

# why we Collect

## REFLECTIONS FROM CHINA STUDENTS' CLUB MEMBERS

"Ceramics incorporate the whole of human life in all dimensions."

Nicholas Johnson

"We both grew up in modern houses and neither family collected antiques. I spent time as a student in Oxford and during vacations traveled around England touring early churches and rubbing brasses therein. Through exposure to church architecture, I became enamored with early structures. Back home in America this interest, shared by my wife, translated to our desire to buy an antique home and eventually to fill it with antique furniture with the help of dealers including Peter Eaton and Roger Bacon, through whom we came to appreciate a balance between ceramics and furniture. Hollis Brodrick was an important influence in refining our collecting interests. Our ambition has been to furnish our home, built in 1697, with furniture, ceramics and other objects that could have been there originally – as confirmed by family history, archaeological evidence, and regional household inventories. Collecting is a passion that we are fortunate to share!"



Kitchen in the collectors' 1697 home. Courtesy of The Magazine ANTIQUES/Paul Rocheleau photograph

New England collectors

"I was very influenced by my mother-in-law, who appreciated antiques. Then, as a young woman with children, I met Diana Edwards, a distinguished author on English ceramics, who had recently moved to Portsmouth. As a result, I joined China Students' Club and the American Ceramic Circle. I became particularly interested in local history and archaeology, especially through the Deer Street excavations carried out by Strawberry Banke."

Louise Richardson

"I am more of an accumulator than a collector. I started over fifty years ago with ceramics, silver and paintings, often from a particular dealer. You didn't have to know much to know more than the dealers. I started with European and Asian, but found difficulties of scholarship and interpretation daunting in Chinese wares and have stuck mainly to English and Continental (white-bodied) wares. I like finding something "really interesting," something which "stands out."

Anonymous collector

"I started and remain interested in crafts: the objects of everyday life. Ceramics are great; they can be held in the hand and are beautiful as well. They also last a long time and they don't take a huge amount of room to store. And they carry so much history. When I got my first piece of 17th century porcelain, I was thrilled to think of how old it was. I am still learning what constitutes beauty in form, material, and technique."

Debbie Bassett

"My first connection to art ceramics thirty-some years ago resulted from seeing the Asian-inspired crackle-glaze on the reproduction Dedham Pottery my old roommate brought home from the pottery where he worked. That serendipity, combined later with buying an antique house in Dedham, led me to collect the original Dedham Pottery. Collecting then necessitated the acquisition of an education about decorative arts, and, toward that end, lectures such as those of the China Students' Club proved invaluable. Learning of the saga of Hugh C. Robertson, the ceramic genius behind the accomplishments of both the Chelsea Ceramic Art Works and Dedham Potteries, who sacrificed wealth and health pursuing artistic ideals, energized my enthusiasm as a collector of his varied creations."

Jim Kaufman



Tin earthenware miniatures of early 20th century Boston-area Arts & Crafts pottery by Lee-Ann Wessel, displayed on miniature Craftsman dresser by Mark Murphy, 2010. Northampton, MA. Collection of Lee-Ann Wessel

"I consider myself a self-educated student of ceramic history and a would-be collector of beautiful ceramic pieces. I make miniature ceramics for my living."

Lee-Ann Wessel

"After expressing an interest in the fun shapes and cheery colors of Fiestaware, one of the first successfully mass marketed modern dinnerware lines, my mother took over. An avid collector, she loved to hunt for rare forms and good prices. Many birthdays and holidays later, I have accrued a wonderful collection—without ever buying a piece myself!"

Nonie Gadsden



Pair of lead-glazed creamware candlesticks by James Whitehead Pottery or Leeds Pottery, Harley or Leeds, England, about 1800. Courtesy of Historic Deerfield, Inc. Museum purchase with funds provided by Ray J. and Anne K. Groves. Photo: Penny Leveritt



Chinese export porcelain plate, about 1715. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Gift of H.A. Crosby and Grace P. Forbes. Photo: Dennis Helmar

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Blue Staffordshire bowl by Enoch Wood and Sons, 1820-25 (Mrs. Little's first transference acquisition).  
Courtesy of Historic New England, Gift of Cyril I. Nelson

"One rainy afternoon in the winter of 1927, I discovered a copy of Moore's *Old China Book* (1903) and within a few short hours, I became so fascinated by the subject that, although I did not know it then, the study and collecting of ceramics would become one of my lifelong interests. I eagerly read Mrs. Moore's descriptions of blue-printed earthenware and decided I should like to own an example, [but] I had never actually seen a piece and therefore didn't know what I was looking for! In a small shop in Ipswich, Massachusetts I caught a flash of blue in the shadowy corner. After hesitant investigation, I emerged triumphantly bearing a shallow bowl that pictured *Table Rock, Niagara* in the bottom and a *Catskill Mountains, Hudson River* scene around the outside...the bowl was the precursor of many other blue Staffordshire treasures that came my way during the next few years."

Nina Fletcher Little

early China Students' Club member, as recounted in her book  
*Little By Little: Six Decades of Collecting American Decorative Arts*



Nina Fletcher Little and Bertrand Little at Cogswell's Grant, Essex, MA, 1952.  
Courtesy of Historic New England



Fao Jima Pot (from "Never Forget" series), 2001 by Diego Romero (born 1964), Cochiti Pueblo, painted earthenware. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Museum Purchase, partially funded by Merry Glosband. Photo: Jeffrey R. Dykes

"My favorite pots are the ones that tell a story. The story may be one of historical or cultural significance, the physicality of the piece (texture, surface treatment, material, design or construction), an educational interest, some mystery or intrigue, influence across time or geography, similarities across cultures, or even simply the quest: how I acquired it. With this in mind, it is easy to imagine that my collection is quite eclectic."

Merry Glosband

"I have an evolving collection of many things and have always gone to markets for 'something which could catch my eye, something that talked to me.' I used to collect moths and butterflies as a child. In my mid 20s I started beekeeping. I bought old illustrated books on bees and other insects, and became interested in printing processes and American historical prints. I bought and researched some art pottery and transferwares. I first saw an ad for China Students' Club at an auction and have learned a lot there."

Ned McCabe



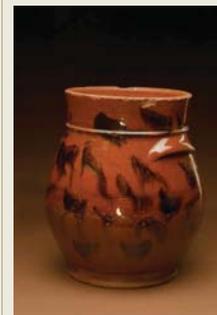
Chinese kraak-style porcelain plate, 1600-1620.  
Collection of Jeffrey Brown

"That some long-dead artisan, just trying to make a living, took a ball of mud and transformed it into an object that has been used/admired for centuries, and that object has ended up on my shelf, its story and beauty touching my soul, never ceases to amaze me."

Jeffrey Brown

"I perk up when I see redware. My collecting interests started by going to sales with my mother. Encouraged by my parents, I collected costume dolls as a child. But I only started to buy pottery on my own after college. Having since gotten into (historical) archaeology, I am excited to see how much redware there once was here."

Deborah Richards



New England lead-glazed redware jar, 1800-1850. Courtesy Historic Deerfield Inc., Museum Collections Fund. Photo: Penny Leveritt

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Yellow stoneware teapot, China, late 17th century.  
Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Gift of Mrs. Harriet Carlton Goldweitz.

"Becoming a curator of Asian export art, particularly of Chinese ceramics, seemed a natural for me after having graduated from Mass Art as a ceramicist. My first exhibition was *I-hsing Ware and its Influence on European Ceramics* (1979) through which I became involved with the China Students' Club. I relied heavily on generous loans from members such as Elizabeth Chellis, Nina Fletcher Little, Lauristan Ward, Dorothy-Lee Jones and Harriet Carlton Goldweitz. Each of these scholar-collectors and others, particularly Mildred Mottahedeh, became valued friends and compatriots in our shared passion for the 'fictile arts,' a passion for the hand of the artist in clay shared with many others over the last three decades."

William R. Sargent



Salt-glazed stoneware crock by Stephen Orcutt and Luke and Oberdiah Wail, Whately, MA, 1815-1817. Courtesy of Historic Deerfield, Inc., Museum Collections Fund.  
Photo: Penny Leveritt.

"These objects are some of my treasures. They are old, and they tell a story, and therefore they speak to me."

Barbara Renner

"My mother had an extensive collection of English pottery, so I struck off in pursuit of brown wares, but she never really liked the things I bought. Now I've inherited some of her things. I feel that collecting teaches you how to value true quality in what you collect. I don't think most people know how to assess quality in pottery, but perhaps they know when they see it."

Nicholas Johnson



Chelsea hard-paste porcelain figure of a Horn Player, about 1765. London, England.  
Collection of Yonathan Bard

"My collecting originally lacked focus, but in early 1994, I chanced to buy at auction a Meissen figurine of a violinist, and soon thereafter a Chelsea figurine of a French horn player. I soon realized that figurines of musicians were just the things for me: I had been an avid classical music lover for almost fifty years; an added attraction was the fact that most of the pieces that interested me dated to the period of my favorite composer Mozart's youth; he was born in 1756. In fact, Mozart was visiting London in 1765-1766, precisely within the period in which my Chelsea pieces were being made just down the river! The Chelsea musicians really throw themselves into their performances and their poses are highly animated."

Yonathan Bard

"These objects are some of my treasures. They are old, and they tell a story, and therefore they speak to me."

Anonymous collectors

"When I was a small girl, I was afflicted with 'English Manor Syndrome'— an incurable desire to live in a large Tudor home with lots of carving, beams and oak paneling. That has never happened. But I quenched that craving when my husband joined me in a crusade to find 17th century English oak furniture and accessories. One day while antiquing with a friend (who was a veteran collector of just about everything), I came upon a colorful hand painted Asian saucer full of whimsical figures—to me it looked like Oriental folk art. Later I found out it was actually early English chinoiserie. I've read and researched a lot in the last 25 years, acquiring a melange of examples—from lustre ware to Chinese export porcelain to salt-glazed stoneware. Each one beckoned pathetically to be taken from shows and shops and brought to a good home. What could I do but rescue them? Some are perfect, some are flawed, but all seem so appealing. I know now that I suffer from the dreaded 'ceramics syndrome.' There is no known antidote for collectors."

Anonymous collector



Tin-glazed earthenware dish, London, England, 1700-1720. Courtesy, Historic Deerfield Inc.  
Photo: Penny Leveritt