent 10 years as a collectible-records columnist for *Goldmine* magazine and has interviewed scores of top recording artists. Chuck's articles on pop culture, toys, sports, history and animation have appeared in many publications, in the United States and abroad. His current interests include reconstructing the 60-year history of the Continental Basketball Association, assisting with inductions for the Vocal Group Hall of Fame and maintaining his beloved 1991 Pontiac 6000.



SHARON VERBETEN is former editorial director of *Toy Shop* and *Antique Trader* magazines. She has written about and presented programs on antique toys nationwide for the last 10 years. In 2001 she authored *The Best of Barbie: Four Decades of the World's Favorite Doll*. Sharon is an avid collector of spinning tops, tinlitho gameboards, and vintage valentines.

KEN HALL is a former business writer now based in Atlanta, where he is with Star Printing & Publishing, parent company of *Southeastern Antiquing & Collecting* magazine. In 2002 Ken began syndicating three antiques and collecting-related columns: Ken's Korner, The Celebrity Collector, and Gavels 'n' Paddles. His collecting interests include coins, records, autographs and art.



BYLINES



A renowned antiques writer, appraiser and lecturer, **GENE FRIEDMAN** has also collected antiques for more than 50 years. Gene’s erudite observations and keen knowledge of the antiques marketplace appear each week in his long-running column in the *Reading Eagle*. Gene also covers antiques for several national trade publications. A native of Reading, Pa., he is a graduate of Albright College with a B.S. in economics. For 27 years he was a reporter and columnist for the *Reading Times*. He also worked in Washington on the House Foreign Affairs Committee as staff director of Inter-American Affairs, followed by a stint in corporate communications.

EILEEN SMITH says she was born curious. That trait led her to a career in journalism, as well as an appreciation of antiques. A graduate of the Perley Isaac Reed School of Journalism at West Virginia University, she has reported and edited for a number of newspapers, including *USA Today*. Her work also has appeared in *This Old House* magazine, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Elegant Wedding*, *AntiqueWeek*, *Antique Trader* and more than 50 other publications. She has won numerous awards and last year was a finalist for an IRE (Investigative Reporters and Editors) Award for her work with the New Jersey daily *The Asbury Park Press*. She is also a *Jeopardy!* champion. Eileen lives in Wilmington, Del., with her husband and cat, Pikachu.



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5 THINGS EVERY PEZ COLLECTOR SHOULD KNOW

DAVID WELCH is one of the world’s foremost authorities on the subject of PEZ. His 1994 book *Collecting PEZ* has been an influential force in educating collectors about those universally identifiable character-head dispensers we all remember from childhood. If you’re a PEZ collector or thinking about starting up a collection of vintage PEZ dispensers, here are five excellent tips Dave shared with TCM:



1967 Snow White and Dopey store display box, possibly the only extant example.

1 ■ If future value is important to you, don’t buy dispensers with a patent number that starts with 4,9 or higher. All but 1 percent of PEZ dispensers have a patent number, and if it starts with a 4,9 or higher number, that means it was made sometime during or after 1990. Most PEZ dispensers made in the last 15 years or so are worth less than \$10.

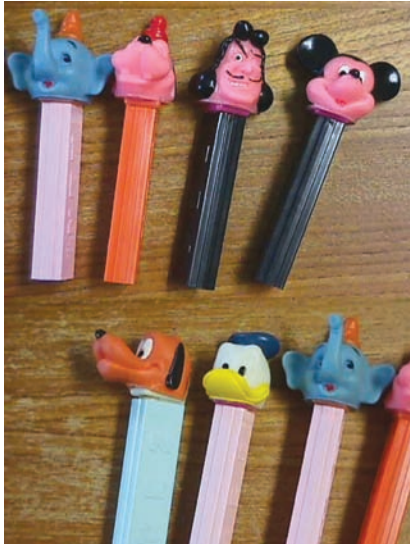
2 ■ PEZ dispensers are marked with their country of origin. If they were made in China, Slovenia or Hungary, they’re from the 1990s or later. These aren’t for the collector of vintage PEZ.

3 ■ Ninety-five percent of PEZ dispensers don’t have a date on them. But just because a PEZ dispenser has a date on it, that doesn’t mean that’s when it was made. The most confusing are the *Peanuts* dispensers. You might have a Charlie Brown dispenser that says 1965 on it, but that’s a copyright date. The PEZ *Peanuts* series didn’t come out till the 1990s.

4 ■ Beware of dispensers that have had their feet intentionally broken off. In the novice world, there’s a general belief that if a dispenser doesn’t have feet, it’s valuable; if it has feet, it isn’t valuable. So, some dishonest people



ABOVE: The 1972 PEZ Make a Face, also known as Mr. Potato Head, is scarce if complete and packaged. BELOW: Very rare 1979-1980 Disney rubber-head PEZ dispensers. Never publicly marketed. Between 12 and 25 of each version are thought to exist.



5 THINGS EVERY PEZ COLLECTOR SHOULD KNOW

wanting to take advantage of this widespread belief will buy brand new dispensers and carefully trim off the feet. They'll buy PEZ at close-out prices after Halloween, clip off the feet, then take the dispensers to a flea market and put \$3, \$5 or, if they're particularly ambitious, \$20 price tags on them. If a dispenser has a 4,9 patent number or higher on the stem (body), it should have feet on it – with very few exceptions, namely the 1990s Valentine's Day Heart and the new version "regulars" (no character head) that look like cigarette lighters. They were made without feet, in the era of feet.

5 ■ Dispensers that are missing pieces lose considerable value, but don't pass on a good dispenser if the price is right. If the head is fine but the stem is trashed, you may be able to find an identical replacement stem from a similar-era dispenser.

> DO MORE



The definitive guide to PEZ collecting is (surprise) *Collecting Pez* by David Welch. Although currently out of print, copies are available from the author (who will also inscribe them for you), or you can search Amazon for used copies

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NEUMAN'S OWN

NEW YORKER PAUL NEUMAN REFLECTS
ON HIS JOURNEY AS A COLLECTOR OF
SOON TO BE AUCTIONED ARCHITECTURAL SETS

BY CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON

IMAGES BY NOEL BARRETT AUCTIONS



The 19th-century construction set that produced this replica of the Eiffel Tower may have been sold as a souvenir.

After 26 years as caterer to Manhattan’s elite, Paul Neuman has been inside some pretty swanky places. And it’s a fair bet that the constant exposure to posh Park Avenue dining rooms and Upper East Side venues, coupled with a childhood love of elaborately outfitted train layouts, probably laid the groundwork for his later interest in antique architectural toys. Within Neuman’s world-class collection are boxed sets

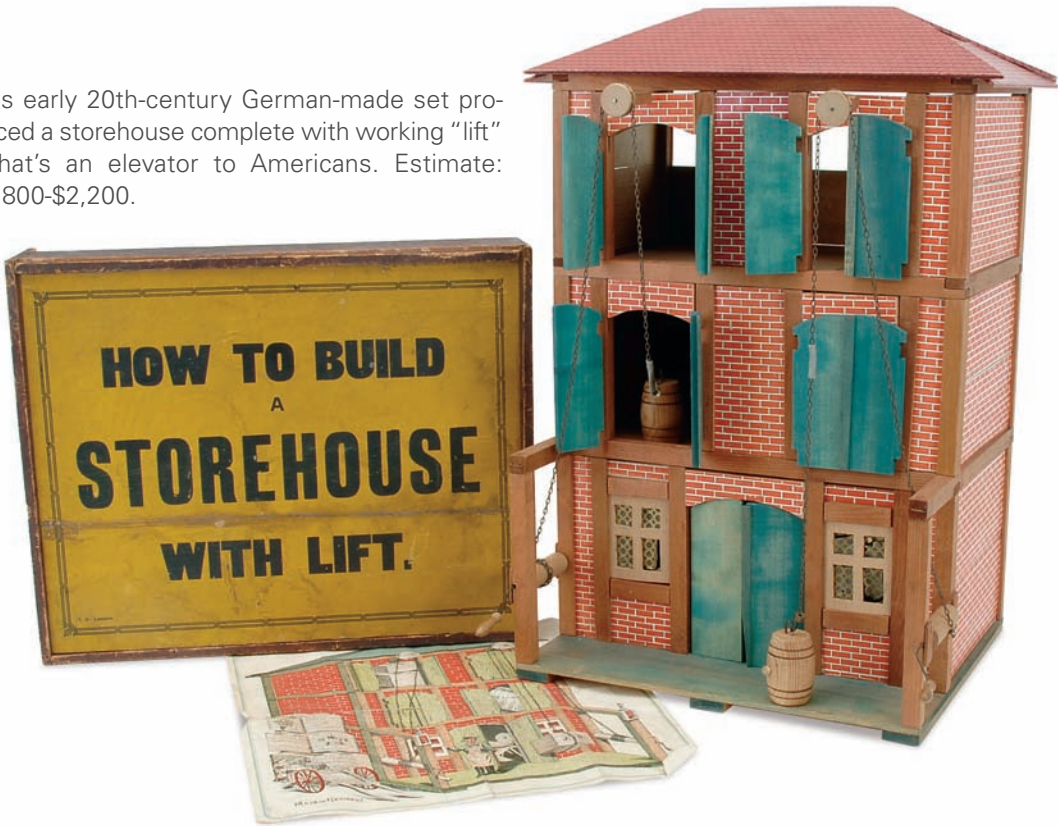
Here’s another early 20th century set made in Germany. The boxlid features a beautiful illustration of the actual military barracks known as Die Kaserne. Estimate: \$1,500-\$2,000.



whose contents construct scale models of grand landmarks, European castles and military strongholds – relics of another time, when toys were made with the same care as fine-art objects.

Neuman’s collection, which will be auctioned in 288 lots of Noel Barrett’s June 16-17 sale (with Internet bidding through eBay Live Auctions), is a

This early 20th-century German-made set produced a storehouse complete with working “lift” – that’s an elevator to Americans. Estimate: \$1,800-\$2,200.



highly refined assortment of classic 19th through early 20th-century Richter Anchor Block sets and other rare construction toys acquired over many years. Each set was designed specifically to teach young boys the basics of geometry and construction.

The Neuman collection is broad

in scope, encompassing German, Oriental and Moorish architecture all the way through to the “modern” era and the visionary designs of Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Kahn. Some of the sets create historic buildings like the Eiffel Tower and the Trocadero in Paris; Waterloo Bridge in London

and Queen Victoria’s Brighton Pavilion, while other very rare pre-World War I examples build fortresses. There’s even a rare anchor-block set of gray stones that constructs a small-scale Maginot Line – the series of concrete fortifications, tank obstacles and machine-gun posts that France set up along its borders with Germany and Italy in the runup to World War II.

Other European-made sets recreate historical war theaters such as the Battle of Peking and the Crimean War’s Siege of Sebastopol, the latter fashioned in a puzzle-like way, with guns that “shoot” the

fortress down. Anchor-block military sets became very scarce after World War I, when Germany was forced to demilitarize per the Versailles Treaty. During that time, many such toys were criticized for being too militaristic, and were destroyed.

The 20-year Neuman collection also contains very scarce stone-block sets made by Bing, a competitor to Richter, as

well as sets with a Biblical theme, like the Palestine Construction Set, equipped with plans to create the Temple of David, streets in Jerusalem, and more. Crafted with great care and attention to detail, architectural sets like those in the Neuman grouping could be regarded as the first action playsets, made for children of the Victorian Age. The lithographed paper-on-wood components and the gorgeous color lithography seen

on the boxes represent the pinnacle of artistry of a bygone era.

And it is that artistry that first captured Neuman’s attention. After graduating from college, Neuman was of a mindset to explore new areas of collecting. “I had started buying vintage trains, but found them too expensive,” he told *Toy Collector Magazine*. “Then, at a toy show in Philadelphia on June 2nd, 1985, I found a set of blocks – a Richter #12 set – fell in love with them and said, ‘Now I’ve found what I should really be collecting.’”

Because he was already tapped into the antiques circuit, it wasn’t more than a couple of weeks before Neuman found his second architectural set and also received a tip that would set him on a 22-year collecting mission. Neuman remembers the

One of the most elaborate sets in the Neuman collection, this one re-enacts the Siege of Sebastopol. In September 1854, British, French and Piedmontese allied forces landed in the Crimea and besieged the city of Sebastopol, home of the Russian Tsar’s Black Sea fleet that was threatening the Mediterranean region. Estimate: \$2,500-\$3,000.



turning point as though it were yesterday. "A dealer said to me, 'Do you know Norman Brosterman? He's been collecting for years.' I went straight to a phone booth there at the show, called Norman and said, 'I'm collecting block sets, and I hear you have a lot of them.' Soon I was at his apartment, which was like Tutankhmen's Tomb. He was an architect and had been collecting for several years. He had all this great

stuff. I knew I had to become a serious collector, and it was the network of dealers and other collectors that helped me do that."

Neuman said one of the most exciting things about collecting is that one never knows when or where "the next great thing" will turn up. He recalled a fortuitous visit to a doll shop in London. "I had no interest in

dolls, and most of the time you wouldn't find dolls and toys in the same shops. But I said to the woman behind the counter, 'I'm looking for architectural sets.' A German father and son who were in the shop overheard the conversation. Outside the shop, they told me that had some sets they'd like to sell. On a whim, I asked if they had the Volkerschlacht-

Denkmal, which is the Battle of the Nations War Memorial and the Holy Grail of stone-block collecting. They said yes, and that it was for sale!" Neuman had spent only two minutes in a doll shop he had hesitated to enter in the first place, and left with a



These colorful sets are typical of the better-quality building toys available in Europe in the second quarter of the 20th century. The boxlids feature exceptional color lithography and images of finished buildings to entice junior architects.



A beautiful replica of a German train station of the early 1900s, Der Bahn-Hofbau could be built with this set, which carries an auction estimate of \$1,200-\$1,500..

connection that brought him one of the greatest prizes in his collection.

Many of the sets Neuman collected over the years were German made. "Germans were the masters of this type of toy," Neuman said, adding that the golden era for most

manufacturers was 1850 to 1880. Richter’s prime production period, however, came later: 1880 to 1920. Richter was one of the few companies of its type that survived World War I. “But after the war, they had to give up some of their patents – probably as part of war reparations – and A.C. Gilbert ended up manufacturing some of Richter’s designs,” Neuman said.

In order of desirability, Neuman ranks the ones comprised of hand-colored chromolithographed wood blocks as

Two quintessentially Art-Deco-style skyscrapers, the Chrysler Building (left) and New York Life Building, inspired these 3-D puzzle sets by Skyline of Astoria, N.Y. Estimates: \$700-\$800 each.

the best, followed by stone, plain wood, then the paper and cardboard slot-and-assemble types. The earliest set in his collection was made around 1817, with 75 to 100 hand-carved wood pieces that construct London’s

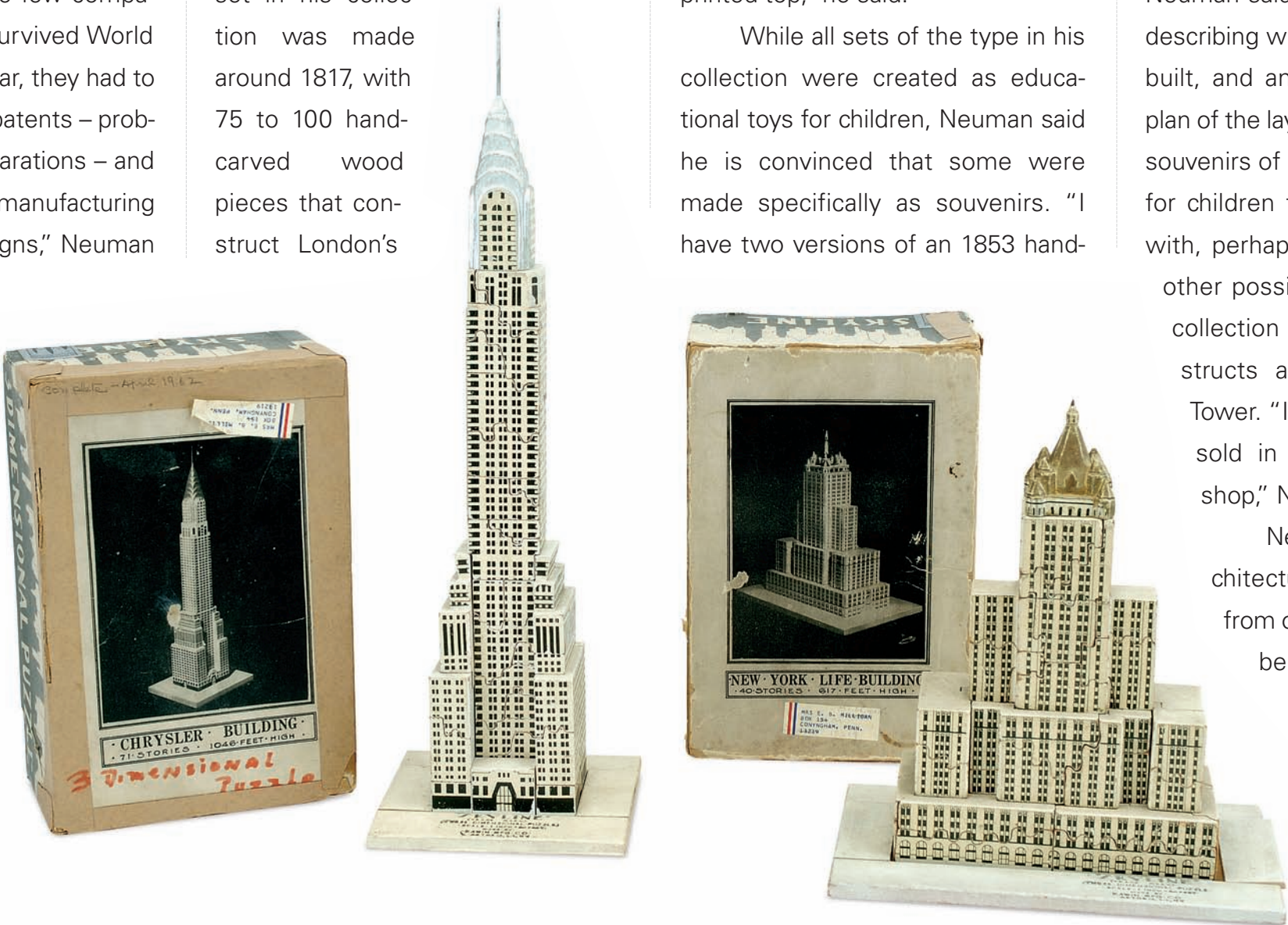
Waterloo Bridge. “It’s primitive and gorgeous, and comes in a little wood slide-top box with a monochrome-printed top,” he said.

While all sets of the type in his collection were created as educational toys for children, Neuman said he is convinced that some were made specifically as souvenirs. “I have two versions of an 1853 hand-

painted model of the same St. Sergius Monastery in Moscow, but they’re made in two different scales,” Neuman said. “One has a little book describing when the monastery was built, and another has a rice-paper plan of the layout. I believe they were souvenirs of a visit to the monastery for children to take home and play with, perhaps as Sunday toys.” An-

other possible souvenir set in the collection is the one that constructs a replica of the Eiffel Tower. “It’s quite possible it was sold in the Eiffel Tower’s gift shop,” Neuman said.

Neuman observed that architectural toys stand apart from other types of playthings because of their dependence on human intelligence. “Unlike a car or train or figure,



they really need the interaction of a person in order to be realized. Until then, they just sit in a box.” Neuman said this was never more evident than when aspects of his collection were loaned to the San Francisco Airport for a special exhibition. “When I arrived, they had taken some of the most basic sets and assembled them into the most beautiful things. They

had a couple of model-builders and artists do the work.”

Neuman said there are a few “emotional favorites” in his collection. The most beautiful of the sets, in his opinion, is the German-made Peking Palace, which comes with a 10-page, hand-colored, lithographed book. “The blocks are extremely ornate,” Neuman said, “printed, then



One of the oldest sets in the Neuman collection is the one called Grand Jeu D'Architecture. While the wood is plain and unpainted, the structure, with its turrets and drawbridge, would have made any child feel “grand” if they managed to assemble it. Estimate: \$1,200-\$1,500.

> DO MORE CONSTRUCTION TOYS



Because architectural toys are exceedingly rare, collectors jump at the chance to buy. Click now to visit the auction catalog featuring the Neuman collection.

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Linear and simple in design, the 19th-century Frost's Blocks set stores away neatly in its original wood box. Estimate: \$600-\$700.

hand colored, gilded and ebonized ... Having visited The Forbidden City, I think it was the basis for the palace in this set.”

Another favorite is the Palestine set, with printed-wood blocks carved with images of palm trees, camels

and domes. Neuman, who is Jewish, regards it as “a romantic set, because it depicts a place and time in history ... pre Israel.”

Like any enthusiast of any type of toy, Neuman said one thing he always enjoyed during his long collecting

odyssey was discovering a set he never knew existed. “That would be the moment when the world opened up a little bit more to me.”

Over Father’s Day weekend, June 16-17, Noel Barrett Auctions will sell the Paul Neuman collection of ar-

chitectural toys, with live Internet bidding available from anywhere in the world through eBay Live Auctions. Click here to view the entire electronic catalog, leave an absentee bid or sign up to bid live online as the auction is taking place. **tc**



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HIGH-INTEREST BANKS

HEADED TO AUCTION,
THE STECKBECK COLLECTION
IS READY FOR ITS CLOSEUP

BY CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON

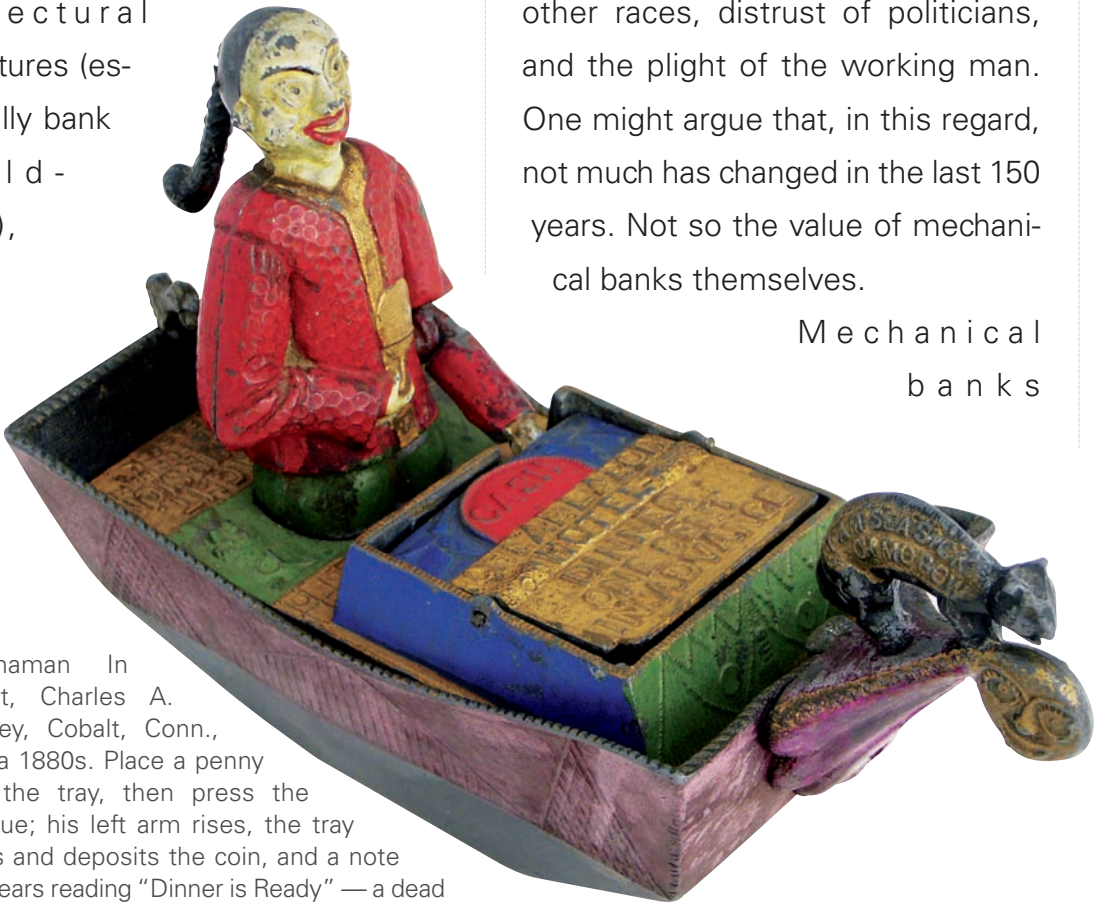
IMAGES BY MORPHY AUCTIONS

AROUND THE MID-1860s, parents began to convey the virtue of thrift to their children by means of cast-iron mechanical banks – novelty forms that amused the younger set and at the same time encouraged the little tykes to



The Mikado mechanical bank by Kyser & Rex, Philadelphia, circa 1886. Wonderfully detailed with Chinese mythological imagery and “filigreed” adornment. Estimate: \$120,000 - \$150,000.

squirrel away their hard-earned coppers. Many of the banks' designs reflected activities and images from everyday life, such as the military, sports, architectural structures (especially bank buildings),



Chinaman In Boat, Charles A. Bailey, Cobalt, Conn., circa 1880s. Place a penny on the tray, then press the queue; his left arm rises, the tray flips and deposits the coin, and a note appears reading "Dinner is Ready" — a dead rat. The bank provides a revealing commentary on the anti-Chinese-immigrant sentiment in late-19th-century America. Estimate: \$50,000 - \$70,000.

pets and other animals. Behind other banks, however, lay more-serious adult themes – social commentaries captured in metal that revealed post-Civil War America's prejudice toward other races, distrust of politicians, and the plight of the working man. One might argue that, in this regard, not much has changed in the last 150 years. Not so the value of mechanical banks themselves.

Mechanical
banks

have defied the laws of economics. During times of war, recession or depression, they've never taken a backward slide. In fact, in contrast to the peaks and valleys other collecting categories have experienced over the years, mechanical banks have maintained a steady upward course. Their bulletproof status can be attributed to two main factors: 1. the number of extant banks has been well documented for several decades, now, and 2. new enthusiasts have continued to come into the hobby, thereby increasing the pool of collectors chasing the same rare examples.

So with this in mind, it is easy to see why there's so much excitement over the impending auction of one of the country's premier assemblages of mechanical banks. The Stephen and Marilyn Steckbeck collection, which will be sold in its en-



Bank Teller mechanical bank, J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn., circa 1876. Place a coin in the bank teller's outstretched hand. His arm and head lower, and the coin slides into the bank. He then returns to his original position. One of only a few examples known to exist. Estimate: \$125,000 - \$150,000.

tirety on Oct. 27 at Morphy’s, is one of the all-time greats. Seeded with rare examples from earlier collections of now-historic stature, e.g., those of Ed Mosler, F.H. Griffith and L.C. Hegarty, the Steckbeck collection was built and refined over a 50-year period.

“The rarity and condition of the banks is astounding,” said Dan Morphy,

chief operating officer of Morphy Auctions. “The Steckbecks own many of the finest known examples of quite a few mechanical banks. I photographed the top 10 collections in the country for the reference book coming out later this year, so I know what’s out there.” (*Pre-order the book at the end of this article.*)

Stephen Steckbeck, a native of Ft. Wayne, Ind.,

whose family established residency there six generations ago, says he saw his first mechanical bank in 1938. “I was seven years old and was visiting a school friend whose father was president of a large bank in Ft. Wayne. The father was also a friend of O h i o

banker Andrew Emerine – one of the very earliest collectors of mechanical banks – who had convinced my friend’s father to start collecting.”
Another collection that made a big impression on Stephen Steckbeck was that of a dentist named Dr. Corby. “When I saw it, I thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to have a collection like that, although now I know that many of the banks in his collection at that time were rather com-



Darky and Watermelon, J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn., circa 1888. Estimate: \$250,000 - \$300,000. The man kicks the football containing the coin over the watermelon, thereby depositing the coin. One of four known examples.



Freedman's Bank, Jerome B. Secor, Bridgeport, Conn., circa 1880. Estimate: \$250,000 - \$300,000. Man rakes his left hand across the desk, depositing coin; thumbs nose with right hand.



Darky Fisherman, Charles A. Bailey, Cobalt, Conn., circa 1880s. Estimate: \$125,000 - \$150,000. As the pole rises to reveal a fish, the fisherman's hat lifts as though he is surprised, and coin is nudged into slot. One of two known examples.

mon. It was well known that Dr. Corby would buy any bank priced at a dollar.”

Steckbeck’s early exposure to mechanical banks would later ignite his own desire to collect. In 1954, he and Marilyn purchased their first bank at an antique fair: a cast-iron bust of an African-American man, for \$25. While they still own the bank, it is

one of the couple’s least-important examples. “It’s in terrible condition,” Steckbeck said with a laugh.

Always proactive in his approach to collecting, Steckbeck had pickers scouring several states on his behalf. “It started a chain reaction,” Steckbeck said. “The pickers would give me names of other collectors, and I’d contact them and find out about other collectors and dealers. Once I started working the circuit, things started to come to me.”

Merry-Go-Round bank, Kyser & Rex, Philadelphia, circa 1880s. Estimate: \$70,000 - \$100,000. After coin is deposited, bells chime as figures revolve.



North Pole bank, J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn., circa 1910. Estimate: \$60,000 - \$80,000. American Flag pops up when coin is deposited. Near-mint-plus condition. Provenance: L.C. Hegarty.

As his collecting progressed and he became familiar with better-quality banks – like those in the Wally Tudor collection – Steckbeck redirected his focus toward acquiring only the rarest examples in the nicest possible condition. “In those days, it was a lot easier to collect than now,” he said. “There weren’t a lot of auctions. You’d find them mostly in antique stores. We’d go on weekend shopping junkets to look for them.”

The collection rose to a new

Girl Skipping Rope bank, J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn, circa 1890. Estimate: \$60,000 - \$75,000. Mechanism activates girl who skips rope, kicks legs and turns head.

level as a result of Steckbeck’s friendship with the late Edwin H. Mosler Jr., who was chairman of the board of Mosler Safe Co. and a pioneer collector of mechanical banks. Around 25 years ago, Mosler held a private, invitation-only tag sale in his Manhattan office. “I was the first one he invited,” Steckbeck said. “The way it



worked was, he would let me buy all the banks I wanted, then the next person would be allowed to come in

and buy. He wanted the banks to go to collectors and didn't want anyone reselling the banks they bought.

That's all he asked. I said, 'Why not sell me the whole collection?' But he didn't want that. He said he wanted everyone to have a chance to buy from the collection."

Steckbeck recalls that he spent the maximum he could afford – \$400,000 – on banks from the Mosler collection. The next morning he was supposed to meet Mosler for coffee, but instead it turned out to be a second bank-buying opportunity. "My wife had said to me, 'You didn't buy all the banks you wanted, so why don't you go back and buy some more, even if you have to borrow the money?' So I did,



The only known example of the self-descriptive Japanese Ball Tossing bank, with original box (not shown). Weeden Mfg. Co., New Bedford, Mass., circa 1888. Estimate: \$90,000 - \$125,000.

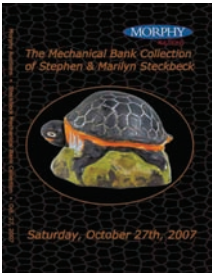
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By special arrangement with Morphy Auctions, *TOY COLLECTOR MAGAZINE*'s readers can sneak preview the entire

Steckbeck mechanical bank auction catalog now. View all lots, leave absentee bids or sign up to bid live via the Internet on auction day, as the sale is taking place. Mark your calendars: Saturday, Oct. 27, 2007, at 12 noon EST, is when the action begins.

GO



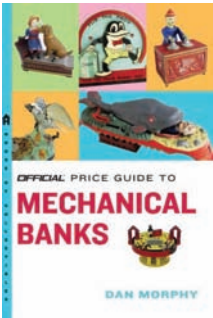
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and from those two days of buying, I ended up with some of the best banks in my collection.”

Steckbeck has never actually sat down and counted his banks but estimates there are around 460 money boxes in the collection – “I’m probably a couple short of having everything.” A few years ago, he reassessed his collection and liquidated a number of duplicates, keeping the cleanest examples for himself.

Bismark Pig mechanical bank, J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn, circa 1883. Press down the figure of Otto von Bismarck and lock into position, then place a coin in the slot above the pig’s tail. When tail is depressed, coin is deposited and Bismarck pops up. Possibly the best example known. Ex F.H. Griffith, Wally Tudor collections. Estimate: \$20,000-\$25,000.



While most of the Steckbeck banks are of cast iron, many others are of lithographed tin, white metal, aluminum, wood and other materials. Some are exceedingly rare, like the Presto Coin Disappears (one of three known), the Ducky and Watermelon (one of four known), Ducky Fisherman (one of two known), an extraordinary near-mint Jerome Secor Freedman’s Bank, and one of the few all-original examples of the Kyser & Rex Merry-Go-Round.

“There are lots of onesies and twosies,” Steckbeck observed, “but some that are my favorites are not necessarily the rarest. I like the tall cast-iron Rabbit Standing with Nut bank. It may only bring a couple of thousand dollars, but I think it’s fabulous. I also find some of the tin banks to be every bit as charming as the cast-iron ones, especially the ones by Saalheimer & Strauss. I liked those because they had my ini-

tials on them – S.S.”
The Steckbecks’ North Pole bank, ex Hegarty collection, is one of the finest known; and their Kenton Hardware Mama Katzenjammer, which came straight from the manufacturer’s showroom, is in superior, near-mint-plus condition. Among the

Horse Race mechanical bank, J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn. Circa 1871. Pull the cord to set the spring, place the horses’ heads opposite the star and deposit a coin, causing horses to race around the track. Provenance: F.H. Griffith. Near-mint-plus condition. Estimate: \$40,000-\$50,000.



collection’s acknowledged “unique” examples are a nickel-plated Chrysler Pig, originally owned by Walter Chrysler; a Safe Deposit Tin Elephant, and a stock-market-themed Bull and Bear. While there are so many rarities in the collection it is nearly impossi-



Obscure Disney character Flip the Frog tin mechanical bank, Saalheimer & Strauss, Germany, Circa 1920s. Perhaps the finest known example. Estimate: \$20,000 - \$25,000.

ble to keep track of the statistics, Steckbeck says it was condition that guided him in his acquisitions. “Many of the banks were up-graded over and over through the years so I’d have the best-known example of each bank,” he said. “I never rested till I had the best one out there. The Mikado came out of the old Pennsylvania collection of Squire Henry, for instance, which was auctioned many years ago.”



Calamity mechanical bank with box (not shown), J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn., circa: 1905. Dark maroon base variation. Near-mint-plus condition; box lacks lid. Estimate: \$60,000 - \$75,000.

The Steckbeck banks, which have been featured in a number of business and investment publications over the years, including *Forbes*, *Money* and *Wealth*, will make their final public appearance in September at the 50th anniversary convention of the Mechanical Bank Collectors of America. The event will take place in Ft. Wayne so clubmembers can view the collection in the Steckbecks’ home environment one last time before it is

packed up and sent to auction. Stephen Steckbeck said he and Marilyn could have sold the collection privately as a whole but opted to go



Mama Katzenjammer bank, Kenton Hardware Mfg. Co., Kenton Ohio, circa early 1900s. Provenance: Kenton Showroom, Wally Tudor. Near mint plus. Estimate: \$50,000 - \$70,000.

the auction route “so everyone can have a chance.” The collection will be offered in a one-day, single-consignment auction on Oct. 27 at Morphy Auctions’ gallery in Denver, Pa. The banks – 30 of which retain their original boxes – will be apportioned into 450 lots, and if Stephen Steckbeck’s prediction is correct, there will be good buys right along with the widely anticipated world-record prices. “There are sure to be



Bowing Man in Cupola mechanical bank, J. & E. Stevens Co., Cromwell, Conn. Press lever, man rises in cupola, bows after coin is deposited. Estimate: \$60,000 - \$75,000.

bargains. There always are,” he said. “The Stan Sax sale, Hegarty – there are bargains to watch for in every auction.” Dan Morphy, who is himself a bank collector and MBCA member, said, “It is a dream come true to be handling what I consider to be one of the most prestigious mechanical bank collections of all time. I bought my first mechanical bank from Steve when I was 12 years old, and now it has all come full circle.” **tc**



SOLD \$6,875



SOLD \$60,500



SOLD \$5,040



SOLD \$12,000



SOLD \$8,250



SOLD \$14,400



SOLD \$6,900



SOLD \$10,450



SOLD \$8,800



SOLD \$5,600



SOLD \$45,100



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DOOR OF HOPE DOLLS

A SNAPSHOT OF
EARLY 20TH CENTURY
CHINESE SOCIETY

BY CATHERINE SAUNDERS-WATSON

IMAGES BY JAMES D. JULIA AUCTIONS



SOUGHT AFTER by Asian collectors for some time, now, Chinese-made Door of Hope dolls have become increasingly popular with collectors worldwide over the last few years. James D. Julia Auctions of Fairfield, Maine, has been a leader in sourcing and presenting these special dolls to the North American market. The company's June 22-23 auction contains an outstanding selection of rare Door of Hope designs.

The earliest Door of Hope dolls were created in the early 1900s, under the supervision of Christian missionaries at Shanghai's Door of Hope mission. The "missionary ladies" – one of whom was future Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winner Pearl S. Buck – hoped to steer desperately poor Chinese girls and women away from prostitution by teaching them

marketable skills, including doll-making. At the same time the young doll artisans were learning a respectable way to make a living, they were also unwittingly creating a tangible "document" of pre-Revolution Chinese society for future generations.

Each doll crafted at the mission was a unique production, hand carved of pear wood with painted-on features, then dressed in hand-sewn, knitted and embroidered outfits very similar to what one might see on Shanghai's citizenry of that period. The importance of these dolls lies not only in their beauty and obviously painstaking construction but also in their realistic portrayal of all classes of Chinese people of that period. The missionaries encouraged depictions that accurately represented Chinese men, women and children – not anti-septic Westernized versions of real-

ity. Hence the early Door of Hope dolls, in particular, have eyes that are narrow rather than rounded, and some of the female dolls exhibit unusually small feet – a reflection of the cruel practice of a century ago in which Chinese girls' feet were broken and bound during infancy.

Each Door of Hope doll has an individuality and expression that is captivating to collectors. Certain examples seem to steal the spotlight whenever they come up for auction. The one known as Manchu Woman, with its elaborate carved headpiece, is considered the rarest and most desirable. Last November, Julia's set a world auction record for an example of this doll at \$9,200, beating the previous record set three years earlier of \$8,050 – also at Julia's. The Manchu Woman in the June 22-23 sale is in superb original condition and dressed



The Rice Farmer Door of Hope doll with original rake, in James D. Julia's June 22-23 auction.

in an embroidered shell-pink satin coat. She carries a pre-sale estimate of \$4,500-\$6,500.

Other Door of Hopes include a rare Policeman with tasseled, pointed cap (estimate \$2,000-\$2,500), a Rice Farmer with straw suit, woven sunhat and original rake (estimate \$2,000-\$3,000); and darkly garbed Mourner (estimate \$1,000-\$1,500). **tc**

> DO MORE

DOOR OF HOPE

Door of Hope dolls continue to climb in popularity, due to their craftsmanship and unique nature. Don't miss the James D. Julia Auction event June 22-23, 2007. Click the link below to view the catalog, register to bid live, or leave an absentee bid for one or more lots.



Individual sellers have Door of Hope dolls listed on eBay. View what's available now.



ABOVE: A fine selection of Door of Hope dolls consigned to the June 22-23, 2007, James D. Julia auction. LEFT: The authentically period-uniformed Door of Hope Policeman doll to be auctioned at James D. Julia's.



SECRET FIXATIONS

A VISIT WITH JOE FREEMAN,
THE TOY HOBBY'S GO-TO GUY FOR PARTS AND REPAIRS

BY ALAN JAFFE

IMAGES BY THE AUTHOR

A LLENTOWN, Pa. – A pyramid of broken Lehmann Tut-Tuts rises from a cardboard box. The bows and decks of toy boats lie shipwrecked on a desk. The remains of Chain carousels are frozen in motion on a top shelf. Gears, springs and sprocket wheels overflow from drawers, and drills, sanders, saws and lathes crowd nearly every foot of floor space.

The Tin Toy Works is a cross between Santa's workshop and Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory.



More Mr. Claus than mad scientist, Joe Freeman is the craftsman



Joe and Barbara Freeman of Tin Toy Works.

who has made the unassuming little building in Allentown into what is probably the most renowned antique toy restoration business in the world. His customers include the super-rich and famous, and an international list of clients who know he

can perform miracles with their broken or incomplete treasures.

Freeman recently allowed *Toy Collector Magazine* into his workrooms for a peek into how he and his crew of seven artisans restore hand-painted and lithographed tin playthings, although like any great magician, he keeps some of his trade secrets to himself.

Freeman grew up not far from his shop, but a world away. He was raised in an East Allentown housing project by his mother, who cleaned other people's homes, after his parents separated. Freeman spent most of his school days in metal shop class, and left after the 11th grade. "I had a lot of street smarts from then on, though," he said. "My brains are in my hands."

"Yeah, and one of those is broken," laughed Barbara,

his business partner and wife of 43 years, explaining that Joe tripped over one of their border collies a few

and then back in Allentown. In the mid-1960s, his father asked Freeman if he'd like to join him in a new venture

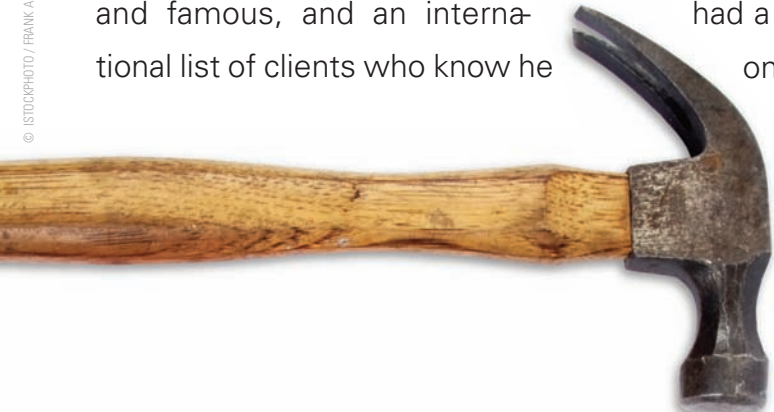


Boxes of familiar toys made by well-known manufacturers wait their turn in Joe Freeman's office.

days before.

In his early 20s, Freeman found work as a machinist in Dallas, Texas,

and learn how to repair toy trains. "I said, 'Sure.' Little did I know he didn't know how to fix them either."



They started their self-taught business in a garage, then expanded to a cellar, Freeman said. He would pick up, repair and deliver their clients' trains, "all for two bucks."

Around 1970, Joe and Barb opened a hobby shop in Allentown, followed by another in an old railroad car in nearby Kempton. In the basement of the Allentown shop, Joe did the metalwork while Barb did the painting and finishing – "she invented ways to make and match colors," Joe boasted.

In the beginning, the couple didn't know if they could make a

living in the hobby-and-repair trade. In 1981, Freeman tried making his own toy, a tin steamboat. He found buyers for all 25 boats, but he never finished them. "I decided I didn't want to be in the repro business; I wanted to be in restoration."

In 1983, the Freemans sold the hobby shops, erected the 1½-story brick building on 15th Street, and turned their attention to antique toys. They had gotten into the business at "the prime time for collecting," Joe said.

"It was never difficult to find customers." And they haven't had

a down year since.

But doing the work has never been

child's play. Freeman had no mentor to turn to, and "like the tools and equipment, we had to improvise and invent everything, and make everything ourselves to make the product. There's no directions or instructions, there's no nothing," he says. "There's no how-to book in this business."

Which is why Freeman only raises the curtain on his shop so far. He points to the sheets of tinplate that he purchases in coils, but he won't say where



There's a gear for every toy at Freeman's.

he acquires them or exactly how they're produced. His shop uses the tin-litho process to restore the toys, but

Freeman won't say how that's done, or how he weathers new parts to match the old patinas.

Those are among his secrets. He will open drawers and reveal a sidelamp he has reproduced for a Carette car, and show the tools and dies created specifically for that piece. "We make over 6,000 parts and add new parts to the line every week," Freeman said. A copy of every part ever made in the shop is saved, along with its tools, so the next request is easily filled.

Freeman then holds up a long metal rod – "gear



Brian Freeman, who has worked in his parents' shop since he was 13, repairs a toy boat.



© ISTOCKPHOTO / FRANK ANUSEWICZ

stock” -- from which he slices off parts as needed, “like lunchmeat.”

Throughout the shop are small file drawers containing Ferris wheel gears, roller coaster parts, springs and wind-up keys of all sizes.

Rows and rows of bins contain boxes filled with current projects. The wait time for a complex restoration can be up to two years.

Yet the orders and new customers keep coming every week, from Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and throughout the U.S. and Canada.

The Freemans have no Web page. Ninety percent of their busi-



Joe Freeman performs a cosmetic restoration on a Marklin locomotive shell.

ness, they say, comes from word of mouth. “We have competitors,” Freeman said, “but no competition.”

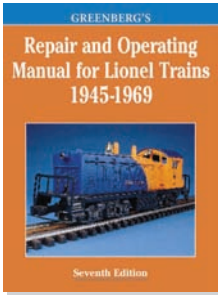
Repairs can cost anywhere from \$25 for a simple job to thousands of dollars for a major restoration.

Even after four decades in the industry, they still get requests for work they have never done before. “No matter what you think you saw, you didn’t see it all,” Freeman said.

Sometimes when they’re stumped by a project, they “wait and hope” that a similar toy will arrive. “And then boom!” he said, two or three of the same toy, or a close vari-

> DO MORE VINTAGE TOY REPAIR

It takes talent and years of experience to learn how to repair toys on Joe Freeman's level. Do-it-yourselfers may find these books useful as a starting point:



Lionel train owners can trust the original company documentation for repair tips in this compilation of vintage repair manuals, edited by Roger Carp. At 736 pages, it’s got virtually everything you’ll need to repair and operate postwar Lionel trains.

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Got Marx toys that need repair? Check eBay for the current crop of vintage and reproduction parts.

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At any time, there are hundreds of lots of Lionel parts from all eras of production on eBay. Click below to see what’s currently available — and what fits your current needs.

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Dinky and Corgi toys are hot collectibles with a wide range of collectors, yet it’s common to find examples missing drivers, tires, or other vital elements. Check out these searches.

🌐 **GO DINKY**

🌐 **GO CORGI**

ation, will show up. “You just never know in this business. Nothing is as rare as you think it is. The Internet has really opened the whole world up and

shown people that some of these things are not as rare as we originally thought.”

S o m e - times they take educated guesses on how a certain part would look, Barb said.

And once it’s done, Joe adds, “everybody says that if Tin Toy Works does it, it’s right.”

Usually, however, the Freemans have seen it before. Their library and photo archive “never ends,” Joe said.

“Over the years, we’ve spent tens of thousands of dollars on photography.”

Filed on a shelf in the reception area are loose-leaf photo albums, the

c o n t e n t s recorded on their spines: Robots – battery op. Bing – war, sub, ferry. Carrette. Marklin. Arnold. And every other conceivable toymaker and category.

Besides far-flung places, the Freemans’ customers come from “all walks of life, from my level to some of the richest guys,” Joe said. Their first big-name patron was billionaire publisher Malcolm Forbes. Tin Toy



Barry Malkemes specializes in gears and pinions and toy mechanism repair, like on this Japanese diesel.

> LEARN MORE

T he antique toy repair biz has changed over the years. Back in the 1960s and '70s, much of the Freemans’ work came from dealers, who delivered boxes of trains or toys acquired at auction. These days, the customers are more likely to be collectors who’ve made purchases online. What they bring in to Tin Toy Works has changed, as well.

In the beginning, the Freemans worked mostly on boats, autos and go- rounds made from the turn of the 20th century to the 1920s. “But the back end has become obsolete, because we kind of saturated the market,” Joe said. For the early vehicles,

TOP SELLERS

for example, the Freemans made hundreds of wheels, headlights, doors and other hardware. “Now, we don’t sell as many because we’ve filled that niche - that need.”

That niche was replaced by parts required for toys of the 1930s through '60s, and

“the manufacturers made way more of those toys,” said Barb. Among the most popular repairs of toys of that era was the Amos ‘n’ Andy Fresh Air Taxi, which often lacks a seat or dog.

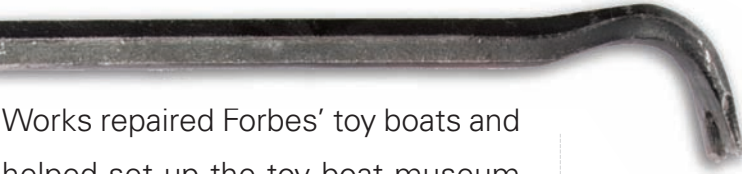
“We also made tons of Marx bumpers, and arms for figural toys,” Joe added. At the top of the list of most-requested parts? Chein roller coaster cars. The Freemans have made around 1,500 so far.



Chein marketed a number of roller coaster toys. Original cars, like the one shown here, have become very hard to find. Tin Toy Works reproduces them.



© ISTOCKPHOTO / FRANK ANUSEWICZ



Works repaired Forbes' toy boats and helped set up the toy boat museum at his Manhattan headquarters.

But Freeman doesn't give up any other famous customers.

That's another of his secrets.

He feels great pride when he wanders into a museum and sees a toy he worked on. But there's never a credit to the Freemans.

And that's not a problem. "We have to maintain a customer's privacy," Joe explained. "It's up to the customer to do what he wants" with a piece they have repaired.

Which raises questions about a

toy's value and integrity after restoration. Since the 1960s, Joe said, replacement parts have been acceptable among dealers and collectors. And the Freemans have almost never turned down a request. "It's got to be cost effective" for owner and restorer, Barb explained, although sometimes, for sentimental reasons, clients will tell them to do the work knowing they'll never recover their investment.

Joe tries to satisfy all customer requests. "I don't know anyone who manufactures more antique toy parts that we do. If somebody (else) made it, I can make it," Joe says. "But we

really draw the line on how many parts we'll make for a specific toy, so there's not a whole fake out there."

The Freemans, after all, are collectors, too. Barb hunts for tin Easter eggs, toys and other items celebrating the spring holiday. Joe buys early animated German toys: people, animals and carousels. Their home, built in the 1730s, is "decorated with all this stuff," he said.

Besides tin, Joe also makes rubber toy parts, composition figures, and hollow-cast and solid bisque figures. Tin Toy Works has created prototypes for the Franklin Mint, including a '57 Chevy, complete with hanging dice made of tin.

They've also tackled folk art, advertising signs, weathervanes, early motorcycles and garden ornaments. A life-size plaster elk in need of new antlers and legs recently took up residence in the workshop.

The Freemans say the business eventually will be turned over to their son Brian, 40, who has been an integral part of Tin Toy Works since the 8th grade.

But before that time comes, Joe, now 62, may cut down his six-day work week. Or maybe not. "I love it," he said of his job. "But I'm never 100 percent satisfied with anything that goes out. I always think, there's something I could do better." **tc**

ONE STEAMER'S JOURNEY

A Marklin ocean liner, circa 1915, undergoes an extensive restoration by the crew of Tin Toy Works. The results are amazing.





E-E-E-E-K!

CLASSIC HORROR MOVIE POSTERS HAVE MOVED INTO SIX-FIGURE TERRITORY

BY KARLA KLEIN ALBERTSON

H ORROR FILMS ARE ONE OF the purest forms of pop culture, for they both reflect and influence the public's innermost fears – whether stirred by invaders from outer space, moonstruck werewolves or the mild-mannered next-door neighbor who turns out to be a serial killer.

After the real-life horrors of World War I, early movie-goers found release in monsters taken from literary sources – *Frankenstein*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Dracula* – or lifted from current headlines. During the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, the

The only known copy of the very large *FRANKENSTEIN* (1931) six-sheet poster used for outdoor display advertising is a treasure in the collection of Stephen Fishler, founder of Metropolis Comics in New York. Photo courtesy of Stephen Fishler, MetropolisComics.com.

RIGHTTOP: Although Universal's *THE BLACK CAT* (1934) was a lesser-known film featuring Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, the rarity of the one-sheet poster, its bold graphics, and the very fine condition sent the price to \$286,800 in a March auction at Heritage. Photo courtesy Heritage Galleries, Dallas.

publicity surrounding the "Curse of the Pharaohs" – a belief that anyone who disturbed an Egyptian pharaoh's mummy would be cursed – later helped fuel the popularity of Boris Karloff's appearance as the undead "Mummy" in the 1932 film of the same name.

Grey Smith, Director of Vintage Movie Poster sales for Heritage Auction Galleries in Dallas, observed: "Horror movies are all about the news stories we hear and our thoughts of how those sce-

narios might play out. The 1950s is the most obvious example. With the advent of the nuclear age, people were tremendously concerned about the bomb's effects." He continued, "Hollywood jumped on the bandwagon and did a series of giant mutant creature films during that period, such as *Them!* (1954) and *Tarantula* (1955). Even classics like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), which dealt with non-aggressive behavior, reflected that. In many ways, that was



ABOVE: The Reel Poster Gallery London set a world record for a poster in October 2005 with this original German-release version for *METROPOLIS* (1926) — \$690,000. Photo courtesy The Reel Poster Gallery, London. TOP RIGHT: Although Universal's *THE BLACK CAT* (1934) was a lesser-known film featuring Karloff and Lugosi, the rarity of this VF-condition one-sheet, with its bold graphics, realized \$286,800 in a March sale at Heritage. BOTTOM RIGHT: In the same auction, one of four known half-sheets for *THE RAVEN* (1935) sold for \$50,788. Both photos courtesy Heritage Galleries, Dallas.



a statement about the Cold War.”

Philip Weiss, an *Antiques Roadshow* expert appraiser who runs a collectibles auction house on Long Island, pointed out, “There’s a difference between the horror movies of the 1950s and 1960s and the ones they’re doing now. Those were great movies because they left a lot to your imagination – they made a good scary movie without all the gore and disgusting stuff.”

“The films we watched when we were kids – *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) – what could be scarier than that! They always had the same theme – some sort of wacky atomic energy makes things bigger than they are. In the old

days, your parents didn’t mind if you went to see a flying saucer movie.”

Like many horror and sci-fi fans, Weiss knows that the best way to get that old feeling is through vintage posters from the movies that scared you the most. He said, “I’m looking at one on my office wall right now – *Curse of the Demon* (1957) with Dana Andrews ... (with a) demon superimposed over a train. The poster art says, ‘The most ter-

rifying story the screen has ever told,’ and there’s this horrible creature with flames coming out of its mouth.”

Grey Smith and Heritage Galleries made news in March when a striking 27 inch by 42 inch one-sheet



This lobby card for *THE WALKING DEAD* (1936), sold for \$8,963 in a March auction at Heritage. Image courtesy of Heritage Galleries, Dallas.

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from *The Black Cat*, a 1934 Universal movie starring both Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, sold for \$286,800, the third-highest price paid publicly for a horror poster. “It’s very rare,” Smith said. “Some might say *The Black Cat* is not in the same league as *Frankenstein* or *Dracula* or *The Mummy* – well, yes and no. The film is more obscure, but it has all the elements of Universal horror.”

Smith characterized the real aficionados of horror film posters as “a

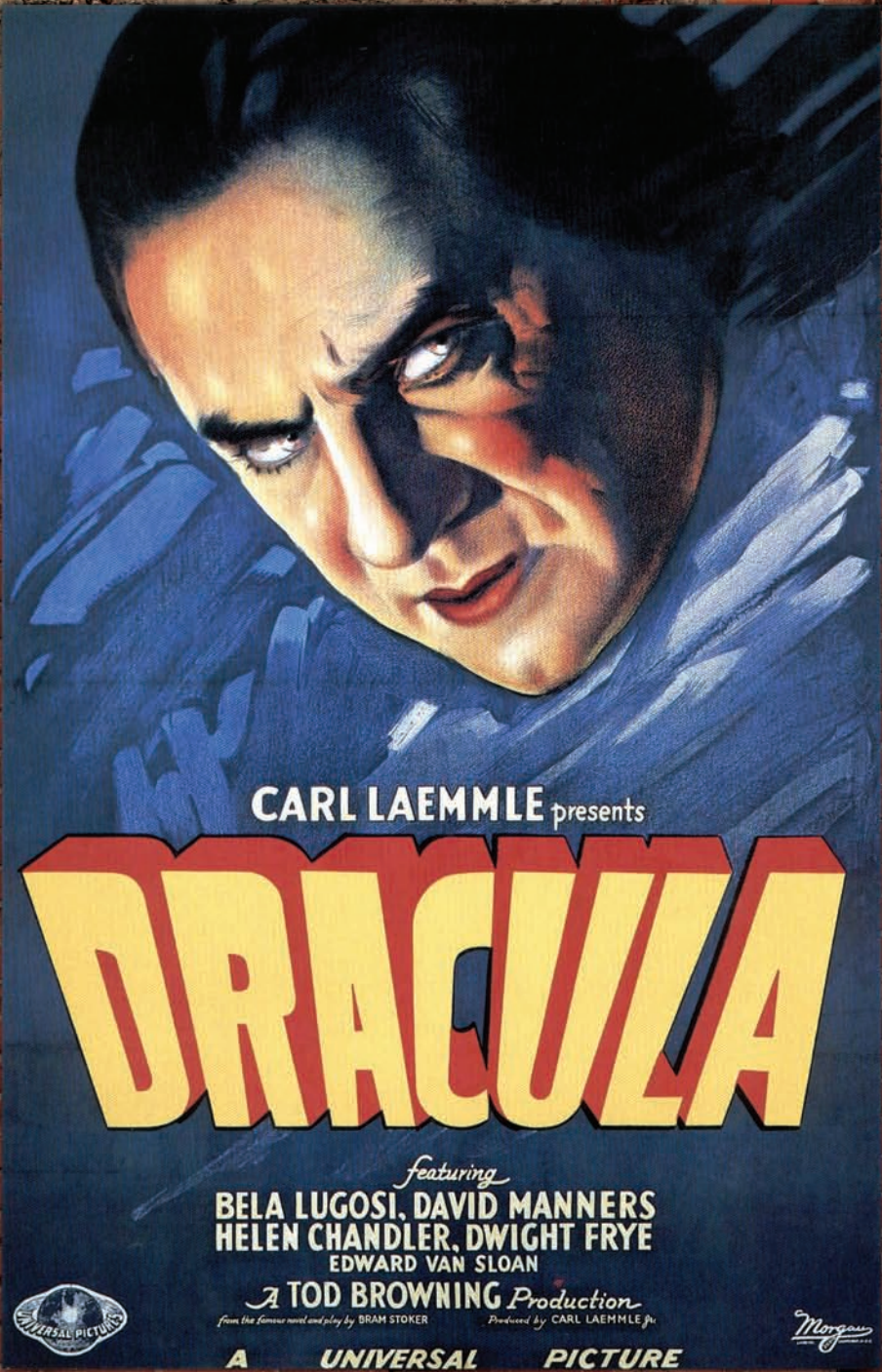
handful of people who were knowledgeable enough to buy it when it was available and not so pricey, and people who are buying it now, even though it is pricey, just to have it in their collections.”

“There has always been a dramatic scarcity of material from that time period,” Smith said, “starting with *Hunchback* (1923), Universal’s first horror film, and *Phantom of the Opera* (1925), into the 1930s – the golden age of horror.”



ATTACK OF THE 50 FT. WOMAN (1958) shows the mutant star rocking her world while men flee in horror. The one-sheet sold in March for \$10,158. Photo courtesy Heritage Galleries.

RIGHT: Fishler’s collection also includes the only copy known of the one-sheet style A poster for the 1931 *DRACULA* with Bela Lugosi. Photo courtesy of Stephen Fishler, MetropolisComics.com.



Another important milestone was the \$453,500 auction price realized in March 1997 for a poster promoting the 1932 Universal release *The Mummy*. This highlight came during Sotheby's New York auction of the Todd Feiertag collection. This was a record price until Tony Nourmand of The Reel Poster Gallery in London sold the original German poster for *Metropolis* to a Los Angeles collector for \$690,000. The silent film masterpiece *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang,



portrays mankind's horrific future in a mechanized society of the year 2000. The 82 inch by 38 inch poster with art by Heinz Schultz-Neudamm is in perfect sync with the Modernist sets and costumes of the film. Nourmand noted that this was a record for any type of poster: "It sold for more than a Toulouse-Lautrec." As author of 14 books on poster art, he recommends looking at as many images as possible before making a purchase.

ABOVE: In March 1997, Sotheby's New York set a horror poster record when they sold *THE MUMMY* (Universal 1932) for \$453,500 as part of the Todd Feiertag Collection. Photo courtesy Sotheby's New York. RIGHT: Universal's 1954 *CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON* featured a sympathetic monster who temporarily gets the girl. This fine/very fine one-sheet sold in March for \$13,145 (at Heritage Galleries, Dallas).



Enthusiasts, more men than women, are 30- to 60-somethings at the peak of their earning power who want to buy back a bit of their childhood. Phil Weiss also has noticed that many “high-end comic collectors get into horror posters – there’s a big crossover there.” Stephen Fishler, founder of Metropolis Comics, serves as a prime example.

Fishler has around 1,000 posters in his hard-to-beat collection, most from his favorite period – Universal’s golden age of the 1930s. He said, “I’ve always been involved in collecting one type of thing or another, and I’ve always been a Universal horror fan. I get a lot of enjoyment out of my posters.”

“In the late 1980s and 1990s, it was easier to find them,” Fishler noted. “Once a year I would be able to buy something good. Now it’s very

difficult.” But then, Fishler would like to find things that may not have survived, like the poster for Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*.

One treasure in Fishler’s collection is the only known one-sheet “style A” poster from *Dracula*, (1931) with Bela Lugosi. “The two most valuable titles without a doubt are *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*,” he said. “Everything else is below that.”

Even rarer



ABOVE: Visitors from other planets began to arrive after World War II. A dramatic one-sheet poster for *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* (1951) brought \$11,950 in a March auction at Heritage. BELOW: In the same sale, a 1931 *Frankenstein* lobby card in fine condition, 11 inches by 14 inches, with vivid colors, was bid to \$33,460. Both photos courtesy Heritage Galleries, Dallas.



than one-sheets are the four-times-larger “six-sheets,” which were actually four pieces that could be assembled within a very large format, such as a billboard. Most were torn off in strips when it was time to put up the next movie ad, so six-sheets seldom survived unless they were never posted in the first place.

Fishler could hardly believe his luck when he was offered an un-

mounted *Frankenstein* six-sheet found in an estate. He explained, “This is by far the most important movie poster ever found, and – before it was found – it was the most important poster that ever *could* have been found. The only time it was ever seen was when it was originally photographed in black and white for the 1931 press book.”

Great periods in horror films do not always coincide with great poster art. The enjoyable Hammer Films horror productions of the 1960s took place at a time when studio executives spent far more money on TV advertising than on poster graphics. This trend fortunately has reversed in recent years, with some wonderful images of coming attractions appearing in modern theater lobbies. Smart collectors will acquire the best of those to salt away for the future. **tc**



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT INSURING YOUR COLLECTION

BY SHARON VERBETEN

ERIC OWNS MORE THAN 500 action figures. Andrew has carefully amassed dozens of valuable 20th-century cast-iron toys. Michael has a small but coveted collection of American tin comic character windups. Which one should be insuring his toy collection?

In the opinion of one longtime insurance agent, all of them. "If they value their collections that strongly, they should take out separate policies on them," says

George Wausnock, an award-winning State Farm insurance agent and toy collector from Pottstown, Pa.

Surprisingly, many collectors aren't aware that insurance is available for toy collections, while others mistakenly believe their items are already adequately covered by their homeowner's policy. As a result, collectors can end up the big losers when a catastrophe strikes.

"It's human nature to wait until something happens," said Wausnock. That's the fatal

flaw many collectors make. Once a collection is lost to fire, theft or other disaster, it's probably too late to make a claim.

"It is not prudent to expect these things to be covered under a homeowner's policy," he said. But while a toy collection would fall under that policy's "personal contents," the coverage would likely not be sufficient. "This is where the problem comes in," Wausnock said.

Perhaps only 50 to 60 percent of a home's value covers personal contents – which would include the

collection as well as clothing, furniture, electronics and more. Even then, Wausnock said, items are only covered under "16 named perils," including fire, riot, vandalism, smoke, lightning, ice/snow and others. "That's pretty standard throughout the country," he added.

To avoid potential "nightmare scenarios," Wausnock recommends that collectors consider insurance riders that provide "all-risk coverage." Such coverage often runs between 20 cents to \$1.50 per \$100 of coverage, Wausnock said.

A rider can cover an entire toy collection, or a few items with especially high value can be insured separately. The rider ensures coverage for most disasters, with only a few

exclusions (among them, war or nuclear incident, fraudulent activity, vermin or insects, wear and tear).

"The insurance company is accepting the item for the value you place on it. They will pay the cost to repair or replace ... without depreciation ... up to the policy limit," Wausnock said.

"If the item is irreplaceable, then it goes to an 'agreed value.'"

Wausnock recom-

mends collectors be proactive to preserve and protect their toy collections. "If you expect these items to be covered, you'd better have some documentation," he cautioned. This means compiling a detailed inventory of items (including manufacturer, date made, date/place purchased, purchase price and possibly



a professional appraisal), along with a photo or video diary of each piece. And, as an added safeguard, he recommends marking all pieces with invisible ink that fluoresces under a black light. This precaution could verify ownership if an item is stolen and later resurfaces for sale.

What about toy dealers, or collectors who dabble in toy-dealing part time? They shouldn't assume that their "goods" are covered by their homeowner's policy, whether

those goods are bought specifically for resale or come from their own collections to sell for upgrade or quick-cash purposes. Most insurance companies differentiate dealers from collectors on the basis of how much profit they take in annually from selling toys. The general rule is that a homeowner's policy will cover toys if the collector makes less than \$1,000 in profit per year from dealing in toys – check with your agent to be sure. A rider usually suffices in providing

coverage if the collector's toy-sale profits are \$1,000-\$5,000 per year, but anything above that and the insured is likely to be

regarded as a professional toy dealer, and would need to take out a commercial insurance policy in order to be covered.

In any of the aforementioned scenarios, the insurance company might ask you to obtain an outside appraisal to confirm

the value you have placed on your collection. This is one of many reasons

why it pays to join and take an active role in a toy or bank collectors club. It's the best way to meet experts in the trade whom you could trust to come into your home to provide an appraisal your insurance company would accept.

And while on the subject of valuation, let's not forget that many toys appreciate in value – sometimes

dramatically – from one year to the next. In the same way that we change the batteries in our smoke alarms when daylight savings time starts or ends, collectors should choose an annual reminder date – whether it's income tax day, their

birthday or some other significant date – on which to review their collection's value. If it has jumped substantially,

then the policy's – or rider's – value should be increased.

Wausnock believes few people have sufficient coverage on their collections. Premium costs vary from company to company, so he encourages shopping around for the best deals. Most insurance carriers offer all-risk riders, but some companies specialize in collectibles. "I recommend



that collectors check around,” Wausnock said, to compare coverage, premium prices, terms, and the stability of the company offering the proposed coverage.



One of the country’s top State Farm Insurance agents, George Wausnock of Pottstown, Pa., is also an avid toy and antique advertising collector — his base for his understanding the ins and outs of insuring collectibles. He says: “Don’t get caught without it.”

It can provide additional peace of mind to be dealing with an insurance agency that understands toys and the collecting hobby. It’s often the case that companies specializing in insurance on collections are run by

individuals who are, themselves, collectors. One of those companies, the Collectibles Insurance Agency, was founded by stamp collector Dan Walker. On his Web site, www.collectinsure.com, Walker writes that he began offering insurance on stamp collections in 1966, expanding to other types of collectibles in the early 1990s. His company has insured toy collections since 1997.

Walker said that, in addition to being a licensed insurance agent, his having been a collector for several decades gives him additional insight into the manner and method in which toy dealers document purchases and sales in a fast-paced hobby. “Since we have over 30 years’ experience in this specialized business, we have a good sense when additional documentation is needed to prove a loss,” Walker writes on his Web site. **tc**



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Wells & Company, England, circa-1930s Mickey Mouse Circus train set, by permission of Walt Disney, with original packaging and lithographed tin tent, sold online April 28, 2007, by Bertoia Auctions

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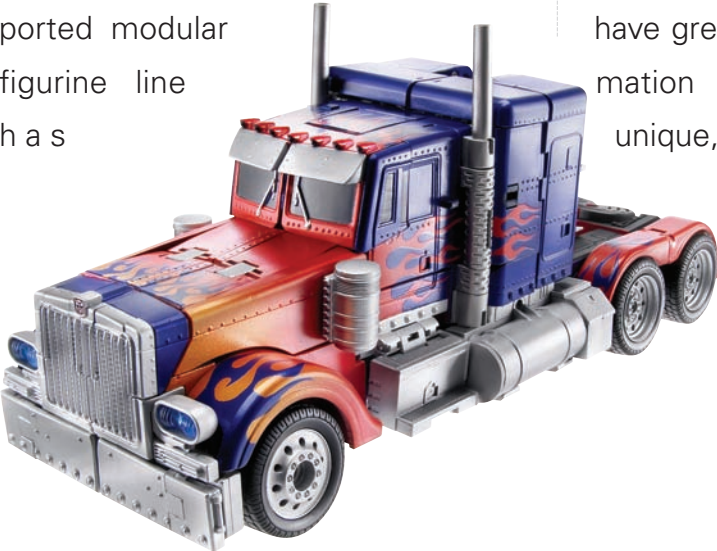
ANOTHER GENERATION OF COLLECTORS GETS READY
TO "TRANSFORM AND ROLL OUT!"

BY CHUCK MILLER



ON JULY 4TH – a day when Americans celebrate the nation's independence – Transformer fans will also celebrate a premiere: the official U.S. release of the live-action film *TRANSFORMERS*, in theaters and cineplexes everywhere.

For nearly a quarter-century, the Transformers – a toy line featuring sentient robots that could convert or “transform” into trucks, cars, or other unique devices – have captivated toy collectors and sci-fi aficionados. What originally began as a Japanese imported modular figurine line has



evolved into a mythology of two warring factions of living machines – the virtuous “Autobots,” led by their jut-jawed leader, Optimus Prime; and the malevolent “Decepticons,” guided by their maniacal ruler, Megatron.

“Transformers, first and foremost, are just great toys,” said Kevin Lukis, a Minnesota-based Transformers collector and Webmaster of UniCron.com, one of hundreds of different Transformers-themed websites. “Transformers have great detail and sculpting, they have great poseability, and best of all, the toys have great play value. Each transformation from robot to vehicle is unique, and it just sets it apart from every other toy that col-

The heroic leader of the Autobot Transformers, Optimus Prime, can convert or “transform” from a fighting robot to a 1980s-era Peterbilt truck. Photo credit: © 2007 Hasbro.

lectors would want to collect.”

What we today know as “Transformers” began in 1983, when the Japanese toy company Takara tried to market two toy lines to American consumers: “New Microman Micro Change” (toy trucks that changed into robots) and “Car Robots Diaclone” (toy cars that changed into robots). After Hasbro representatives saw Takara’s products at the 1983 Tokyo Toy Show, Hasbro secured the rights to distribute the Takara conversion toys in the American market, branding the various toy lines with the name “Transformers.”

Hasbro then advertised the toys over several media platforms, and commissioned Marvel Comics to create an animated series and comic book line for the Transformers. Marvel responded, building an entire backstory and mythology of the Trans-



An original 1984 Optimus Prime figurine, still mint in box. On the box’s side is the autograph of Peter Cullen, who voiced Optimus Prime in several television programs. Photo credit: © Hasbro; from the collection of Kevin Lukis. Photo by Kevin Lukis.

formers universe, all in the pages of a successful comic book and on a top-rated daily cartoon series.

The backstory told of a world called Cybertron, a planet populated with living machines, which had been thrust into a devastating civil war that destroyed the planet’s life-sustaining resources. In the aftermath, the Decepticons learned of a planet called Earth, where an abundance of natural materials existed that could be



Optimus Prime (RIGHT) battles Bonecrusher in a scene from the 2007 film *TRANSFORMERS*, which will open nationwide on July 4. Photo Credit: DreamWorks LLC/Paramount.

converted into “energon,” a fuel necessary to sustain their existence. With that knowledge, the Decepticons traveled to Earth to plunder the planet’s resources for their own use.

But to prevent a repetition of

what had occurred on Cybertron, the altruistic Autobots – who had learned of the Decepticons’ evil plans – followed them to Earth to stop them. Shunning human interaction, the warring factions developed the ability to

transform into earthly objects and vehicles so they could continue waging their war secretly. A few humans did discover the secret existence of the Transformers, including young Spike Witwicky, who worked with the Au-

tobots, and the mad scientist Dr. Arkeville, who plotted with Megatron and the Decepticons.

“The fiction behind the toy line is the biggest factor in the line’s enduring success,” said Benson Yee, a

New York-based Transformers collector and operator of the Transformers Web site bwtf.com (Benson's World of Transformers). "Transformers are not just toys, they are characters. Because each Transformer has his or her unique personality, there is something for everyone to enjoy in the line. You want the noble cowboy? You've got Optimus Prime. You want the big planet-eating dark god? You have Unicron. Add to that a mythology whose size rivals those of other science-fiction staples such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, and you have a world that fans can explore almost endlessly and enjoy on many different levels."



Hasbro distributed more than 20 different Transformer toys in 1984, the first year of release in America. Fans could choose from such Autobots as Bumblebee (a robot / VW Beetle), Ironhide (a robot / Nissan C20 Vanette), and Jazz (a robot / Porsche 935 Turbo). The Decepticon line of Transformers included Megatron (a robot / Walther P-38 pistol), Starscream (a robot / F15 jet), and Soundwave (a robot / cassette boombox, whose cassettes could eject and transform into other malevolent robots).

Transformers were an instant hit, and the line of heroic vehicles with secret identities found a new collector's market in the West. While fantasy-adventure movies and TV shows had human characters working with multi-function vehicles,

such as James Bond's weapons-packed Aston Martin and Speed Racer's ultra-equipped Mach 5, this was the first time where an entire race of living machines, sentient creatures with artificial intelligence, could fold up into utilitarian vehicles, then unfold into an anthropomorphic form.

Despite some claims that the television series masqueraded as a 30-minute toy commercial, the *Transformers* television series was one of the top-rated children's daily programs. During the 1980s, the combined Transformers multimedia blitz of television, comic books and toys eventually squeezed a similar robot-shifting toy line, Tonka's GoBots (which also had a television series, *Challenge of the GoBots*, produced by Hanna-Barbera) into second-string status.

As the toy line and television se-



ABOVE, LEFT: In the 1980s, the Transformer Bumblebee changed from a robot to a VW Beetle. In the new live-action *TRANSFORMERS* movie, and in toy stores around the country, Bumblebee now changes from a robot to a 2008 Chevrolet Camaro concept. Photo credit: ©2007 Hasbro.

ries progressed, Hasbro and Takara introduced new Transformers vehicles and groups, including the Constructicons (robots that could join together to create one super-vehicle),

the Dinobots (fiercely independent robots that could change into metallic dinosaurs), and the Pretenders (robots that disguise themselves as a shell- or rock-type entity).

A 1986 animated movie was released in which several of the main characters, including Optimus Prime, Wheeljack, Megatron and Thundercracker, were either killed or deactivated, while new Transformers, such as the Autobot Rodimus Prime and the Decepticon Galvatron, were introduced. Although the film was a box-office flop in its initial release, it has since developed its own cult following among fans of Japanese anime filmmaking.

Over the next 20 years, the Transformer toys received several reinventions and “reboots,” including the very successful release of Beast Wars, a 1995 toy and television series

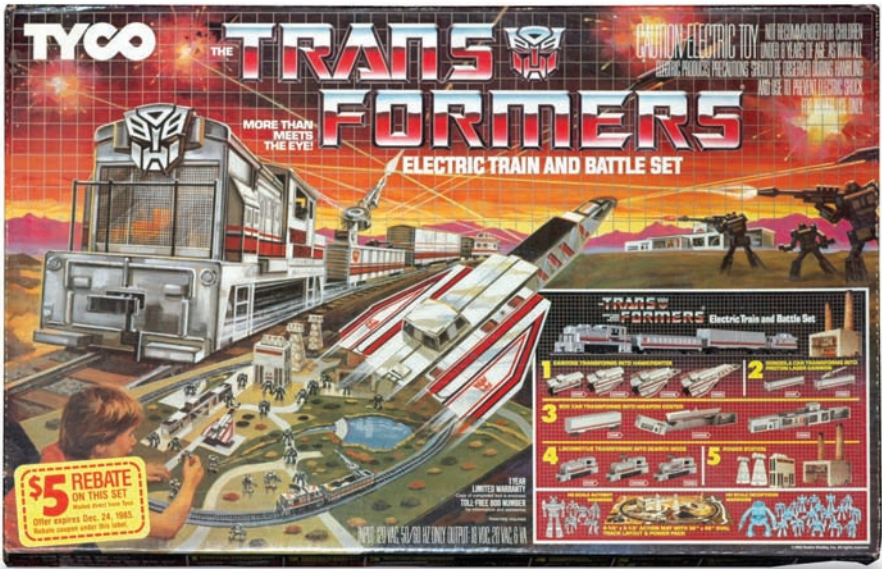
in which the descendants of the Autobots and Decepticons, now “Maximals” and “Predacons,” continued their centuries-old war, morphing from robot to animal mode – the leader of

Some fans, however, were not enthralled with their favorite robots transforming into animals. “Optimus Prime should be a cool truck, not a stupid monkey,” the fans posted on

“TRUKK NOT MUNKY” [sic] is used by Transformers fans to denote a change in the Transformers universe that they’re not ready (or willing) to accept.

However, the arrival of the Beast Wars series had also gotten a boost from the World Wide Web, Internet bulletin boards and USENET newsgroups like alt.toys.transformers. Homemade fan-based Web sites with rudimentary HTML script developed into hundreds of detailed, personalized websites frequented by fans declaring their support and enthusiasm for their favorite shape-shifting robot toy line.

“Transformers collecting definitely benefited from the growth of the Internet,” said Kevin Lukis of unicorn.com. “As the Internet grew, you started to see a lot of homemade websites. And at that point, we all



From 1985 to 1986, Tyco manufactured a Transformers electric train set – and yes, the caboose, locomotive and boxcar all “transformed” into various other machines. Photo credit: © Hasbro; from the collection of Bob Molta. Photo by Chuck Miller.

the Maximals, Optimus Primal, could change from robot to gorilla.

Internet message boards. Even today, the Internet fan slogan



Bumblebee (left) speaks with Sam Witwicky (Shia Labeouf, right) in a scene from the 2007 film *TRANSFORMERS*. Photo Credit: Dreamworks LLC/Paramount.

realized that there were more Transformers fans out there than we previously knew existed. The Web sites got more detailed as time went on, I don't know if it was a sense of competition or the way we are in terms of

fans, but everybody wanted a great Transformers website of their own.”
Just as surprisingly, Transformers fans discovered that although the toy line was predominantly geared toward a male collecting fanbase, there

was a growing legion of female collectors who appreciated the Transformers toys as much as did their male counterparts. “If you watch the *Transformers* animated TV show, you see that it was designed for a male

audience,” said Nicole Jarry, a Transformers collector from Vancouver, B.C., who first discovered the shape-shifting collectibles in her local toy store. “Granted, you wouldn't see too many males interested in My

Little Pony, but for me, the collectibility is more for the toys. My local toy shop was very big on Transformers, so I spent a lot of time in the store, and it opened my eyes to the enthusiasm of all the collectors as they bought Transformers toys. One of my favorites was the first Transformers toy I ever bought, in 2001 – a Japanese crystal Lio Convoy. That was a special-edition model, it was see-through and it sparkled in light. It appealed to the girly side of me, but it was part of the cool transforming line.”

Even more surprisingly, Transformers fans discovered that other interested parties were lurking on the Internet message boards – comic book writers and artists, television series producers and writers, even Hasbro representatives – all trying to find out, at a grassroots level, what

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WHEN THE FIRST wave of Transformers toys appeared on store shelves, figurines available for purchase included Megatron, the maniacal leader of the Decepticons. In the original series, Megatron was designed to transform into a Walther P-38 pistol, a pistol inspired by another multi-function firearm, the gun from the 1960s TV series *THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.* With the exception of a Decepticon sticker on the barrel, the toy pistol looked exactly like a real gun. Too real, in fact, and the toy was immediately yanked off the market. Today, the 1984 Megatron figure is one of the hardest Transformers to acquire.

After the toy’s removal from the marketplace, subsequent Megatrons sold in stores were designed either NOT to convert, or converted into a tank or a barrel-less gun. Even the Megatron in the 2007 Transformers film converts into a Stealth bomber, a long way from the char-

MEGATRON: AN ILLEGAL COLLECTIBLE?

acter’s original form as a pistol.
When Takara, the Japanese manufacturer of Transformers, developed “Masterpiece” editions of Transformers toys in 2006, they created exquisitely detailed,



12-inch-tall, fully functional Transformers based on the 1984 cartoon series. These high-end collectors’ pieces, which can sell for \$100-\$200 each, include Optimus Prime, Starscream and Ultra Magnus, as well as the Decepticon leader Megatron.

However, you won’t be able to legally import the Japanese-made Megatron figure into the United States unless it has been modified to comply with U.S. regulations. Because the Masterpiece Megatron retains its ability to convert into a toy Walther P-38 pistol, the toy must be affixed with a non-removable blaze-orange tip over its muzzle before it can be imported into the United States. Importing it without the tip is a violation of Title 15, Chapter 76 of the United States Customs Code, which prohibits the importation of replica toy firearms.

“All the collectors wanted a Masterpiece Megatron to go with their Masterpiece Optimus Prime,” said Kevin Lukis. “When Takara made a Masterpiece Megatron, Hasbro wouldn’t import it into America. Hasbro instead created a ‘Classic Megatron’ figure, but he converts into a goofy-looking hand blaster without a barrel – and still has a great big orange bottle cap out of its muzzle.”

TOY IMAGE © 2007 HASBRO. FROM THE COLLECTION OF KEVIN LUKIS

was needed to make the Transformers toys, TV shows and comic books more appealing and entertaining. Eventually the nicknames of several online posters started appearing as references in the *Beast Wars* television series. In one *Beast Wars* episode, for example, the Optimus Primal character announces that he is encoding a transmission “M Sipher,” in reference to fan Greg Spelak’s online identity. In the same episode, a reference to “Starbase Rugby” was added, in honor of the online Transformers store Rugby’s Starbase.

“Hasbro, in the mid-1990s, began to read what fans posted on newsgroups and bulletin boards,” said Benson Yee. “They were getting unsolicited, honest feedback from fans without having to commission marketing groups. It was a valuable tool they have been utilizing ever

since. Currently Hasbro works very closely with fans. I myself have been a ‘Transformers Consultant’ with Hasbro since 1997. More recently, Hasbro assembled a panel of fans to form the ‘Transformers Advisory Panel,’ a group of fans who have their fingers on the pulse of fandom and can help recommend direction on product. While Takara is still the primary



In the 1993 television series *Beast Wars*, the Transformers were reinvented as robots that changed into animals. The leader of the Maximals, seen here, was Optimus Primal. Photo credit: © Hasbro; from the collection of Kevin Lukis. Photo by Kevin Lukis.

guiding hand on Transformers design and assembly, Takara and Hasbro are now more willing than ever before to listen to the concerns and wants of their core fan base.”

Just as Star Trek buffs have their own conventions and get-togethers, so too do Transformers collectors. The Transformers Collectors Club’s annual convention, “BotCon,” allows Transformers enthu-

siasts to meet voice actors from the many TV shows, as well as writers and artists from the long line of comic books; and to interact with other Transformer fans.

“I went to the first BotCon in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1994,” said Nicole Jarry. “It was great to see so many knowledgeable Transformers people in one place. I had a nice experience at the last one I went to, in Chicago. I hung out with the artists from the Transformers *Dreamwave* comic book series at their hotel suite. One of the artists, Pat Lee, drew me a picture; then he made me draw him a picture. It’s nice to put a face to the names on the comic books and television end credits.”

The 2007 edition of BotCon will take place June 28 through July 1 in Providence, R.I., only a heartbeat away from Hasbro’s corporate offices

in Pawtucket. In addition to being able to purchase convention-exclusive Transformers pieces available that weekend, conventioners will have the opportunity to preview the new *Transformers* movie days before its official premiere. The special movie event is a fundraiser for Rhode Island-based children's charities.

"The BotCons have developed a great fan community," said Kevin Lukis. "You get a nice weekend out, you're listening to voice actors talk about the TV series – it's a great time. Hasbro has increased its involvement and now debuts many new Transformers at BotCon."

In anticipation of the upcoming movie, Hasbro has licensed the Transformers name to manufacturers in several different platforms. Dodge car owners can visit dodge.com and order an exclusive Web-only Trans-

> 10 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT TRANSFORMERS

1. The partnership between Hasbro and Takara existed a decade before Transformers were ever created; Takara was the Japanese distributor for Hasbro's G.I. Joe line of action figures and vehicles.
2. Jim Shooter, who was editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics at the time, and Denny O'Neil, who achieved great success with the redesign of the DC Comics character Green Arrow, collaborated on the original Transformers backstory and mythology. Bob Budiansky, another writer for Marvel Comics, came up with the names and identities of the Transformers characters, and wrote dozens of issues of Marvel's *Transformers* comic book.
3. The 1986 animated film *TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE* has a STAR TREK connection to it. Leonard Nimoy voiced Galvatron.
4. *TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE* features the last acting appearance of Orson Welles, who voiced the planet-devouring Unicron.
5. The Transformers have appeared in several home-video games, with their earliest appearances in 1986 with the games "Transformers" and "Transformers: The Battle to Save the Earth," for the Commodore 64 game platform.
6. Among the voice actors for the 1984 *Transformers* TV series and 1986 movie were American Top 40 host Casey Kasem ("Cliffjumper"), jazz vocalist Scatman Crothers ("Jazz"), speed-talker John Moschitta Jr. ("Blurr"), Everybody Loves Raymond star Brad Garrett ("Trypticon"), and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* player Eric Idle ("Wreck-Gar").
7. A heroic rock song from the *TRANSFORMERS* animated movie soundtrack – titled *The Touch* – later appeared in a pivotal scene in the film *BOOGIE NIGHTS* (1997). The original song, performed by Stan Bush, was later made into a music video, complete with scenes from the *Transformers* 1986 animated feature.
8. Transformers were parodied in the film *Spaceballs*, when the evil spaceship *Spaceball One* transforms into an air-sucking "Mega Maid" vacuum cleaner.
9. The sound effect of Transformers changing from robot to vehicle was later adopted by several hip-hop deejays (including DJ Jazzy Jeff, who partnered with Will "Fresh Prince" Smith) as a special turntable scratching effect. By chopping the sound off and on in time with the beat, deejays can perform the "Transformers scratch."
10. Hasbro eventually purchased Tonka Toys, giving Hasbro the rights to that company's robot-morphing toys, the GoBots. Eventually some of the GoBots appeared in crowd or battle scenes in the Transformers *Dreamwave* comic book line; however, the GoBots are considered minor characters in the Transformers universe, as there has never been a battle between Optimus Prime and Cy-Kill, or between Megatron and Leader-1.

formers set, including robots that can change into either a Dodge Ram truck or a Dodge Viper sports car. Hasbro has even created special Transformers in their Mr. Potato Head line (as



the spud “Optimash Prime”), as well as a Transformers chess set and a Transformers edition of the board game Risk. USAopoly, the manufacturer of themed Monopoly board

games, will release a Transformers Monopoly set, complete with pewter tokens of Optimus Prime, Megatron, Bumblebee, Soundwave, Jazz and Starscream. Radio Shack’s popular line of ZipZaps remote control cars will have three Transformers-themed vehicles available in time for the movie, including remote-controlled versions of Bumblebee, Optimus Prime and Barricade.

This is, of course, in addition to all the toys Hasbro has on its own release schedule, including the various Transformers associated with the film: an Optimus Prime voice-changing mask (put the mask on and you too can shout “Autobots - Transform and Roll Out!”), and a Transformers video game for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii.

Of course, every collector’s attention is focused on the July 4th re-

lease of the live-action film *TRANSFORMERS*. Directed by Michael Bay (*ARMAGEDDON*), *Transformers* stars Shia LaBeouf (*DISTURBIA*) and Megan Fox (*CONFESSIONS OF A TEENAGE DRAMA QUEEN*), whose human characters discover, and participate in, the secret Autobots-Decepticons war. Several of the classic Transformers characters are retooled for this film. Megatron now converts into a Stealth bomber, while Bumblebee trades in his VW Beetle body for the concept 2008 Chevrolet Camaro.

The initial reaction from many fans was that although a live-action Transformers motion picture would be a dream come true, there were concerns that the film would stray too far from the original 1980s Transformers concepts, becoming another Michael Bay explosion movie. “As more completed footage from the

movie is made available to the public, I believe some fans are warming up to the movie,” said Benson Yee.

Fans were happy that one of the original *Transformers* cartoon



voice actors, Peter Cullen, would once again voice the noble Optimus Prime, this time for the 2007 movie. “The casting of Peter Cullen was something fans lobbied for from the

PHOTO CREDITS THIS PAGE © 2007 HASBRO.

beginning,” said Yee, “so it was definitely the right move for the studio. Whether fans like the movie robot designs or even agree with the choice of Michael Bay as director, what they cannot deny is the cultural impact this will have.”

“What we’re going to see in this movie,” said Kevin Lukis, “with Michael Bay’s action prowess and modern-day special effects, will exceed what, as kids, we imagined a film like this could ever be. We fans want to see Transformers do well on the big screen. This has the potential to be something really special in the action genre. And we can’t wait to hear



Marvel Comics' original *Transformers* comic book was to be a four-issue limited run. It instead ran for 80 monthly issues, from 1984 to 1991. Photo credit: ©2007 Hasbro; Marvel Comics trademark © 2007 Marvel Entertainment. All rights reserved. From the collection of Chuck Miller.

Peter Cullen reprise the role of Optimus Prime. All Transformers fans are in complete agreement with that.”

In a world populated with successful multi-platform pop culture icons, Transformers now have the chance to join Spider-Man and Shrek, Harry Potter and Indiana Jones as a recurring motion-picture franchise. “2007 will be the year where the general public will see Transformers everywhere,” said Yee. “From the supermarket to the clothing aisles to fast food restaurants, Transformers are going to take over and tell the public that not only have they returned, they in fact never actually left.” **tc**

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BILL MUMY: WHERE THERE'S A WILL



BY KEN HALL

THE ACTOR KNOWN TO MILLIONS AS
LOST IN SPACE CHARACTER WILL ROBINSON
COLLECTS PEZ DISPENSERS, VINTAGE GUITARS,
COMIC BOOKS AND AUTOGRAPHS

PERFORMANCE PHOTO © 2015 CHUCK IVY WWW.CHUCKIVY.COM SPACE BACKGROUND: NASA JUPITER 2 ILLUSTRATION © ANDREW BAKO

AS A CHILD ACTOR, Billy Mummy was instantly recognizable, with his fiery red hair, an engaging smile and face full of freckles. Fans remember him from many memorable roles. He was the perfect Will Robinson in the enduring sci-fi TV series *Lost in Space*. In what is now a classic *Twilight Zone* episode, he played an abhorrent little boy whose superpower could banish adults “into the cornfield” if they so much as looked at him wrong. And he got a kiss from Brigitte Bardot in *Dear Brigitte*, the only film the French actress made in America. All this before puberty!

As a grownup, he dropped the “Billy” and became simply “Bill” Mummy, but he never broke ties with

the entertainment industry. Mummy has remained as busy as he has wanted to be, choosing his roles with care and maintaining a schedule that puts his family and music interests first. Mummy’s acting career remained intergalactic when he co-starred in *Babylon 5*, and in the interim he has become an accomplished musician-singer-songwriter as well as a voice-over talent.

Bill has also written comic books, and perhaps it’s here we should point out that he is also an avid collector of not only comics but also guitars, PEZ dispensers and autographs. There are reasons why he got into these things, and most go straight back to his childhood. Mummy enjoyed a privileged upbringing in Los Angeles, where his mother and

RIGHT: Bill Mummy, who played guitar as a child, posed for this shot with the left-clawed B-9 robot on the *Lost In Space* set. Image © 2007 Space Productions / MPTV.net, used under license.



grandfather had show-biz connections. His grandfather was, in fact, Boris Karloff’s agent and got Karloff the career-making role in *Frankenstein*.

Mummy loved comic books as a kid. He bought them, devoured them and like a true collector, stashed them away. Superheroes were his favorites, and he related heavily to Superman, Batman and The Flash. Because of that, much of what he bought then and collects now is from DC (Detective Comics), although he also has some issues from Marvel Comics and others. Along the collecting path, horror has crept into his archive (most of it from EC, Entertainment Comics). Today, he has thousands of comics, dating back to

the 1930s.

“I still go out and buy the new comic books on the newsstands every week,” Mummy said from his home in Hollywood Hills, Calif., where he lives with his wife, Eileen, and their two children, Seth and Liliana. “I keep the old stuff locked away in a vault. It wouldn’t be too smart having a copy of *Superman* #1 lying around with young kids in the house.” And yes, he has *Superman* #1. In fact, he has every copy of *Detective Comics* from no. 24 on. That’s more than 700 comic books right there.

Nowadays, Mummy locates the hard-to-find comics at conventions and through Metropolis Collectibles. They can be pricey, and in one instance Mummy was the culprit. “I was



TOP RIGHT: The cast of Irwin Allen’s *Lost In Space* on the set of the Jupiter 2 spacecraft, circa 1966. Image by Gabi Rona © 2007 Space Productions / MPTV.net, used under license. BOTTOM RIGHT: Four of the most popular LIS collectibles include the Thermos lunchbox set; Remco B-9 Robot, Aurora “The Robot” model kit, and Aurora LIS diorama kit featuring the Cyclops and Space Chariot. Click on the images to perform an item search on eBay. Toy images courtesy LiveAuctioneers.com.



looking for a copy of *Adventure* #210, which marked the premiere of Krypto, the Super Dog. It was book-valued at \$80, but none of the dealers I contacted had it. I finally found a copy, but before long the word had spread of its scarcity. Within a year it was valued at \$1,000. Today it's worth several times that."

At a comic convention, Mumy fell into a conversation with one of the creative directors of Marvel Comics, who invited him to submit a script. Mumy was flabbergasted by the offer, but creatively he knew he was up to the task. Along with actor-pal Miguel Ferrer, he cranked out a storyline based on an original character, Comet Man, which Marvel liked and used. A *Comet Man* series followed (500,000 copies have sold), as did related work published by Marvel, Dark Horse and DC Comics.



The PEZ dispenser collection began when young Mumy was going from studio to studio to fill acting assignments. "This was before I was signed on to do a series, so I was always going from one place to another," he recalled. "And most of the soundstages had lobbies or foyers, with vending machines in them. Well, I was always a fan of PEZ candy, so I'd buy that. And, like most kids, I liked the dispensers, too, so I kept them. As it turned out, most of them are desirable collectibles today."

Mumy had pretty much forgotten about the dispensers until years later, when he was moving some things and found about 30 of them in a box, along with his old Aurora models. He did a little homework and realized he was sitting on a small goldmine. From there, he just started adding more dispensers. "I've got

PHOTO © 2005 CHUCK IVY WWW.CHUCKIVY.COM

hundreds of them. I keep them on 10 shelves, all 4 feet long, in my house. There’s a Bullwinkle, a die-cut Bozo, Zorro, Mickey Mouse, Popeye, Casper the Ghost – I love ‘em.”

Mumy often attends sci-fi conventions as a celebrity guest, still a popular attraction due to his roles on *Lost in Space* and *Babylon 5*. “At first, I would use the money I made from appearances to buy comic books for that collection, then when I got into PEZ I would use some for that, too,” he said. “A lady friend named Sue who is very knowledgeable about PEZ dispensers really got me hooked on them. As for pricing, I would say I pay \$100 or more for most of the dispensers I buy.”

The guitar collection has its roots in Mumy’s childhood, too. He began playing at age 10, first on a steel-string acoustic, then an electric

(his first was a 1968 Rickenbacker). “I remember in 1968 I decided I had to have a bass guitar,” Mumy recalled, “I had my eye on a Fender for \$250. My parents were like, ‘But you just went from an acoustic to an electric. Why do you need a bass?’ They wanted to teach me the value of a dollar, so I had to sell some comic books to buy the Fender.”

No great loss. Mumy figures he’s reacquired most of the comics he sold (“... although I’m sure it cost me a lot more than \$250!” he notes). But the story illustrates his fierce dedication to music, even as a pre-teen. Today, Mumy owns over 70 guitars, and he can strum a good lick on all of them. He owns banjos and 12-strings, as well. Some of the most highly prized “axes” include a 1970 Martin D-45, a 1950s-vintage Gibson Les Paul (“the Holy Grail of guitars”),

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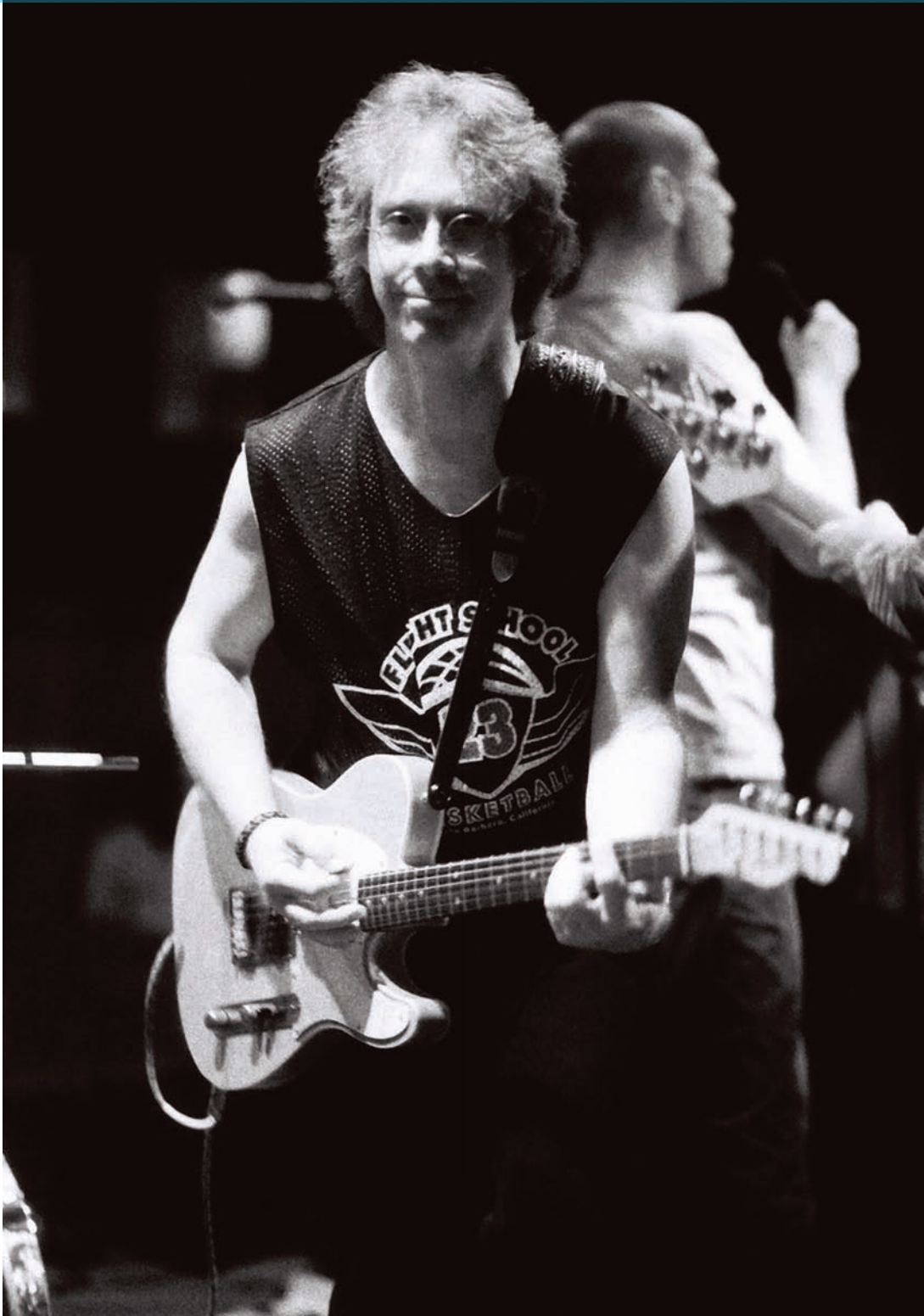
Barely out of short pants, child actor Bill Mumy appeared in the 1965 film *Dear Brigitte*, which starred one of the great beauties of cinematic history, Brigitte Bardot. Mumy has again teamed up with Madame Bardot to aid animals in need. The stars have co-signed a limited edition of 35 black-and-white *Dear Brigitte* production stills, and are offering them for \$100 each on Bill Mumy’s official site. All profits go to Florida animal shelters damaged in the recent hurricane seasons, as well as the French-based animal-welfare charity Fondation Brigitte Bardot. This is the first time the two stars have signed photos together, and the edition is strictly limited to 35 photos. Order this ultra-rare collectible today before they sell out!

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a Fender Telecaster (James Burton model) and several Gretsch guitars (George Harrison and Chet Atkins models).

The guitars were probably never meant to comprise a full-blown collection, but for Mummy it was a matter of necessity. "I played with Shaun Cassidy as part of his world tour, and I went through the whole thing using a Les Paul. I love Les Pauls, and I own five of them, but by the end of that tour I was whipped. That thing was so heavy. I said to myself, 'I've got to go out and get me some more guitars.'" And that's exactly what he did.

For years, music has been a large part of Mummy's life, both personally and professionally. Along with guitar, he also plays bass, keyboards, banjo, mandolin, harmonica and percussion. Plus he's a singer! Mummy



has released six solo CDs since 1997: *Dying to Be Heard*, *In the Current*, *Pandora's Box*, *After Dreams Come True*, *Ghosts* and *With Big Ideas* (co-produced with veteran studio drummer Russ Kunkel). His next CD, *The Landlord or the Guest*, will be released this summer on the indie GRA label out of San Francisco. He describes his musical style as "non-wimpy alternative rock."

Mummy's music spills over into his autograph collection. He has signatures personalized for him by the likes of Bob Dylan and George Harrison. Others of note include Brian Wilson (of the Beach Boys), John Sebastian (of the Lovin' Spoonful) and Graham Nash (of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young). His father got Marilyn Monroe's autograph, which is now part of the collection, plus he has a John F. Kennedy, and all four Beatles

PHOTO © 2004 CHUCK IVY WWW.CHUCKIVY.COM

on one photo from the *Revolution* recording session.

The Kennedy autograph was obtained through a trade with a dealer – Mummy’s signature on 50 stills from *Lost in Space* for the one JFK. “That’s something I’ve done a few times, actually,” Mummy said. “It’s one of the nice things about having some celebrity status. I can swap it out for things I’d like to have, like a signature or a rare comic.” He did a trade to ob-



tain a rare presidential photo bearing the signatures of five former U.S. presidents: Reagan, Carter, Ford, Nixon and George H.W. Bush.

Nowadays, at age 53, Bill Mummy has slowed down a bit, having made the decision not to tour anymore after his first child was born. When he’s not doting on his kids and being the dutiful husband, Bill Mummy is making music, writing, doing voice-over work and just living easy. **tc**

- Bill’s legion of fans can visit him online at www.billmummy.com
- His music site is www.billmummymusic.com
- His MySpace page is located at www.myspace.com/billmummy

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THE GI JOE STORY

HASBRO'S TOUGH-AS-NAILS ACTION FIGURE
HAS NEVER BEEN ONE TO SIT ON A SHELF

BY ALAN JAFFE

RIGHT: Don Levine, a Hasbro vice president and director of marketing, developed this prototype for GI Joe in 1963. The sculpted-wood model is on display at Geppi's Entertainment Museum at Camden Yards in Baltimore, from whom this photo was kindly provided.



AT AN AUCTION in spring 2006, a group of GI Joes made in the 1980s and coming from the collection of actor Leonardo DiCaprio was expected to sell for a few hundred dollars per lot of three or four toys, according to catalog estimates. Instead, the bidding, led by Internet buyers and a row of 30-something dealers who strategized via laptop and cell phone, reached four figures for nearly every lot. Two lots of 1983 toys exceeded \$2,000.

Collectors of cast-iron and tin toys in that room at Morphy's Auctions in Denver, Pa., couldn't believe what the little plastic figures were bringing. But they shouldn't have been shell-

RIGHT: An early incarnation of Hasbro's GI Joe Action Soldier with facial scar. The toy was marketed as "America's movable fighting man" and launched as the United States' involvement in Vietnam escalated. This example complete with box and accessories sold for \$350 in September 2005. Image courtesy Morphy Auctions.



shocked, says Dr. Arnold T. Blumberg, curator of Geppi's Entertainment Museum at Camden Yards in Baltimore, whose doctoral dissertation was on the psychology of collecting. "We're entering an era now where anything from the 1980s would officially enter that nostalgia window," and the generation that grew up then has the desire and income now to collect the things that they loved, he explained. "The mid- to late-80s is now that sweet spot."

GI Joe, who marched into the National Toy Hall of Fame in 2004, is a seasoned veteran of both the toy wars and the fluctuations of the collecting market. His appeal has crossed generations, and his maker, Hasbro, has managed to create and sustain a product so strong, Blumberg said, "you can have several different brands of the Joe line existing

simultaneously.” While baby-boomer dads seek mint-in-box 12-inch figures, Generation X-ers buy up Joes on



Operating under license from Hasbro, the UK’s Palitoy marketed a variety of Joe variants. The heroic American Green Beret was among Palitoy’s Soldiers of the Century range. Photo courtesy of www.modellersloft.co.uk.

sealed cards, and 9-year-olds visit Toys R’ Us for the latest edition of the Real American Hero.

Of course, toy industry combat is fierce, and Joe has his scars, but the early years were triumphant. At the Geppi museum, visitors can salute GI Joe’s one of a kind prototype sculpted in 1963 and purchased at auction in 2003 by Steve Geppi for \$200,000, no doubt the highest price paid to date for any Joe. The wood figure, complete with helmet and green fatigues, was crafted by Hasbro vice president Don Levine, who had been approached by licensing agent Stan Weston with the idea of creating an articulated soldier inspired in part by a TV show called *The Lieutenant*. Borrowing the name from the 1945 Robert Mitchum film, *The Story of GI Joe*, the new character for boys was introduced at the

1964 toy fair in New York. He had 21 moving parts, with 75 accessory products to support the Soldier, Sailor, Marine and Pilot models.

There are several versions of

Levine knew Elliott Handler, a Mattel co-founder whose wife, Ruth, invented the Barbie doll in 1959. Barbie’s immediate acceptance inspired the Hasbro team to think about a



Actor Leonardo DiCaprio was a longtime collector of GI Joes. He auctioned his collection for charity in 2006. Within the collection was this set of four 1985-era toys near-mint on card (Banoka, Quick Kick, Flint, and Barbaque).The celebrity connection drove this lot to an amazing \$1,500.

the backstory, Blumberg said. “We do know for sure that in at least one respect, the GI Joe line owes its success to the Barbie doll.” Hasbro’s

counterpart for boys. “Just as it had been the common wisdom in the toy industry that girls didn’t want to play with anything but baby dolls,

which Barbie completely shattered, there was also the common wisdom that boys were never going to play with a doll,” Blumberg explained, “especially what is still ostensibly a fashion doll, a doll that is dressed up. And then the military angle came up, and it was like, ‘This is how we can break through.’”

The notion of a boy’s “doll” was not the way they’d sell it. “In fact, there are some stories I’ve read that suggest there was actually an internal company policy that the employees were not supposed to say the ‘D’ word,” Blumberg says.

Boys of earlier generations had played with articulated wood dolls – most notably Superman and Popeye figures made in the 1920s and ‘30s.

RIGHT: The 1970s Adventure Team releases included a variety of can-do characters, including this black figure with Kung Fu Grip. Courtesy Live Auctioneers Archive/Morphy Auctions.

But there had never been dolls marketed toward adolescent males. “The notion in America at the time was that boys should be putting those things away at a certain age,” Blumberg said. “The other thing is that the other, earlier



figures could not be re-dressed. The toys were mainly static military figures in metal or plastic – just little statues, more or less. ... and there certainly had not been a doll with this kind of fashion approach.”

The clothing and accessory



concept had also been borrowed from Barbie. It was the “razors and razor blade approach,” Blumberg observed. “You buy the razor, which is the initial doll, then you’re going to need the razor blades, which is the different outfits, the accessories, the weapons, everything.”

At about the same time Joe came on the scene, little boys were also buying the new James Bond figure, which was marketed by Gilbert shortly after the success of the 1962 movie *Dr. No*. “They may have coined the term ‘action figure’ before Joe started using it,” Blumberg said, “but certainly Joe cemented the idea of referring to a boy’s fashion doll as an action figure and coining that euphemism to make it more palatable.”

LEFT: One of the flops in the GI Joe line was GI Nurse. Boys just didn’t buy the concept, and parents didn’t think to buy it for the daughter in the family. Photo courtesy of Hasbro.

Hasbro invited American boys to join the official GI Joe Club; 150,000 signed up by the end of 1964, and 2 million Joes had been sold by 1965. The toymaker began expanding the line, adding additional figures, outfits, equipment, and vehicles, including a footlocker to stow everything away. “Probably most significant was the marketing of the black GI Joe doll, the first African-American action figure,” Blumberg said. “At first they only marketed it regionally, in the North, for unfortunate but obvious reasons.”

The company also came out with the GI Action Girl Nurse, “probably the biggest failure they had in the whole line,” Blumberg noted. Boys balked at buying a female figure, “which is interesting because now, decades later in the collector market, men are far more likely to gravitate to

female action figures.”

In 1966, Hasbro also sent Joe overseas. The company licensed the British manufacturer Palitoy to produce an identical cousin of GI Joe. But they had to alter the distinctive American nomenclature. On the other side of the pond he would be called Action Man, “which was good forethought, because he became more of an adventurer,” explained Greg Brown, director of marketing and new products at Cotswold Collectibles, a Washington state firm that now imports Action Man to the U.S.

Back in the mid-1960s, other



A member of the 17th/21st Lancers joined the Action Man line in 1971. Photo courtesy of www.modellersloft.co.uk.

countries, including France, Germany, Spain and Japan, produced their own versions of GI Joe with their own national identities. In Britain, Action Man eventually set himself apart from the Yank figure with uniforms that were authentically British. He donned the elaborate appearance of the 17th/21st Lancers, the Royal Horse Guard and other outfits that were never exported to the States.

The kids of the United Kingdom embraced the new toys, Brown said, and Palitoy sent Action Man into other realms: outer space, sports and

adventure, “but they never abandoned the military concept.” The military Action Man was produced from 1966 to 1984.

The war in Southeast Asia was a double-edged sword for GI Joe. The Vietnam conflict had started just prior to the toy’s appearance, “so initially you have that very strong, positive, masculine kind of image that the Joe figure was supposed to represent. A father could feel comfortable giving the doll to a boy – here was something that every American boy should aspire to: strength and justice and honor,” Blumberg said.

But within a few years of America’s entry into the Vietnam conflict, “sentiment had built up, particularly in the emerging youth culture, to be against the war,” said Blumberg. “Right or wrong, the image of the American soldier got tied into that,

and sales for the Joe doll started suffering drastically, to the point that the entire line was really endangered.”

Hasbro repositioned the toy line to make it a more generic cast of adventure characters, taking on environmental issues, and distancing it as much as possible from military personnel engaged in combat. “It was really a case of damage control for the rest of the decade,” according to Blumberg.

The Joes became “more fanciful,” with a science-fiction flair; an atomic character had bionic qualities to compete with the release of a Six-Million-

Dollar Man doll. But instead of leading the market, Hasbro was “chasing what the other trends were at the time,” Blumberg said, and the original 12-inch Joe was losing favor with American boys. “The kids had moved on.”

Hasbro tried one more time. It came out with an 8-inch, solid plastic Super Joe, but it didn’t sell. By 1978, “GI Joe was dead, and for a few years he disappeared completely,” Blumberg said.

Part of the problem with the 8-inch figure was the cost of production; the rise in the price of oil “dictated a sea change in the action-figure world,” Blumberg explained. The



The Adventure Team Astronaut set catered to youngsters’ interest in the Apollo program. This set sold for \$150 in March. Image courtesy Live Auctioneers Archive/Clars.

> DO MORE GI JOE + ACTION MAN



For an inside look at the development of Hasbro’s GI Joe product line, this DVD comes highly recommended. Featuring former Hasbro exec Don

Levine as well as many knowledgeable collectors, the 110-minute documentary covers the product launch with the detail collectors want.

🌐 \$24.95 FROM AMAZON



If you grew up with the 3¾-inch, 1980s-era Joes, you’ll want to own all the Rhino DVD boxed sets of the 1985 cartoon.

- 🌐 VOL. 1-1: \$79.98 FROM AMAZON SELLERS
- 🌐 VOL. 1-2: \$89.94 FROM AMAZON SELLERS
- 🌐 VOL. 2-1: \$79.99 FROM AMAZON SELLERS

Hasbro’s UK variant of GI Joe, Action Man, is documented in superior fashion in this collecting guide by N.G. Taylor. From Amazon UK.



🌐 £15.19 FROM AMAZON UK

eBay is the best way to survey the breadth and depth of current aftermarket offerings in GI Joe.

🌐 GI JOE ON EBAY
🌐 ACTION MAN ON EBAY



Cotswold Collectibles works with Hasbro in the marketing of collectible GI Joe and Action Man products. Check out their offerings.

🌐 GO

rise of Star Wars merchandise also eclipsed much of the competition. The toymakers at Kenner introduced 3¾-inch figures that wouldn't be too expensive to produce and could fit into a universe of accessories. "They came up with what would become the standard for the next 30 years," Blumberg said.

In 1982, GI Joe was back, at 3¾ inches. No longer a conventional soldier, he was now part of a paramilitary organization devoted to fighting one enemy: the nefarious Cobra, a terrorist organization led by a faceless figure in the Darth Vader mode. "So they borrow a lot of things that are working, and that becomes a massive success – the GI Joe line in the 1980s becomes one of the biggest-selling toy lines in history," Blumberg summarized. In 1984, Joe earned \$150 million for Hasbro.

Marketed with the help of a GI Joe cartoon series and comic book, the new line con-

The UK Palitoy Action Man line included enemy forces like this German Stormtrooper in authentic attire with accessories, a figure sought after by collectors on both sides of the Atlantic. Photo courtesy of www.modellersloft.co.uk.



sisted of a specific cast of characters, as opposed to the "Everyman" soldier of the '60s. With names like Zap, Snake Eyes, Rock 'n' Roll, Grunt, Short Fuze, Roadblock, and Scarlett, the first female member; each had his or her own bio on the back of their card.

Over the next 20 years, Hasbro revived the classic Joes, recycled older characters, and invented new lines. The Duke figure was reissued in 1991 in Desert Storm fatigues. Twelve-inch versions of characters from the 1980s were offered in limited editions. The Eco-Warriors become the Drug Elimination Force. A 6-inch GI Joe Extreme was called up to fight in "extreme times." The Sigma 6 team – a return to 8-inch toys – was formed in 2005 with specialized capabilities to protect the world from Joe's old enemy, Cobra. And this summer Hasbro will try a launch of 25 collectible 3¾-inch figures to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the initial battle with that ever-wily foe.

Celebrity tie-in toys have had uneven

success. Blumberg recalled how plans for a Rocky/GI Joe character never saw daylight. The Joe team did enlist the Chicago Bears’ William “The Refrigerator” Perry and pro wrestler Sgt. Slaughter. A Classic Collection was rolled out in the mid-1990s that included a diverse hall of Greatest Heroes, from Teddy Roosevelt to Ted Williams to Buzz Aldrin.

Last year, on the 40th anniversary of Action Man, Cotswold Collectibles began importing sets of favorite soldiers from the British line, including the Soldiers of the Century. The best sellers, according to Greg Brown, have been the French Foreign Legion, the U.S. Green Beret, and the German Stormtrooper.

That toys from the 1960s, and as recently as the 1980s and 1990s,

RIGHT: Hasbro GI Joe Sea Adventurer, 1970, Adventure Team, flocked hair & beard, original box, excellent condition, sold in August 2004 for \$190, near the top of its estimate range. Courtesy Village Doll & Toy Shop.



are now fueling the collectibles market and skyrocketing in value is utterly predictable, said Blumberg. Due partly to the Internet and the global distribution of information, “the standard wisdom of the 25-year nostalgia cycle has decreased a lot,” and has actually accelerated, he said. “There’s also something to be said for the GI Joe line in particular, a line so driven by the idea that you were actively playing with them.”

Little boys ripping into packaging of the latest character and gear had little regard for future collectors. “To find Joes on the card, intact playsets, original boxes – it’s the same challenge that it has always been in collecting. What they sell for shouldn’t be so surprising. It’s going to escalate as people realize how hard some of them will be to find,” Blumberg said. “So the chase is on.” **tc**



R.I.P. CAPTAIN AMERICA

COULD THIS REALLY BE THE END?

BY J.C. VAUGHN

CAPTAIN AMERICA IS DEAD. When word hit the national press that Captain America had succumbed to an assassin's bullet, reactions ranged from the stunned ("I can't believe it!") to the cynical ("It's comic books. He'll be back."). Regardless of the tone of the coverage, though, the word got out quickly. "Here lies Captain

LEFT: Captain America battled Hitler months before the U.S. involvement in World War II. Image courtesy Heritage Auction Galleries.

America, defender of Democracy,” wrote Scott Thien for the *Indianapolis Star*. “Dead – at least for now.”

As the story unfolded, it seems that Cap’s on-again/off-again girlfriend, S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Sharon Carter, had pulled the trigger, and that she, in turn, was under the mental control of Dr. Faustus, a B-level no-goodnik working for Cap’s arch enemy, the Red Skull. At first, Carter didn’t even know that she had done been the shooter.

Fox News, ABC News, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and numerous other media outlets covered the events of *Captain America* #25, which was released on March 7. The issue was a follow-up to Marvel Comics’ company-wide crossover event known as “Civil War.” The battle, split along ideological lines, pitted

one group of superheroes against another over the issue of a law demanding superhero registration with the government. Captain America was the leader of the opposition, waging what he perceived as the good fight, the same way as he had ever since the days leading up to the Second World War.

Contrary to what the layman might expect, Captain America didn’t wait for his country to be attacked to declare his own war on Adolf Hitler and the Axis forces. More than six months before Pearl Harbor, the Star Spangled Avenger was punching Der Führer in the face on the cover of *Captain America Comics* #1, cover-dated March 1941. He wasn’t the first patriotic comic hero (that honor went to The Shield, of the eponymously titled comic published by Archie



RIGHT: In addition to appearing in his own title, Captain America was in a number of other Timely comics. Image courtesy Heritage Auction Galleries.



Fighting the Axis powers was standard protocol for Captain America and teenage sidekick Bucky during the war years. Image courtesy Heritage Auction Galleries.

Comics’ earlier incarnation, MLJ Magazines), but he quickly proved to be the one with the most staying power.

Unlike many other superhero characters, Captain America’s secret origin was not an accident. Young

Steve Rogers was eager to enlist to serve his country against the growing threats of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, but he was classified 4-F, physically unfit for military duty. Frustrated, he volunteered to be part of an experiment to create a super-soldier. The project succeeded, and frail Rogers was transformed into the robust fighting man. The scientist behind the project was killed, however, and took the secret formula with him to the grave. As such, Captain America would be one of a kind.

As was the common practice in comic books of the day, he was teamed with a teenage sidekick – in this case, James Buchanan “Bucky” Barnes. Together they battled enemy forces at home and abroad. He was also given his seemingly indestructible shield – the equivalent of the Excalibur for a 20th-century King Arthur

– on his quest to vanquish evil and establish justice.

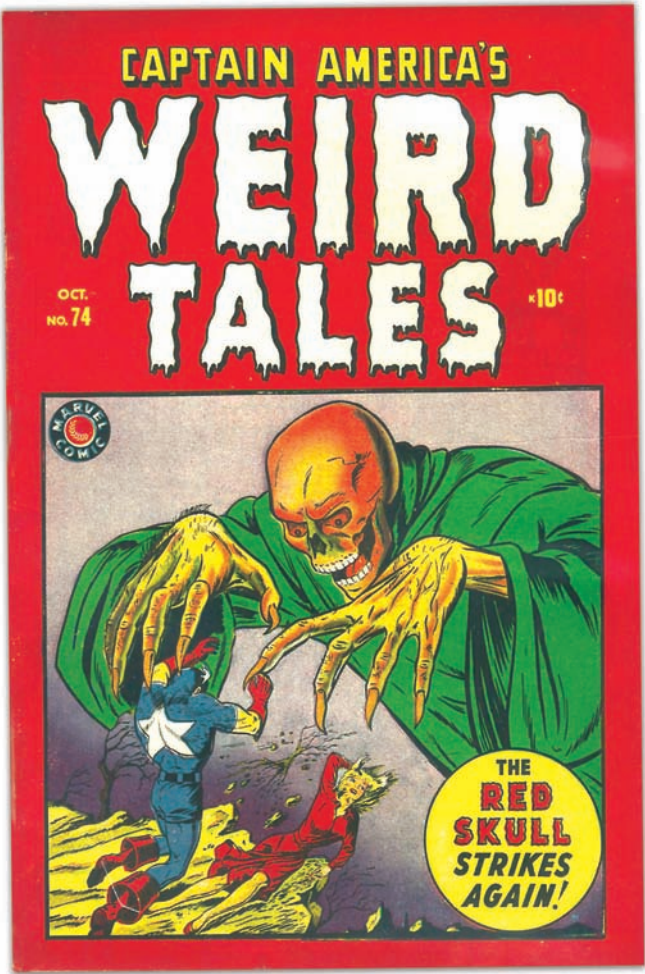
The character and his adventures sprang from the pencils, pens and brushes of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. After developing Captain America, the creative duo would put its stamp on virtually every type of comic book fiction over the next three decades. They launched titles such as *Fighting American* and *Boys Ranch*, and they are widely credited with spurring the romance and Western fads in the 1950s.

A decade earlier, Simon had supplied Timely Comics’ publisher Martin Goodman with a concept sketch of the Captain America character. Once they had the go-ahead, they quickly established the standard operating procedures: Only a handful of people knew Steve Rogers was Captain America, saboteurs had



A 15-chapter serial from Republic was issued in 1944. Image courtesy Hake’s Americana & Collectibles.

some incredible weaponry, and his arch nemesis, the Red Skull, was nearly impossible to kill with finality. Although Simon and Kirby left the series after 10 issues, *Captain America Comics* continued through 1950, even spawning a 15-chapter Republic Pictures serial in 1944.



After the war, the superhero craze faded, as can be seen on this cover from late in the original run. Image courtesy Gemstone Publishing.

The years immediately after the war, though, saw a severe decline in the popularity of superheroes. By the

end, *Captain America Comics* #75, the series bore the title *Captain America's Weird Tales* on the cover, and Cap himself didn't even appear in the issue.

A revival (issues 76 – 78, subtitled “Commie Smasher”) appeared in 1954. That was two years before larger competitor DC Comics reignited the superhero craze in 1956 with *Showcase* #4, which featured an updated version of The Flash. The return was not long-lived.

As time marched on, Timely Comics became Atlas Comics, and Atlas Comics became Marvel Comics. During the subsequent transitions, ringmaster Stan Lee had followed the trends. His first assignment

at Timely had been a text story in *Captain America Comics* #3, and

sometimes just trying to stay in business, he produced Westerns, romance stories, monster comics, and science-fiction tales. But through it all, he longed to do comics his way. With the surprise success of the Fantastic Four and the Amazing Spider-Man 20 years later, he got his chance.

Looking at the success of DC's Justice League of America, Lee assembled some of Marvel's top characters into a single team, The Avengers. In *The Avengers* #4, he brought back Captain America. It was a huge hit with fans, but it was a continuity nightmare.

Unlike comics from earlier periods, Marvel Comics in the early 1960s flourished at least in part because they portrayed one

cohesive universe. On the upside, this created a lot of what today one would call brand loyalty. On the downside, it spurred a lot of interest in older comics and created the

RIGHT: Captain America fought the daunting Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* #58. Image courtesy Heritage Auction Galleries.





LEFT: Captain America began sharing billing with Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* #59. Image courtesy Heritage Auction Galleries.

tion the 1954 version), Lee’s cohorts and successors set up a rather straightforward story that other heroes had taken their places due to the negative impact on morale that their deaths would have had. For the record, The Spirit of ’76 died in the

challenge of explaining how they fit into this continuity.

Considering that they were explaining how Captain America and Bucky had disappeared near the end of World War II when the original series continued until 1950 (not to men-



RIGHT: After *Tales of Suspense* #99, the title switched to *Captain America*, beginning with issue #100. Image courtesy Heritage Auction Galleries.

role of Captain America, only to be replaced by The Patriot as Captain America.

Since his return in the 1960s (which oddly passes for about seven years in the Marvel universe), Captain America has been played as a man out of time. Some writers have perceived this as the dynamic core of the character while others have viewed it as a hindrance. Based on some of Marvel’s editorial comments, it seems that those who found the character “dated” have prevailed. They have made it clear that Steve Rogers is dead.

With respect to Captain America, however, things might not be so

clear-cut. Sidekick Bucky was brought into the first issue of the current series. Now called the Winter Solider,

he is a distinct possibility to fill his former mentor’s role. The debate over who might possibly be the new Captain America is fueling a lot of Internet speculation among comic book collectors.

Whichever character should take up the mantle would be faced with the specter of a much-loved predecessor. The current Marvel Comics series *Captain America* is the eighth ongoing title to feature Steve Rogers as Cap.

While some of the series have been short lived, others have spanned



Among Mego collectors, the rare Kresge packaged edition garners prices in the \$2,000 range. Image courtesy Hake’s Americana & Collectibles.



Captain America toys are scarce. Marx made these late-1960s toys in Japan. Images courtesy Hake's Americana & Collectibles.



many years. Here's how the chronology runs: *Captain America Comics* (1941-1950, 1954), *Captain America* (1968-1996), *Captain America* (1996-1997, known as the "Heroes Reborn" series), *Captain America* (1998-2002, "Heroes Return"), *Captain America: Sentinel of Liberty* (1998-1999), *Captain America* (2002-2004, "Marvel Knights"), *Captain America and The Falcon* (2004-2005), and *Captain*



The standard Captain America Mego figure regularly brings \$400 or more. Image courtesy Hake's Americana & Collectibles.

America (2005 through the present). Over the years, the character has been featured prominently in *Tales of Suspense*, *The Avengers*, *The Invaders*, and throughout the Marvel universe. With numerous mini-series, one-shots and guest appearances, Captain America is also featured in Marvel's "Ultimate" line as a member of The Ultimates.

> DO MORE



Marvel has released a complete set of *Captain America* comics, from November 1964 to December 2006, on

DVD-ROM for Windows and Mac.

🌐 **FROM \$44.96 FROM AMAZON**



Over the years, Marvel Toybiz has created many excellent collector figures in its Legends line, but this Cap example (6 inches in height) may be one of the finest. It's based on the "Ultimates" series of comics published by Marvel.

🌐 **FROM \$44.00 FROM AMAZON SELLERS**

CAPTAIN AMERICA

Captain America #25 is the issue in which the Marvel superhero is shot and killed. The storyline is amazing and probably nothing like you'd expect.



🌐 **FROM \$29.95 FROM AMAZON SELLERS**

Not surprisingly, eBay is a great place to browse the world of Captain America publishing and product. From comics to figures, costumes to Mego figures, it's all there, waiting for your bid.



This top-quality Captain America shirt features classic Marvel art and a tie-dyed look — perfect for that 4th of July / Deadhead effect.

🌐 **\$26.99 FROM AMAZON**

In addition to the 1944 serial, he was the subject of a 1966 cartoon series, a pair of 1979 TV movies, and an ill-fated 1990 feature film. A new feature film is presently scheduled for 2009.

Original memorabilia associated with Captain America is limited to the club kit for *Captain America's Sentinels of Liberty*. Products became more common in the 1960s but never really reached a peak until the 1990s, with action figures and other items. Today there are many Captain America collectibles. **tc**



Captain America died in *Captain America* #25 of the current series. This is the variant cover from the first printing. Image courtesy Gemstone Publishing.



Goodbye, old friend

It gave you endless hours of entertainment. It was always there for you, when you needed it most (especially Super Bowls). And even now, it still struggles to serve, flickering as it does with an ever-darkening tube. Isn't it time you said goodbye to this old friend and welcomed a new member of the family? (Particularly one that's a fantastic bargain?)

Amazon.com is featuring the Samsung 42-inch 720p plasma HDTV for an incredible **\$1247.49 shipping included** (USA 48 states, restrictions apply).

Learn more now.

CLICK HERE



MATTEL HOT WHEELS

STILL BLAZING

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

BY TOM HOEPF



ZOOMING AROUND THEIR PLASTIC orange track or displayed in a tire-shaped rally case, Hot Wheels have sparked children’s interest in cars for nearly 40 years. Mattel’s line of diecast miniatures roared off the starting line in 1968 to become a premier marque in the toy industry.

Driven by the collector mindset of the late 20th century and a new generation of youngsters, the popularity and production of Hot Wheels remain at full throttle. “I think they intrigue kids of all ages,” said Michael Zarnock, a Hot Wheels authority and author of several books on the subject. “Guys my age are into the early muscle cars — Chevelles, Camaros, Corvettes, 442s ... while kids of today, like my 13-year-old, have Hondas, Ferraris and Jaguars. There’s just a whole array of different cars for different people.” he said.

Hot Wheels aptly describes the models that Mattel dubbed the “fastest metal cars in the world.” The

Custom Mustang, produced 1968-69, was based on the 1967 Ford Mustang fastback. Rare variations include openings in the hood scoop and a ribbed rear window. This example, rated good-plus, sold in January for \$90 at Vectis. Image courtesy of Vectis Auctions, the World’s Largest Toy Auctioneer.

name characterizes the design of the wheels, which enables the cars to roll freely. “The axle and wheel design allowed the wheels to spin much faster and with less friction. It allowed Hot Wheels cars to go down the track



Mattel produced the Hot Wheels version of Tom McEwen's Mongoose dragster in 1970. Near mint in the blister pack, this one sold for \$220 at Vectis Auctions Ltd.

and go fast. Matchbox cars at the time had an axle with plastic wheels that wouldn't roll at all," said Zarnock.

The wheels were not the only

hot element. Styling was cutting edge, as well. “They looked like muscle cars that were on the street. Being a kid from New York State, I didn't get to see many cool custom cars unless they were in a magazine or at a car show that came around once a year,” said Zarnock, who grew up hanging around at his father's body shop in Utica, N.Y. Having played with mundane Matchbox toys as a boy, Zarnock was amazed

to see the fresh styling of Hot Wheels when Mattel unveiled the line in 1968. “I'm looking at the Hot Wheels

and seeing these diecast cars that already have superchargers,



With an exposed V-8 engine, the Custom VW wasn't your typical Beetle. This near-mint loose example is valued in guides at up to \$90. Vectis Auctions Photo.

mag wheels and trick paint with stripes. I couldn't believe there was a hot rod I could buy without having to make it myself," he said.

Spectraflame hues adorned Hot Wheels produced from 1968 and 1972. The bright, reflective body colors mirrored the candy-color paint on custom hot rods of the era. In a cost-cutting move in 1973, Mattel replaced Spectraflame colors with plain enam-

els, which were often enhanced with “tampo” designs. The term refers to accent designs applied to Hot Wheel cars since 1974, and is named for the company that produced the painting process.

Nothing sets the

early Hot Wheels models apart more than the embossed red circle on the face of the tires, which was popular on racing tires at the time. Hot Wheels cars manufactured between 1968 and 1977 are referred to as Red-



NHRA Funny Car champion Don “The Snake” Prudhomme's Plymouth Barracuda joined the Hot Wheels lineup in 1970. In its blister pack, this car, sold in January for \$220 at Vectis Auctions.

lines, and command a premium among collectors. “Everybody wants Redlines. They're valuable and started the whole Hot Wheels phenomenon,”



Mattel had its Custom Corvette on store shelves before General Motors delivered the 1968 models to Chevy dealers. Krause Publications photo courtesy Jim Nicholson collection.

said Zarnock. “Guys my age are trying to buy back the Redlines they had when they were kids. They’re trying to collect as much as they can from their childhood.”

Topping the list of desirable Hot Wheels are the Sweet 16, the fleet of original cars Mattel produced in 1968. Ten muscle cars were included in the original lineup to represent Corvette, Cougar, Mustang, T-Bird, Camaro, Barracuda, Firebird, Fleetside, Eldorado and Volkswagen Beetle. They all

carried the “Custom” prefix, denoting after-market modifications such as side pipes and hood scoops. Five models were based on customized show cars built by the likes of Ed “Big Daddy” Roth and Bill Cushenberry. These models were named the Hot Heap, Beatnik Bandit, Python, Silhouette and Deora. A Ford J-Car prototype, similar to the Ford GT40 IV that won the 24 Hours of Le Mans race in 1967, was the lone race-car in the original lineup.

Among the most coveted Hot Wheels are those exhibiting variations – little differences that set them apart from vehicles of a standard production run. A variation may be something as slight as a blue-tinted windshield or a different color interior.

> DO MORE MATTEL HOT WHEELS





The definitive Hot Wheels price guide is Warman’s Hot Wheels Field Guide. Michael Warnock’s 512-page mini-book (just 5.2” x 4.3”) fits in your pocket yet packs a huge punch — more than 500 listings and photos.

 **\$11.04 FROM AMAZON**



The next step in Hot Wheels collecting is the world of variations, and this is the book for that level of collecting. Excellent for close study, with 400 pages and 2500 color images to help you avoid paying \$200 for a \$10 car.

 **\$21.77 FROM AMAZON**

 Find Hot Wheels Redlines now on eBay.  **GO**



Mattel knows an opportunity when it sees one — they sell perfectly-sized Kar Keepers 10-pack clamshell protector cases for current-production blister cards.

 **\$12.99 FROM AMAZON**



Mattel has reissued Sizzlers, the early-1970s slotless race sets that were big sellers. Get juiced!

 **\$29.99 FROM AMAZON**



Mattel runs the Hot Wheels Collectors Club for adult fans. Check it out for club exclusives, message boards and more. And while you’re at it, introduce your son or daughter to the kids’ Hot Wheels portal.

 **GO CLUB**  **GO HOT WHEELS**



Produced in 1973, the Show-Off is considered a rare issue. This example in excellent-plus to near-mint condition sold above estimate for \$220 in a January sale at Vectis Auctions.

“Like any other production in a factory, you’re going to use up all your parts,” said Zarnock, who began keeping a record of variations around 1995. “There are some cars that are worth two, three four hundred, a thousand dollars just for a slight difference,” he said.

Variations occurred from the start because Hot Wheels were



Introduced in 1974, Flying Colors were enamels used together with pad-painted designs known as “tampos.” The yellow Mustang Stocker from the enamel era is valued at \$200. Vectis Auctions Ltd. Photo.

produced in both the United States and Hong King. Mattel discontinued production of American-made Hot Wheels cars after 1971.

The key to differentiating authentic variations from modifications made by a car owner is the blisterpack – original packaging consisting of a printed paper-board back sealed to a clear plastic enclosure, which contains the car.

“There are fakes out there, unfortunately,” said Zarnock, describing attempts by unscrupulous traders to



Custom car designer Harry Bradley designed some of the first Hot Wheels cars. His 1968 Deora must have two surfboards to be complete. Near mint: \$85. Krause Publications photo courtesy Jim Nicholson collection.

create rare variations by replacing wheels on cars and other parts and resealing them in the blisterpacks.

“There have been some very expensive cars done that way and people have gotten caught. I have ways of knowing if a package has been tampered with or not,” he said.

Beyond the assurance of authenticity, Zarnock appreciates original packaging for its aesthetic value. “I like the different styles of packaging, the different colors. ... It’s just

Mattel’s 2007 lineup has 174 models in six series, with 24 having a hidden code to unlock additional info at HotWheels.com. Remarkably, the cars are priced as they were 39 years ago. Mattel Inc. photo.



“Hard Workin’ Haulers” described Mattel’s Hot Wheels Heavyweights series, introduced in 1970. This packaged Cement Mixer sold in January for \$180 at Vectis Auctions Ltd.

part of my nature to have things the way there were,” he said.

Zarnock considers himself to be among the 5 percent of Hot Wheels collectors who are so-called “completists,” those who strive to acquire every Hot Wheels toy ever produced.



“That’s what started me on my books. I’m a list keeper. I have to have everything written down just so I know if I have something or not,” said Zarnock.

Much of his collection is on view



Produced in 1970-71, Classic Nomad is often found with slight pitting and mottle spots, also known as toning, which detract from its light green metallic finish. The good-plus-to-excellent car sold in January at Vectis for \$80. Vectis Auctions Ltd. photo.

at the Children’s Museum of Utica, N.Y. “The great thing about the Children’s Museum is it gets the collection out of storage ... and allows everybody to see it. There are things

there people will never see anywhere else,” said Zarnock, who was awarded a Guinness World Record for owning 3,711 different Hot Wheels toy cars.

While Zarnock’s books include price guides, he does not advise buying Hot Wheels as an investment. “If everyone had kept their Redlines, they wouldn’t be as valuable as they are today. It’s supply and demand. Right now there’s a whole lot out there. ...

You can buy collections for 25 cents on the dollar – and that’s packaged stuff. As an investment, I can’t see it happening.”

Zarnock still can’t resist stopping at garage sales in the unending quest for Hot Wheels. “Every chance I get, every place I go, I always ask, ‘Do you have any old Hot Wheels?’ There are all kinds of things in attics

that people have forgotten about. It’s always a good thing to ask,” he said.

Likewise, Zarnock is interested in new releases and continually visits retail stores that sell Hot Wheels. He recommends attending Hot Wheels collector events held several times a year at participating Kmart stores. “They set up at 9 a.m. on a Saturday and collectors all draw num-

bers to go through a fresh case of cars made only for Kmart Hot Wheels Collector Days,” said Zarnock.

While the first generation of

Hot Wheels collectors is now well into middle age, Zarnock does not anticipate interest in the venerable toy line dying.

“Will Hot Wheels sustain its popularity? I think so, because Mattel is changing with the times. They are keeping up with the kids of today, and those kids will keep on buying things just like the kids



Michael Zarnock has been a Hot Wheels enthusiast since 1968, when he bought his first cars at a W.T. Grant variety store in his hometown, Utica, N.Y. Much of his world-famous Hot Wheels collection is on display at the Children’s Museum in Utica, N.Y.

GO MUSEUM

of years ago.”

“A car is a car. As kids reach that certain age, they’re into cars,” said Zarnock. tc

SHOWOFF!

IPOD MAKES IT A SNAP TO
SHARE YOUR COLLECTION

BY CHUCK MILLER

WHETHER IT'S YOUR PRIZED Tipp Mickey and Minnie on a Motorcycle or a super-rare copy of *Fantastic Four* #1, you want to show off your collectibles to anyone and everyone. Instead of bringing these items with you – which would almost certainly be impossible – or dragging around bulky photograph albums, you can now convert your iPod music player to a portable showcase.

You're only a few easy steps away from bragging rights. First, make sure that all your toys or collectibles are photographed and stored in one directory on your computer's hard drive. It's best to save the photographs in .jpg format, although other image formats



such as .tif and .gif will also work. Not every iPod will show your photos on its screen; you need one with a color display screen, such as an iPod Photo, iPod with Video, or one of the many available models of iPod Nano.

Plug your iPod into its docking cradle, just as if you were downloading music from your computer. Your iTunes computer program should appear on your computer screen. On the left side of the iTunes screen, you will see selections for "Library," "Store," "Devices" and "Playlists." Under the "Devices" link, click on the name of your iPod.

Once you have done that, a new screen will appear, displaying your iPod and its storage capabilities.



Look at the top of this new screen. You will see several tabs for Music, Movies, TV Shows, Podcasts and Photos. Click on the Photos tab.

Now you're at a screen where you can decide the number or order of your photographs. Under the Photos tab, select "Sync photos from" and choose the directory containing your photo collection. You can then opt to download all of the images or just those of your choosing. Don't worry about the size of the images; iTunes will automatically make re-sized copies of your images for iPod storage, and without altering your

original snapshots. After your iPod has fully synchronized and all your photos

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USING IPHOTO

One of the leading features of the Macintosh platform is the fully integrated software suite that accompanies the MacOS operating system. Owing to the Mac's heritage as a multimedia production platform, the Apple iLife software programs focus on digital imaging, video, audio and DVD production for the home user.

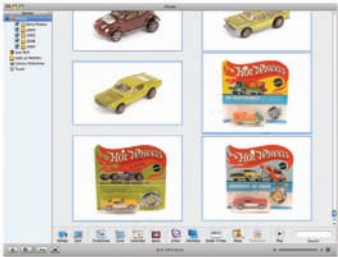
Key among these programs are iPhoto and iTunes. The former is Apple's Mac-only photo import and management package; iTunes is Apple's cross-platform music and video inventory and playback program that syncs with iPod.

With iPhoto, digital photo import is simply a matter of plugging the camera's USB connection cable into an available port; the MacOS recognizes most cameras without installing drivers, and imports the photos automatically. The software includes basic re-touching and enhancement tools (like red-eye removal), plus features

that let users email images directly from iPhoto, creating photo books, and more.

Importing to the iPod is as easy

as selecting "iPhoto" as the source for images in iTunes; during synchronization, the iPod then copies the photos for go-anywhere viewing.



Those on the MacOS platform can use iPhoto (ABOVE), part of the iLife product suite, to store and organize digital photos, then sync them to an iPod using iTunes (BELOW).



are transferred, use your iTunes screen controls to properly disconnect your iPod connection from the computer. You may now remove the iPod from its docking station.

Your iPod startup screen will have a selection for "Photos," so use your iPod clickwheel controls to select that choice. Then select "Slideshow settings." This is where the fun begins. You can choose the number of seconds between slides (anywhere from 2 to 20 seconds, or you can select a manual picture advance), whether you want the images to shuffle or repeat, whether you want a song from your iPod to accompany the



slideshow, and much more.

Now go to the "Photo Library" menu and select the first picture in the collection. Press the "Play" button on your iPod (usually at the 6 o'clock position on your iPod clickwheel), and watch the display cycle run its course!

If you want to show your collection to a large audience and you own an "iPod Photo" or "iPod Video," Monster Cable markets an AV cable set that connects those iPods to a television's video-audio RCA jacks. One end of the cable plugs into your iPod's data port; the other end has red, white and yellow RCA-style plugs, each of which is inserted into your TV's appropriate input. Now you can share photos of your favorite toys with a custom soundtrack to heighten the experience. Diecast car collectors, what'll it be? Perhaps *Hot*

> DO MORE IPOD + DIGITAL IMAGING

The iPod is more than a music playback device; many models now playback video as well as digital images. And the Macintosh product line offers great value, too.



If you don't have an iPod, or own an earlier version, now is the time to experience what it's all about.

- 30GB iPod: \$249.00 FROM APPLE
- 80GB iPod: \$349.00 FROM APPLE



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If you want to transfer your high-res photos to another computer, your iPod can actually work as an auxiliary disc drive. When you “sync” your photos to the iPod, as previously described, you can check the selection for “Include full resolution photos.” The iTunes program will then send two distinct files for each image: the original high-resolution shot, and a reduced-size image suitable for the iPod's tiny screen. Using this method, a toy dealer could easily visit a customer and offer his entire



sale inventory through an iPod slideshow.

Storing your collection on your iPod also allows you to prove ownership or existence of your items to an insurance company or police department, should any of your prized possessions ever get stolen or destroyed. A good rule of thumb is to take an extra set of photographs shot in either a distinctive setting in your home or that include a personal item

such as your business card. In this way, no one can ever claim that you copied an image off a Web site and never actually had possession of the piece. **tc**

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CENTRAL STATION

BY GENE FRIEDMAN

IMAGES BY TRAIN COLLECTORS
ASSOCIATION

ALL LINES CONVERGE AT THE TCA'S NATIONAL TOY TRAIN MUSEUM

STRASBURG, PA. – Toy trains have the ability to captivate onlookers and cause them to forget about time. And it’s not just elders re-

seum, about the makeup of the 50,000 to 55,000 enthusiasts who pass through the doors of the Train Collectors Association’s 13,000-square-foot museum, educational arm and national headquarters in any given year.

“Push the buttons and people will watch the trains run for hours,” said Luppino. “It’s an innate fascination ... generation to generation.” Luppino said the biggest surprise of the last 20 years has been the surge of interest within the younger set because of Thomas the Tank Engine. The story of the

metal and wood – were successfully marketed, and the Thomas stories were adapted to a British children’s TV series, *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends*, and its American spin-off, *Shining Time Station*. With the revival of juvenile interest in trains, thanks in no small way to Thomas, Luppino said the museum’s advertising was shifted to focus on the 12-and-under group, promoting trains as a wholesome, family-oriented hobby.

Duplicating the exterior of a northern California Victorian-era railroad station, the museum opened in 1977, expanded in 1983, and again in 2000 with the addition of a large reference library. Like any railroad, it has a repair shop, in this case manned by vol-



living their childhood; today’s youngsters have fallen under the spell of scale-model railways, as well. Just ask John V. Luppino, operations manager of the National Toy Train Mu-

animated train named Thomas was created in 1946 by the Rev. Wilbert V. Awdry as part of the Railway Series books. In the decades to follow, Thomas the Tank Engine toys – of



An original factory display of toy trains and accessories produced by the Voltamp Electric Manufacturing Company of Baltimore (1904-1923). The freight/passenger sets and trolleys are Gauges 1 and 2 and are based on real-life streetcars and trains operating in and around the Baltimore-Washington area.

unteers who keep the rolling stock on the rails. The TCA, which owns and operates the museum containing one of the most extensive toy train collections in the world, was founded in

tures a replica store display of a 1923 Lionel train factory. The trompe l’oeil artwork painted on the store’s wall by Angela Trotta Thomas is so realistic, visitors have even tried to open a

seum models represent Lionel, followed by American Flyer and Marx.

Another popular display is modeled after a 1950s Lionel U.S. Mint car, with windows and more than

period indicate that a set would have sold retail for only \$27.50, but that was more than a week’s pay for many. Another must-see is the Memorial Display, with an assortment of

LEFT to RIGHT: Two views of the Lionel standard-gauge layout show the grandeur of this big scale — a Lionel no. 517 caboose brings up the rear of a Lionel set, passing a no. 102 American Flyer Central station (circa 1928); Ives (1868-1932) was a major toy and train builder — the plaque is from the now-razed original factory; trains of the Soviet Union (1951-1969) — earlier models were made for Communist Party members exclusively, and basic designs remained unchanged for their entire production run; MTH reproductions of original Lionel no. 85 race cars (1912-1916) show Lionel taking product risks early on.



1954 in Yardley, Pa.

The earliest retail sales of toy trains was in hardware stores, as illustrated in the museum’s first exhibit called “Harry’s Hardware.” The realistic, life-size 1920s storefront fea-

door handle that’s part of it, Luppino said. Also worked into the painting is a depiction of Lou Redman (“Mr. TCA”) purchasing a train from noted Lionel engineer Frank Pettit. Luppino noted that 40 per cent of the mu-

1,000 visible rivets, but still sporting roof hatches from its previous tooling as an aquarium car. Following the Mint car is a 1928 Lionel dealer display featuring models contemporaneous to that era. Price sheets from the

items from prized private collections donated in memory of loved ones.

A Streamliner grouping includes stylish, aerodynamic trains of the 1930s, when American railroads operated their full-size counterparts.

Endless shelves of locomotives, tenders, passenger cars, rolling stock and cabooses fill the walls of the Historical Hall, with displays on both sides exhibiting string-pulled wood

There are five operating layouts with multiple layers, built about 3 feet off the floor for smaller viewers, and all within reach of multiple buttons to start trains on the landscaped loops

dard layout, while N gauge isn't in a layout, but among the exhibits. An unusual grouping is comprised of trains and accessories made entirely of plastic Lego pieces in red, white

Helper Service, Weaver and Williams. Revered German firms with works on display include Märklin and Bing.

A diverse array of early to mid-20th-century American toy trains is on

LEFT to RIGHT: The Wonder Wheel (Märklin, 1957, Germany) featured an HO train set powering the big wheel to showcase the reliability of the German product; the brass collection of Howell Day showcases the life's work of an early importer of Japanese HO brass (much of it built by Kumata in the 1960s); a roundhouse of brass locomotives; the standard-gauge layout has a "secret" Thomas the Tank Engine section for kids to enjoy; this O gauge railroad showcases contemporary-scale realism, the current product trend; the A.C. Gilbert Co. American Flyer S-gauge layout showcases this 2-rail Lionel competitor.



trains and cast-iron floor models, as well as lithographed and European trains. Most examples are from the prewar era, but in the postwar area, visitors can view trains with plastic bodies and realistic knuckle couplers.

and activate lighting and accessories. Trains in the layouts are standard gauge, G gauge, also known as garden trains; O gauge, S gauge, and HO gauge. The small lipstick-size Z cars are displayed within the stan-

and blue; while a Marx display consists of tin trains, stations, tunnels and accessories. Modern train manufacturers with models in the museum include American Models, Atlas, Bachman, K-line, LGB, MTH, S-

view, each a witness in some way to the turbulent economy of that period. Carlisle & Finch, which became the first American firm to successfully mass-produce electric-powered trains, stopped making the toys in

1916 to work on war contracts. Dorfan, also known as Fandor, started in 1924 but didn’t survive the Depression, closing in 1934. An early top player was Ives, founded in 1868 and

American Flyer partnership with W. O. Coleman to establish Overland Flyer, a company he sold in 1951 to Wyandotte Toys, which subsequently declared bankruptcy.

other areas of production, and examples of those expanded lines are on view in the museum. Products from 1930 to 1933 include a functional Lionel electric stove, an Airex fishing

Asked if any celebrities were train enthusiasts, Luppino mentioned the late Frank Sinatra and musician Neil Young. Luppino said he couldn’t elaborate on famous TCA members

LEFT to RIGHT: The HO scale layout demonstrates this size’s realism and authenticity; the Railtown layout (two images) captures this popular MTH product line’s scale-like accuracy and fun; since 1947, Plasticville by Bachmann of Philadelphia has defined model buildings for toy train setups and layouts; a backdrop is all that separates winter from spring on the HO scale railroad.



responsible for many toy-train innovations until it failed in 1928 and was bought out by Lionel and American Flyer in a joint venture. And then there are the trains of William Hafner, who left after seven years in the

Train companies of the first half of the 20th century had to adapt to stay alive, especially during and after the Depression, Luppino said. Trains were considered seasonal toys, so their manufacturers branched into

reel and a record player made for Disney. Virtually no trains were produced during the war years of 1942 to 1945, when Lionel made compasses – at a cost of \$6,500 each – and compass binnacles for the U.S. Navy.

but confirmed that the club’s ranks include a racecar driver and PGA golfer. Luppino said train enthusiasts no longer put up a 4-by-8 board like Dad might have done at Christmases past, but rather, run modern layouts

with controls similar to those of major railroads. He added that, in the last decade, digital controls used with HO trains since the 1980s have been adapted to larger modern trains, as well. “A command control system can run any train,” Luppino explained. “Prior to (the change), A couldn’t run on B. Now you can operate locomotives from other manufacturers.”

Donations of equipment from TCA members, who build the scenic layouts and keep the equipment in top condition, are the backbone of the operation. Just like the real trains, locomotives break down, and wheels and tracks wear out and require maintenance.

Luppino was unable to estimate

the the collection’s value but said an inventory is currently under way. Exhibits are revised or updated yearly, with many new engines reaching “pricey levels.”

There couldn’t be a better location for a toy train museum than

Strasburg, which is also home of the nearby Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. With more than 100 historic locomotives and rolling stock, the Strasburg Railroad is America’s oldest shortline tourist railroad. Adding to the nostalgic experience,

the railroad’s next-door neighbor, the Red Caboose Motel, provides accommodation in genuine furnished cabooses.

The National Toy Train Museum



This “observation car platform” is a speaker’s podium, built in honor of late TCA member Gary Lavinus.

is located at 300 Paradise Lane in Strasburg, PA 17579-0248. Admission is \$5 for adults (ages 13-64), \$2.50 for children (ages 6-12) and \$4 for senior citizens (ages 65+). Chil-

dren younger than 6 are free, and family admission is \$12. A season pass is \$15. Group rates are available upon request. Visit the TCA Web site at www.traincollectors.org. **tc**

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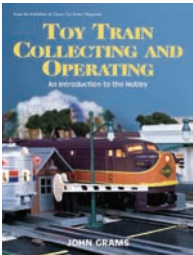
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WHISTLE STOP

AMBROSE AND BAUER TAKE THE HIGH ROAD
TO COLLECTIBLE TRAIN AUCTIONS

BY TOM HOEPF

PITTSBURGH – Paul Ambrose and Drew Bauer have written definitive books on toy trains. Now the principals behind Ambrose-Bauer Trains are rewriting the book on how to market the most popular toy of the 20th century.

Since becoming business partners three years ago, Ambrose and Bauer have switched to the fast track in the toy train trade, with several million dollars in sales per year – all via Internet auctions. Lifelong train collectors, Ambrose and Bauer cater to fellow baby boomers who have the means to buy great toy trains that they may have missed out on when they were children.

“We have a warehouse full of trains,” said Bauer. “Every day here is like waking up on Christmas morning.” Surrounded by boxed trains in like-new condition, Ambrose and Bauer might be compared to Santa’s elves, making certain every train is delivered to deserving new owners. Rather than the North Pole, however, both Bauer and Ambrose are from Pittsburgh, a vibrant blue-collar town where an electric train topped every



Drew Bauer (LEFT) and Paul Ambrose take a break from cataloging consignments to their latest toy train auction. Veterans of the postwar toy train boom, they say fellow baby boomers are their biggest customers. Surrounding them in their Pittsburgh warehouse are shelving units stacked high with boxed train sets, cars and accessories.

boy’s Christmas list from the late 1940s into the 1960s.

Bauer, an attorney, said he has been a train collector all his life. “My parents actually bought my first two train sets before I was born. When I was in prep school, I was buying and selling trains with the intent of expanding my train collection. I’ve been doing that ever since,” he said.

Ambrose, an advanced Lionel collector, has authored many of Greenberg’s Guides to toy trains since the 1980s, and has often listed Bauer as a contributor. Ambrose and publisher Bruce Greenberg had the distinction of being selected to inventory the Lionel archives.

“Paul and I have both been in trains for decades. We just believed there was an opportunity to start a new business that would feature the

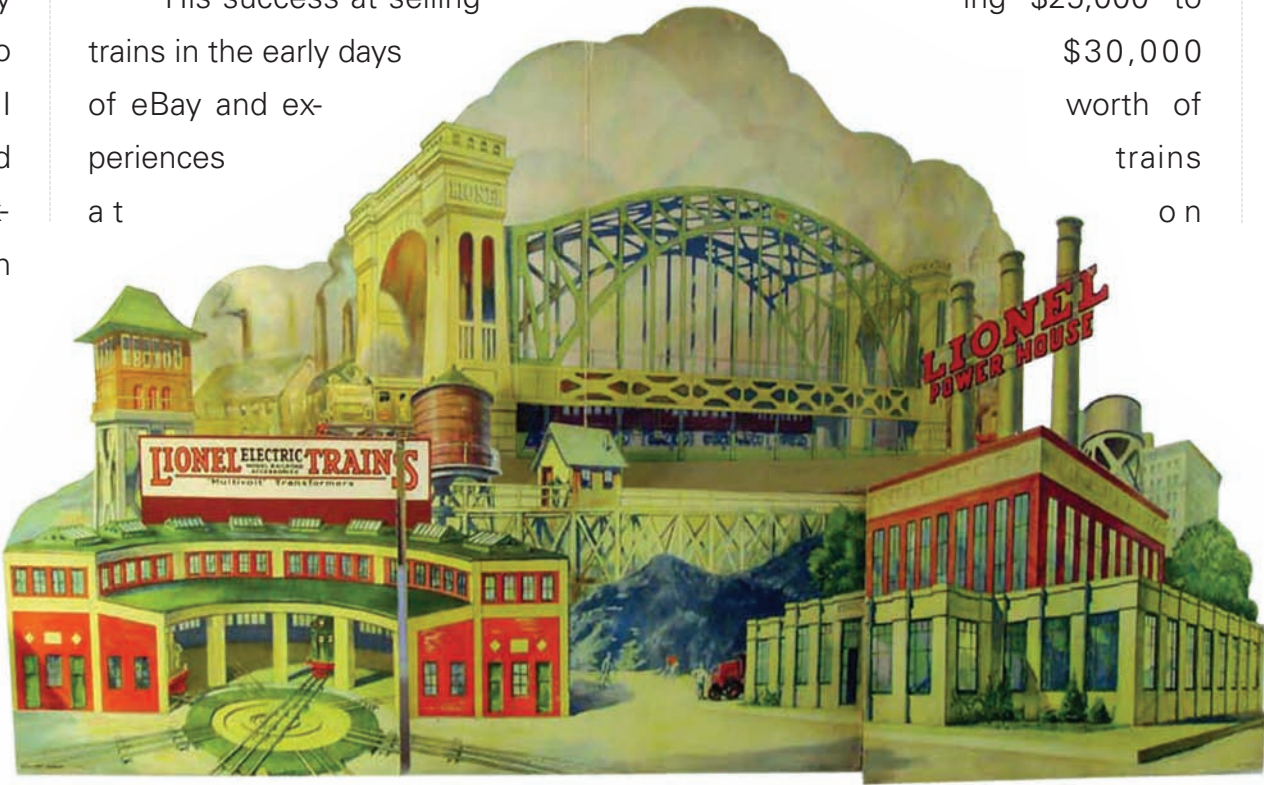
talents we had, which is the fact that Paul and I know the most about toy trains,” Bauer said.

His success at selling trains in the early days of eBay and experiences at

advantages. Bauer said he realized the Internet was the route to take in 2000, when he was selling \$25,000 to \$30,000 worth of trains on

putting them on eBay and making money at it,” he said.

While AmbroseBauer Trains posts many items on eBay, superior items are saved for their train auctions conducted live on their Web site www.toytrinauctions.com. Ambrose and Bauer have split their live Internet auctions between prewar/post-war and modern trains, but plan to make prewar trains a separate category in the near future. They conduct auctions of 300 to 350 lots once or twice a month. Their scheduled auctions feature AuctionsBy™, an exclusive online bidding system that allows live bidding on their Web site. Bidders may also participate through eBay Live. Bauer said he and his 15-year-old son, Andy, developed the system. “It’s an ongoing process, and we keep adding to it,” said Bauer. The



Lionel dealers used this cardboard display to enhance the look of their stores circa 1930. Free of watermarks and stains and judged to be in excellent condition, this rare display sold for \$12,000 plus buyer’s premium to a collector in California.

conventional live auctions convinced him Internet auctions hold distinct

eBay on Sunday nights. “I was buying through other auction houses and

system now offers a searchable database of all auctions conducted by AmbroseBauerTrains.

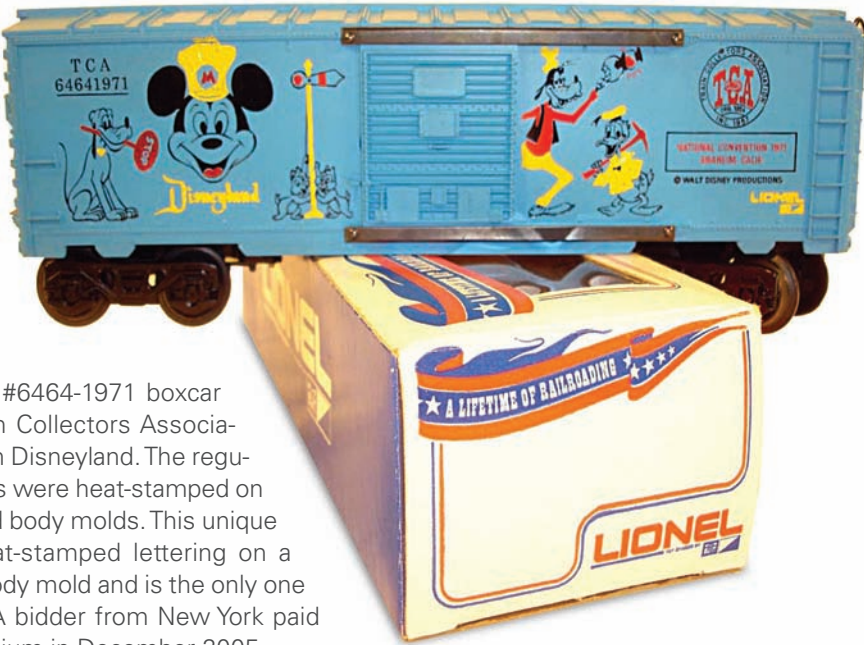
Providing up to 44 images of every auction lot has all but eliminated the need for on-site auction previews, said Bauer. “The only people to have touched (the merchandise) is us, so people are getting it in the same condition it was when we got it from the consignor,” he said.

Rather than requiring customers to travel to an out-of-town city

and sit through a daylong auction, Ambrose and Bauer invite them to participate in the comfort of home, and at a reasonable pace.

“We try to keep the auction manageable ... five or six hours in length. Our bidders know how many lots an hour we auction, so if a guy is interested in something he doesn’t have to sit at his computer for five hours straight. Averaging 50 to 60 lots an hour, and I’m going to bid on lot 200, I know I don’t have to check

Scarcity and pristine condition was a high-powered combination when Lionel O gauge #2136WS Passenger Set (1948) climbed to \$13,500 plus premium at an AmbroseBauerTrains auction in October 2005. With its #675 diecast steam engine wrapped in original paper, Ambrose and Bauer shipped the rare set to the buyer in California.



Lionel made the #6464-1971 boxcar for the 1971 Train Collectors Association Convention in Disneyland. The regular production cars were heat-stamped on a white unpainted body molds. This unique variation has heat-stamped lettering on a blue unpainted body mold and is the only one known to exist. A bidder from New York paid \$6,800 plus premium in December 2005.

in until three hours,” said Ambrose.

Another advantage Ambrose and Bauer promote is a money-back guarantee. “We guarantee originality. If I say it’s kosher, it’s kosher. If it isn’t I eat it,” said Ambrose, who acknowledged a rare oversight this year. I did not look closely enough at what would have been a rare set, and there was a wrong helicopter with it. We

made it right by getting a right helicopter for it,” he said.

“The old idea of going to an auction and buying everything ‘as is, where is’ and the only thing the auctioneer is doing is putting the stuff on a table and putting lot numbers on it is sort of yesterday’s news,” said Bauer, who recalled a train collection that sold at auction a few years ago.

“The auctioneer had the ability to look at these trains for more than six months. They were represented as rare variations. Paul and I, within an hour of being there, were able to identify 90 percent of (the variations) as being fake,” said Bauer. “Because of it, bidders sort of shied away, and some of the original things didn’t sell for as much as they should have.”

On the other hand, Ambrose and Bauer claim to have the experience to recognize

“You will not find a better set than this,” Ambrose and Bauer stated in their catalog listing of this #2144 O-Gauge GG-1 Passenger Set produced by Lionel in 1949. In mint condition with no signs of use, the GG-1 Single Motor Electric with three passenger cars, track, boxes and paperwork sold for \$7,500 plus buyer’s premium to a bidder from Missouri.



the rare items as well as minute variations that can affect value. “One of our competitors had an auction a few years ago and sold something as being not original, so it sold for a couple thousand dollars. In fact, it was original and the buyer ended up selling it for more than \$30,000 profit. The person who got hurt there was the consignor,” said Bauer.

Ambrose and Bauer do not play up, or even reveal, whose collections they are selling. “Other than Ward

Kimball, one of Walt Disney’s original animators whose train collection came out a few years ago, I can’t think of any train collector whose name adds value to the trains,” said Bauer. He and Ambrose discourage potential consignors from being identified with their train collections or selling collections all at once. “We would explain to them logically that that isn’t the best way of doing it,” said Bauer. “If you want to get an extra 25 percent for your collection, sell it over the course of a year. If you want to make a grand slam and have your name mentioned, sell it all now and it will be a fire sale,” added Ambrose.

They explained one reason for spreading out the contents of a collection over several auctions was to lessen the impact of like items. “For example, let’s say we have a con-



Lionel train collectors take the scenic route, especially when the Lionel #974 Scenery Set becomes available. Ambrose and Bauer say a mint-condition set like this one comes up at auction only once every five years or so. Including two three-dimensional mountain backdrops and nine trees, this scarce set sold in April for \$3,850 plus premium.

signor who has three of the exact same thing in brand new condition. Do we put them all out at once and flood the market with three of something rare and kill the price?” Ambrose asked rhetorically. Instead Ambrose and Bauer advise consignors to allow them to space items over several auctions. “It’s called management,” said Ambrose.

Bauer compares the value of toy trains to that of stocks. “Trains

have gone up in value just because everybody wants a particular model, and down in value when another one comes out and there are not as many buyers for it," he said.

Collecting toy trains is a matter of supply and demand – governed heavily by condition. Lionel and American Flyer trains made after World War II through the 1960s are in great demand if they are in like-new condition.

"In what we call the postwar

era, these trains were bought mainly to be played with. No one ever thought they would be worth the fortune some of them are worth today. That's why you find so few in absolute pristine condition. They were toys. The collectibility of Lionel just happened," said Ambrose.

When trains began to be viewed as collectibles, people began buying and hoarding new train sets, resulting in a surplus of trains manufactured after 1970. "If you wanted to

amass a modern-era collection, you could make phone calls to major dealers, look on the Internet and put together a fantastic collection – everything new in the box – within three to four months," said Ambrose. "You could go a lifetime and not get postwar Lionel in that condition because the product is just not there. It was all played with."

Men who grew up in the 1940s and '50s now have the money to dominate the market. "Ninety percent of the people who collect trains want to be 12 years old again on Christmas morning. They want to buy trains, those that they couldn't have when they were children. So the whole idea of buying trains in perfect boxes or a set in virtually perfect condition comes from that," said Bauer. "Everybody wants like-new or mint. Trains that are below that are in great



Owners of Lionel's #2016 Steam Engine and the #6026T Tender from the late 1950s had the opportunity to match them with an original #2016LT master carton. A bidder from Missouri paid \$1,200 for the box at AmbroseBauerTrains' auction in March.

Complete down to its exploding boxcar and missile launcher, this 1959 Lionel #1625WS Freight Set is extremely difficult to find in top condition. Ambrose and Bauer judged this set to be in like-new to mint condition. It sold to a Massachusetts bidder for \$1,550 plus buyer's premium at an AmbroseBauer Trains auction in April.



volume and, for the most part, have fallen in value because people don't want that condition anymore."

"Condition is everything. A more-common train item in exceptional condition brings more than a rarer item in average condition," said Ambrose, adding, "To get exceptional

money you need exceptional condition. And finding that exceptional condition is very difficult.”

Ambrose and Bauer are always searching for trains to sell. “Paul took two trips in April and picked up maybe four train collections. We probably got 50 to 100 lots for our auctions a thousand lots to put on eBay. We only put the high-quality things in our auctions,” said Bauer.

Although their primary business is auctioning trains, Ambrose and Bauer are still active train buyers. But Bauer said they would rather take col-

lections as consignments than buy them outright. “Whenever people talk about a train collection, the first thing I offer is to auction their trains. They are usually the ones who say, can you buy them off me. The second thing I say is, you will always make more money at an auction than by selling them to somebody. It is not a conflict (of interests) when you explain their options to them,” said Bauer. “We would rather not buy the trains; we would rather auction them. But if (buying) is the only way of getting them, we will.” **tc**

There is no sign of use on this Lionel circa-1963 #19281 uncataloged freight set. It includes the #231 Rock Island Alco diesel, #6142 green gondola, #6401 gray flatcar, #6804 teal flatcar with orange girder, #3349 turbo missile launcher, #6473 rodeo boxcar, #6017 brown caboose, #110 trestle set, track, paperwork and transformer. The set box is rated 9-plus. A bidder paid \$1,685 plus buyer’s premium in April.



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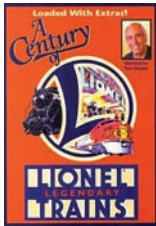
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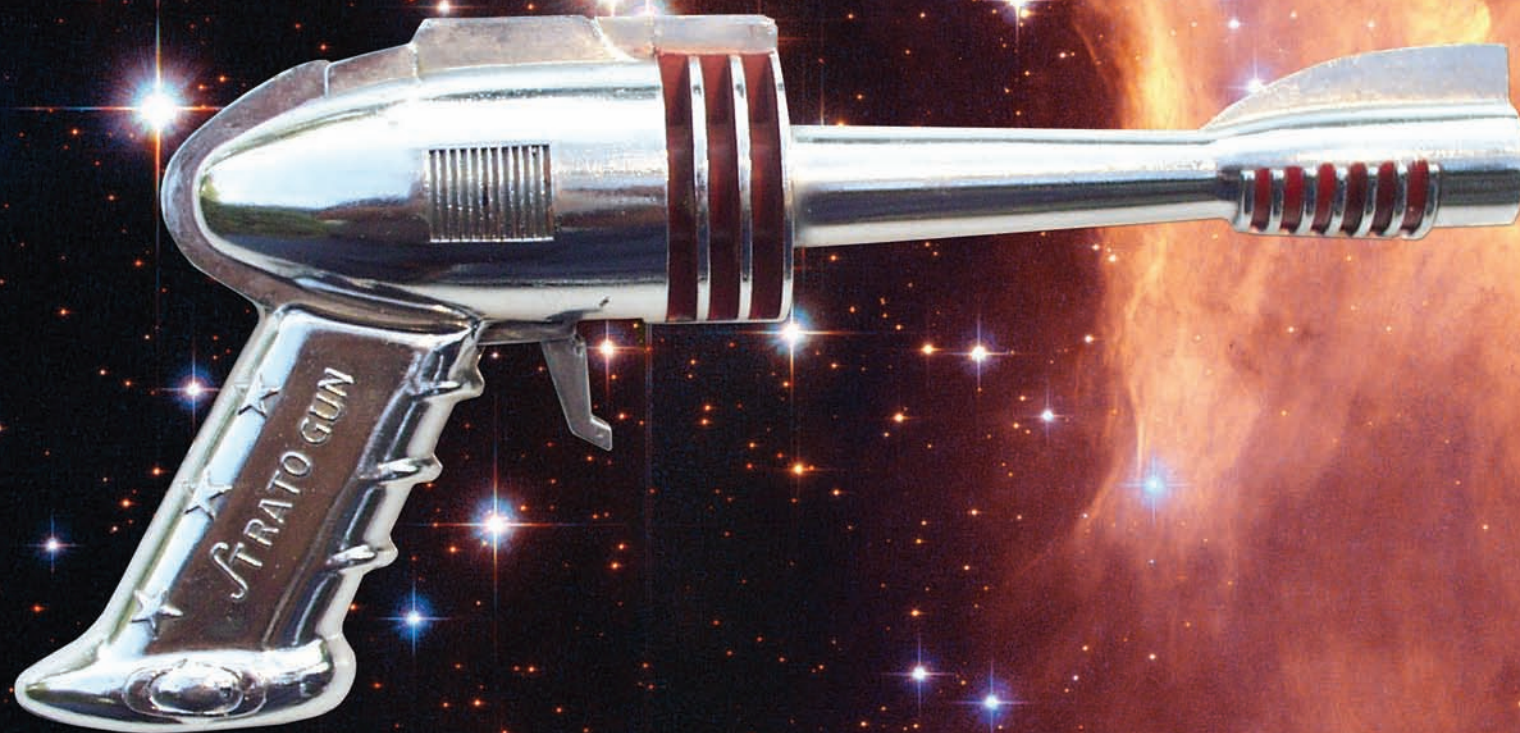


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