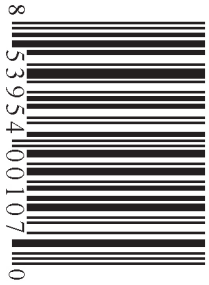


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May the luck of the Irish be with you when collecting

BY BARBARA O'BEEM

Green water in rivers and public fountains, green stripes down the middle of city streets, and famous buildings bathed in a wash of green lights. Green bread, green cookies, and yes, even green bagels. What began as a religious holy day, marking the death of the patron saint of Ireland, has segued into a day of celebration, with corned beef and cabbage and Irish soda bread, all washed down with green beer.

Although St. Patrick's Day is a special day, there are those who never stop thinking "green." To be sure, legions of dedicated collectors, with the luck of the Irish, scour yard sales, flea markets, and antique malls and shops with a common mission: to collect an array of items related to the March 17 holiday and all things Irish in general.

"Everybody likes to be Irish on St. Patrick's Day," said Jimmie Bucci, who noted that he is "100 percent Irish on his mother's side" and 56 percent overall. An inveterate collector of many things, Bucci enjoys searching for wares with an Irish motif, treasures that he uses for entertaining, as well as for decorating his home in Massachusetts. When it comes to this collection, he looks for, among other things, objects that bear a number of specific images, either



alone or in combination with each other.

"Anything with Irish dancers" is one place to begin, according to Bucci. He also favors anything featuring Irish harps, jaunting carts, and pots of gold at the end of rainbows, as well as shamrocks, three-leaf clovers that were originally prized as a symbol of the Trinity, as well as a representation of faith, hope, and love. Because of their place in Irish folklore, leprechauns are a common theme. Shoemakers who prefer a solitary life, these tiny often-bearded old men are generally portrayed wearing a cocked hat and leather apron. Generally speaking, think of a box of Lucky Charms cereal, Bucci suggested with a smile. Of course, traditional Irish wares are

sought after. Along that line, "pure Irish linen is known around the world," Bucci pointed out, and beautiful linen tablecloths are highly regarded for their beauty. Unused examples often still bear an identifying distinctive sticker. But as president of the Vintage Tablecloth Lovers Club, Bucci is particularly drawn to mid-century tablecloths, of which there is one "iconic" cloth. Typical of tablecloths from this time, it pictures a bit of everything, including a courting couple, Paddy's pig, and the Blarney Stone, as well as a bar of music for "When Irish Eyes are Smiling." Rarely offered for sale, collectors should expect to pay \$100 for this sought-after cloth, Bucci said.

For textile lovers, there are other possibilities. Linen kitchen towels abound, many of which were originally intended as souvenirs of a visit to Ireland. "They made hundreds of them," laughed Bucci, "and I have dozens."

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Right: The green harp flag of Ireland adopted in the 17th century by Irish nationalists.

Left: Mid-century party wares are still fun a half century later.



Above: Irish eyes are not the only ones that smile when viewing these fun cardboard cut-outs.

Below: Cheers! One collecting category could be limited to all things related to Irish coffee.



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The Luck of the Irish

FROM FRONT PAGE

Look for those made by Dunmoy and Ulster, he suggested. Attractively decorated, many of these towels feature not only maps but also representations of tourist attractions, as well as recipes, especially those involving alcoholic beverages. Although these souvenir towels are still being manufactured, Bucci characterized those from the 1950s and 1960s as “especially interesting.” It should be noted that terry cloth dish towels decorated with shamrocks are not as collectable as are their linen counterparts.

That said, an inexpensive St. Patrick’s Day collection might focus on handkerchiefs, which were often originally intended as a small gift to be tucked inside a greeting card. Hankies decorated with shamrocks might be purchased for as little as \$2, although those more elaborate might sell for \$12 to \$15. Likewise, vintage placemats with matching napkins are another affordable option. And then there are vintage Irish-themed ties, a fun accessory that brings back memories for Bucci: They were the only non-uniform ties that he and his fellow Catholic school students could wear, if only for one day of the year.

As unlikely as it seems, mid-century holiday-themed paper products for parties, often in mint condition and made by companies such as Hallmark, still exist, even though they were originally intended for single use. In addition to tablecloths, look for cups, plates, and napkins, as well as honeycomb centerpieces, all of which might be found at yard sales, flea markets, and antique malls. Bucci also suggested searching for cardboard holiday cut-outs; once used to decorate classrooms and homes, these items have survived more than half a century and can still elicit a smile.

Other Irish-related paper collectibles include vintage postcards. When compared to those made for other holidays, including Christmas, those intended for St. Patrick’s Day were made in limited numbers; as such,



Above: Hallmark is for “when you care enough to send the very best,” or in this case, when you want to “wow” partygoers with a vintage honeycomb centerpiece.

expect to pay a bit more for them. On the other hand, keep in mind that a collection of postcards depicting scenic views of Ireland can be fun and affordable. And don’t overlook vintage St. Patrick’s Day greeting cards.

Irish jewelry is among other wares that are prized. Claddagh rings and charms are recognizable, with a heart representing love, a crown standing for loyalty, and two clasped hands symbolizing friendship, all of which might be accented with emeralds. Irish Belleek china is cherished by many. And even as values have decreased, Bucci noted that vintage Waterford crystal vases and glassware made in Ireland are still appreciated for their beauty. This might be the time to begin or complete a collection.

And then there’s Irish coffee. A hot drink topped with fresh cream and made from Irish whiskey, hot coffee, and sugar, this potent potable is served in tall mugs with handles. Not surprisingly, serving sets for this purpose are collectible.

When looking for

ceramics, don’t be surprised to find happy cows or leprechauns pursuing various merry pranks. Check out salt and pepper shakers, cups and saucers, and sugar bowls and creamers, which, if they are particularly amusing, might have increased value. Because many of these pieces involve anthropomorphic figures, their cross-collectability results in higher prices. Don’t overlook Irish-themed ashtrays, as well as souvenir plates that picture maps and famous landmarks.

Finally, no party is a party without music. And there is no shortage of collectable LPs full of Irish songs that fit this bill. Bucci suggested collecting albums by the Irish Rovers, the Clancy Brothers, and Carmel Quinn. And then there’s Connie Frances. From “My Wild Irish Rose” and “Danny Boy” to “MacNamara’s Band” and “Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Ral,” the Italian-American singer, in Bucci’s words, is “really good. You’d swear she’s Irish.”

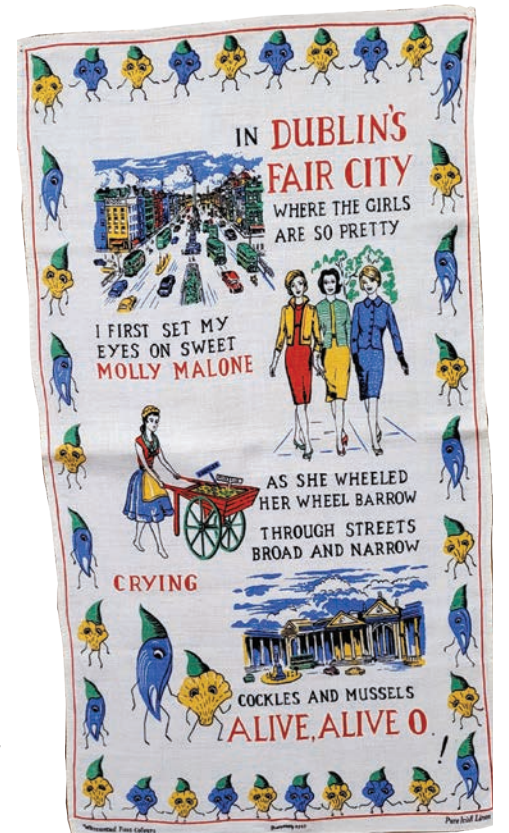
Erin go bragh!

Below: Cheers! One collecting category could be limited to all things related to Irish coffee.



Above: Although linen souvenir towels are still being produced, mid-century examples such as this one are far more desirable.

Below: Mid-century towels such as these (check out those fashions!) are fun collectibles.



Above: Cherished by generations, examples of Belleek china are appreciated for their classic beauty. Images courtesy Jimmie Bucci

