



Once it may have contained coffee or tobacco, candy or talcum powder. Perhaps it became the kitchen catchall for the loose change and other miscellany of a Victorian family. At the turn of the century, the tin container was a common household item taken very much for granted. But, if it was taken for granted 85 years ago, it's not any more; these days, collectors are willing to pay thousands of dollars for these relics.

The most collectible tins are decorated with colorful, elaborate lithographs and date from 1880 to 1930. Lithographs were used less and less in the early years of the Depression because the process was expensive—each color had to be etched on a separate limestone plate. As the colorful tins became scarcer, their popularity

Nostalgic canisters have long been cherished for their beauty and usefulness. In fact, many of yesterday's tin packages are now fetching extraordinary prices at auction. JusTins brings back packaging from the past.

Call for information.

# JUST TINS

613 Cheltenham Ave.  
Philadelphia, PA 19126  
(215) 635-7170  
Telex: 4948119

# TINS

## PACKAGING

from

# THE PAST

BY GAYLE TURIM

and value grew, and today thousands of collectors seek them out. Most collect modestly priced tins in the \$5 to \$50 range.

"We hear about a really topnotch tin being found every two months or so," says Clark Secrest, founder of the Tin Container Collectors Association (TCCA). There are undiscovered rarities tucked away in attics, basements and garages—and flea markets are often happy hunting grounds for collectors. Antique dealers, though not likely to part with a truly unique tin at a bargain price, may be good sources of information about locally produced tins. The TCCA's monthly illustrated newsletter, *Tin Type*, is one of the few published sources of information.

One of the rarest tins known held Peggy O'Neil Cut Plug Tobacco, a brand name for a character in a popular early-1900s song. Peggy is delicately depicted as a shepherdess, fashioned after Little Bo Peep, and today the tin could fetch \$2,500. Condition is of the utmost importance. Flaws such as large rust spots or disfiguring scratches greatly decrease a tin's value, no matter how rare it is. Be careful when cleaning your tins because lithographed colors are easily damaged. TCCA members usually use a very mild lotion wax, such as Sani-Wax.

When the three most valuable characteristics—good condition, rarity and elaborate graphics—are found in one tin, the owner has ample reason to feel smug.

Hundreds of proud TCCA members pack their collections—and very often

their spouses and children—to travel every two years to a Kanvention. This year it will be held from June 28 to 30 in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Pam Coghlan, a New Jersey collector since 1974, is a typical enthusiast—and, like many, she has passed her hobby on to someone else. She and her husband have set up an entire room of her house to replicate a country store. "Jack and I have a little bit of everything—tobacco tins, peanut butter tins, candy tins," she says. "At first he hated all antiques. Now, though, there are some tins that I'd like to sell, but he won't because he likes them too much."



Favorite tins for many collectors are those used for patent medicines. The ones made prior to 1906 (when the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed) exemplify how tins can illustrate our

country's history. Medicine merchants, who were often either naive or just unscrupulous, claiming their products would cure anything from "scrofulous sores" to pneumonia to cancer, plastered such statements all over the

tins, in between pictures of healthy children and robust maidens. Their pills and tablets were consumed hungrily by people who wanted to avoid seeing doctors.

A major part of the appeal of tins is pure nostalgia. Secrest bought his first tin, a Log Cabin Syrup container, because "I remembered seeing them as a kid. They're shaped like cabins, and the spout was the chimney."

A tin, then, does not have to be rare or expensive for a collector to love it. It just has to strike a resonant—not tinny—chord in his or her heart. ■



For more information about tin collecting and the TCCA, write to Clark Secrest at Box 440101, Aurora, Colorado 80044. A sample copy of *Tin Type* is available for \$1.