

● FEBRUARY 27, 2008

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 9

Antique Trader®

\$4.99

AMERICA'S WEEKLY ANTIQUES & COLLECTIBLES MARKETPLACE



Part of
set of
circa 1880
Apple Blossom
design Victorian
butter pats.

Give a little pat

Butter served Victorian style

CARRIE P. JONES

“If you’ve got it, flaunt it.”

That saying certainly applied to the Victorian era of 1837-1901. Flaunt it they did, especially when entertaining. It was the perfect opportunity for the new, prosperous middle class to prove its social status via table settings, which some describe as elegant, while many other thought of, to put it kindly, ostentatious.

Continued on page 20

Butter Pats

continued from cover

Imagine being seated at a Victorian table where you'll dine on at least 10 courses. To your right, approximately 10 each of knives and spoons; to your left, as many forks. Pieces of china, glass and other silver are woven into any remaining table space. In the midst of this array, in the upper left corner, is a tiny plate, only about three inches in diameter. This diminutive piece is known by today's collector as the butter pat, sometimes referred to as a butter chip.

In the Victorian days, butter was churned, then molded. Every formal table was set with individual butter pats. Before a dinner party, the butter was cut into squares, or 'pats,' and one or two would be placed on each miniature plate. Often these squares of butter would be made more distinctive by being stamped with designs. Sometimes individual molds, often in the form of rosettes, were used to form butter for each guest.

I recently saw many butter pats for less than \$30 at a local antiques mall, while eBay listed 103 at the lower end of that range. The problem was not in being able to locate beautiful examples, the diffi-

culty was in narrowing the field of what to purchase.

In her essay, "All Buttered Up for Collecting," Mary Dessoie wrote, "Collectors find butter pats interesting for the sheer variety of pieces that can be found. In England during the 1800s, butter pats were included with dinnerware services for 12. The variety of wares and designs that were produced, mainly by Staffordshire potteries, make English butter pats second only to Haviland pats in availability... Haviland companies alone designed as many as 60,000 dinnerware patterns, most with matching butter pats."

Butter pats can be ideal for beginning collectors. They are small, easily displayed and stored, readily available, and best of all, affordable. It's easy to understand the big appeal provided by such a small item.

These miniatures can also go for hefty prices. On Jan. 18, 2007, a Flora Danica Royal Copenhagen butter pat sold on eBay for \$610.

With butter pats, there's something for everybody, whatever the budget. Shelley collectors, according to *Schroeder's 2008 Antiques Price Guide*, could buy a "Rose Trellis" butter pat for \$30. Cough up \$138 and you could add a "Wild Anemone,



Matthes says buyers often aim towards matching butter pats with other serving dishes of the same pattern. This Majolica butter pat in the Apple Blossom pattern, circa 1880s, also has a matching 8" plate. Both pieces bear the George Jones mark. Photo courtesy: Trilogy Antiques

Dainty Shape” to your collection.

Feeling extravagant? Trilogies Antiques in Dallas, Texas, offers a variety of high-end temptation. Wanda Matthes, a Majolica specialist at Trilogies, has a “Pansy” to whet your appetite for \$195, but if you’re really enticed, a rare circa 1880 “Begonia Leaf on Wicker” could be yours for \$325.

Victorians reveled in using a wide assortment of serving dishes, and Majolica, like other manufacturers, satisfied their whims. Majolica, introduced at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, enraptured Americans with its richly colored, highly glazed ceramics. Marilyn G. Karmason wrote in her book, *Majolica – A Complete History & Illustrated Survey* that, “Majolica... was a welcome and colorful change from the familiar blue-and-white wares, cream wares, and white ironstone on the tables of middle-class families. (With Majolica pottery, they) could satisfy a desire for elegant and creative dining.”

While some enthusiasts seek out butter pats of particular manufacturers or patterns, others hone in on certain colors. Have a soft spot for the widely collected Flow Blue? According to *Antiques & Collectibles 2008 Price Guide*, you could have a circa 1891 “Waverly” for \$50.

Then there are “butter patters” who are riveted by any they happen to find beautiful and don’t own. Dessoie might fit into this category. Considered by some as a collector extraordinaire, in approximately one year’s time, she garnered more than 900 china butter pats.

Of this love of Victorian-era butter pats, Dessoie wrote, “One or two on their own, although exquisitely beautiful, do not make a statement. The individual intrinsic worth of one piece is minimal in comparison to the value it provides to the total collection.”

For many who might question being able to afford special, coveted pieces, Karmason offered this path, “(They) may choose to purchase a repaired piece... rather than face the possibility of never finding a perfect, affordable example.”

Matthes agrees and uses professional restorers to repair tiny nicks. She believes it would be better to purchase one of those professionally restored high-end pieces, rather than settle for a piece of lower-end that has runs or was made in molds that weren’t sharp. That purchase may become one of the bones of a collection.

Because they are so small, many butter pats were often unmarked. To identify makers, look to books about china in general. Study larger pieces in shops and online.

Often for documentation, patterns can be matched to those of marked pieces.

Novelties, such as portrait pats, are also highly collected, according to Dessoie. These pats were manufactured in Germany or France in the 1800s and, “later hand-painted, featuring the heads of finely clothed Victorian ladies, gentlemen or children.”

She also writes of the hunt for rare salesmen’s sample pats of china.

“It was common practice for itinerant salesmen... to carry samples. Catalogues were too costly to send by post and regu-

Learn, document...and dream!

Flow Blue

Collectors’ Encyclopedia of Flow Blue China, By Mary Frank Gaston

Historic Flow Blue, By Jeffrey B. Snyder

Haviland

Evolution of Haviland Design (Schiffer Book for Collectors), By Nora Travis

Haviland China: The Age of Elegance (Schiffer Book for Collectors), By Nora Travis

Majolica

Majolica: A Complete History & Illustrated Survey, By Marilyn Karmason & Joan B. Stacke

The Collectors Encyclopedia of Majolica, By Mariann Katz-Marks

Victorian Majolica, By Leslie Bockol

Staffordshire

Staffordshire Pottery, 1858-1962: Majolica, Transfer Prints, Flow Blue, Fine Bone China from Cauldron (Schiffer Book for Collectors with Price Guide), By Robert E. Cluet

Tea Leaf

Grandma’s Tea Leaf Ironstone (Paperback), By Annise Heavilin

Entertaining in earlier times

Forgotten Elegance: The Art, Artifacts, and Peculiar History of Victorian and Edwardian Entertaining in America, By Wendell Schollander and Wes Schollander

Railroad memorabilia

Railroad butter pats currently fetch high prices as collectors of railroad memorabilia vie for them. On Sep. 4, 2006, a Colorado & Southern Rail butter pat sold on eBay for \$1,512.98. Twenty-one days later, a Santa Fe butter pat on eBay went for \$1,332.02. If you are nostalgic about the Atlantic Coastline Rail, you'll be pleased to know a pat sold (on eBay Jan. 2, 2007) for 'only' \$178.82.

lar-sized wares were far too expensive and cumbersome for traveling salesmen to carry."

When trekking by trains or carriages, it was much easier to tote pat-sized plates to show customers the colors and patterns available.

Butter pats can be grouped on the wall, lined up along narrow shelves, displayed with other pieces, propped up in shallow containers, or put into custom-made cases, a

Check prices!

Antiques & Collectibles, 2008 Price Guide, Krause Publications

Schroeder's Antiques Price Guide, 26th edition, 2008, Collector Books

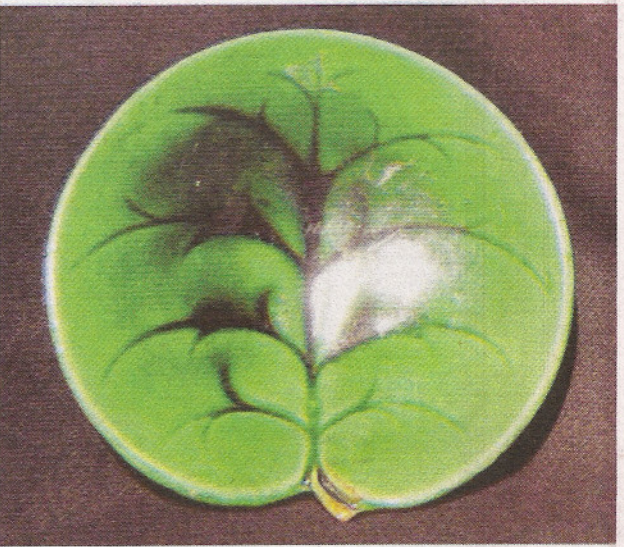
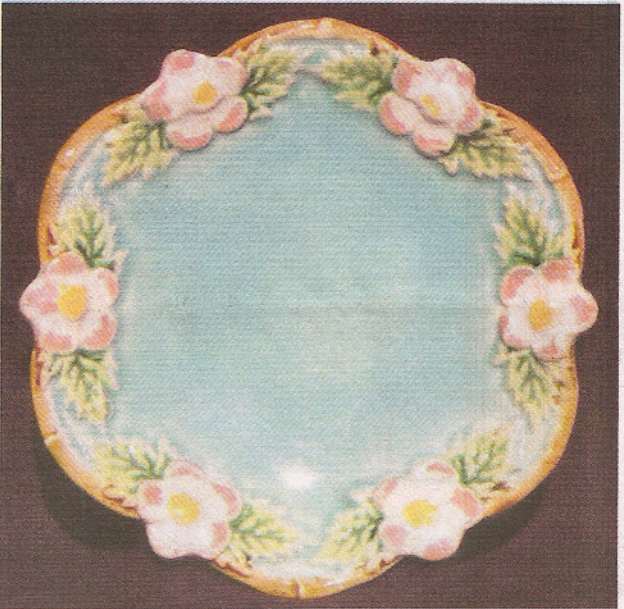
method Dessoie uses for rotating her collection.

They aren't, however, just for exhibiting. For dinner parties, let your guests' eyes wander to that table space above their one or two forks to a delightful mini-plate, a Victorian butter pat. Don't worry, it's not necessary to churn and mold your own butter, a simple 'pat' is sufficient.

In 1997, Dessoie founded the Butter Pat Patter Association for beginners and advanced butter pat collectors. A newsletter, *The Patter*, is available by subscription. Enthusiasts can contact her by writing: Butter Pat Association, 265 Eagle Bend Drive, Bigfork, MT 59911-6235.



(Top Row) Limoges "Wedding Wreath" pattern by Charles Ahrenfeldt. (Bottom Row) This circa 1891, Charles Field Haviland butter pat is one of the 60,000 Haviland patterns produced. Photo courtesy: Brenda's Treasures @ Ruby Lane



(Above) A variety of fine Victorian butter pats demonstrates the lasting appeal of these quirky and elegant collectibles. Their relative affordability also makes them an enduring favorite of a wide cross-section of collectors.