

# Pass the plates—they're hot items

By Sherry Kahan  
staff writer

**A**T ONE TIME plates were something on which to serve food. Today they are placed on walls, viewed as art and

bought and sold for megabucks. When Harriet Delaskey arrived at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers she was carrying with her a plate valued at \$4,000 and another worth \$1,400. She also brought dishes more within the realm of financial possibility for people with modest incomes.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer  
Harriet Delaskey displays one of the first collector plates made in this country. Dating back to 1895, it is now worth \$4,000.

A PICTURE of "Adoration of the Magi" costs \$50, a Norman Rockwell is \$25.50, and "Annie and Sandy" is \$19. Delaskey was on a public relations trip for the Bradford Exchange, which she described as "the only totally computerized plate exchange in the country." Buyers and sellers use the company to exchange these limited edition artistic dishes that should not be used for food.

On the tip of her tongue was a wealth of information on the popularity of plates and the history of plate collecting.

"WOULD YOU BELIEVE there are 7.5 million plate collectors in the world, of whom 5.2 million reside in the U.S.," she said. "This is the world's most traded art. Last year 600,000 new collectors joined the ranks. More than 300 plate clubs have grown up across the country."

The reasons people collect, she added, are pride of owning a piece of art, potential investment growth and because it is fun.

The subjects depicted on plates are quite diverse," she said. "There is something there for everyone."

The history of plate collecting began when a firm called Bing & Grondahl, which is still in the business, produced a blue and white, limited edition plate called "Behind the Frozen Window." The company broke the mold and stopped production of it. As a result there are only an estimated 400 of these plates left.

It was one of these \$4,000 plates which Delaskey brought along on her interview.

THE BING & GRONDAHL monopoly was broken in 1908 when Royal Copenhagen jumped in with a Christmas plate, now trading at about \$1,900. Up until 1955, limited edition collector plates were always Danish blue and white. Then a French firm produced a crystal plate.

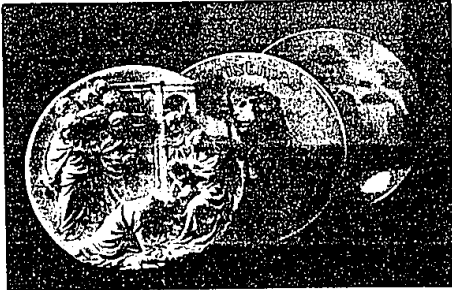
That broke the dam, and today it is possible to buy plates made of such substances as porcelain, crystal, bronze, alabaster, stone, wood, pewter, silver and damascene. Pictured on the plates are a great range of pictures, buildings, animals, birds, military action, Christmas celebrations, foreign landscapes and people, to name but a few.

The Bradford Exchange works like this. On its computer system are the names of people who wish to sell plates. A buyer calls in and describes what he wants. "We match buyer and seller and act as a clearing house," said Delaskey, director of Bradford's trading floor. "We tell the buyer what he may need to pay. Then we contact the seller."

When the price is confirmed, the buyer sends in a check. The seller sends the plate to Bradford.

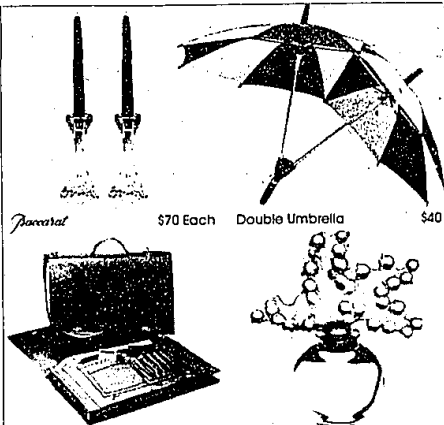
"WE INSPECT the plate to make sure it is what the buyer wants, and that it is in mint condition," she said. "Then we send the check to the seller and the plate to the buyer. Once the transaction is confirmed, it is accompanied by a Bradford Exchange guarantee."

The Exchange, located in Chicago, can be reached by calling 1-800-323-8078 between 11 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. There is only one Farmington Hills shop that is registered with the Bradford Exchange, The Yankee Peddler, 23905 Freeway Park Dr., in the industrial park west of Halsted between Nine and 10 Mile. The telephone number is 478-7476.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Those less expensive plates range in cost from \$50 for the Adoration of the Magi (front) to \$25.50 for the Norman Rockwell, to \$19 for Annie and her dog Sandy.



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