

Jigsaw puzzles date to 1760s printmaker

(AP) — Scatter the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle on a table and few people can resist the challenge.

Collector Anne D. Williams was entranced by the compelling nature of picture puzzles at an early age and those early hours spent around a table littered with puzzle pieces sparked a love of puzzles that has continued to grow. Today, Williams has a collection of more than 1,800 jigsaw puzzles and related examples.

According to Williams, the first known jigsaw puzzles were made by London printmaker John Spilsbury during the 1760s. Hand-colored maps, engraved and printed at Spilsbury's shop, were mounted on thin mahogany boards to be cut with a coping-type saw into large, non-interlocking pieces along the boundaries of the countries.

Envious of Spilsbury's success, other printmakers soon began to copy and profit from his innovation. But it was the mid-1780s before anyone made the leap from maps, which seemed so logically divisible, to making puzzles of other subjects.

AS THE subject matter changed, so did the cutting style. Expensive hardwoods were still the preferred material, but unlike Spilsbury's prototypes, these puzzles were laboriously cut with large interlocking border pieces that framed a series of simply cut interior shapes. It was a style that would persist for an entire century.

Although a few purely frivolous puzzles entertained children in the late 1700s and early 1800s, most of these early puzzles were made with a child's education foremost in mind. Maps were a mainstay, but puzzles taught math, grammar, natural history, religion, politics and geography.

By the 1850s, however, pleasure puzzles had surpassed their more pedantic predecessors in popularity. Puzzle makers in England, France and Germany began to dissect a huge variety of non-educational pictures, and soon America joined in.

At first, U.S. puzzle makers im-

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ly mimicked the earliest English puzzles, producing maps of single American states as well as the entire country. But after the Civil War, as the businesses of toy and game makers blossomed, American puzzles surged to the forefront of world puzzle art.

During the last 30 years of the 19th century, American manufacturers also began to use cardboard as a backing for their puzzles, another innovation that assured their success.

Puzzles had always been child's play, but during the late 1800s new technical developments, such as the power scroll saw (later known as the jigsaw) and the invention of plywood, made increasingly difficult puzzles feasible.

By 1908, the puzzle craze was on. A wooden jigsaw puzzle or two became a required element of every society house party.

AS THE public's expertise grew, manufacturers and individual puzzle makers increased the difficulty of their puzzles. Manufacturers developed intricate new styles of interlocking cuts that included special figural pieces. Other makers cut puzzles without interlocking pieces at all.

Puzzle mania swept America again during the dark years of the Great Depression, as people sought distraction from their troubles. Amateur puzzle makers abounded as out-of-work men and women turned their skills to the jigsaw in hopes of making a meager living.

With the advent of television and

the age of electronic entertainment, the puzzle slipped quietly into the background of favored evening pastimes.

But in many ways, the art of the jigsaw puzzle did not reach its frustrating pinnacle until 1985, with the production of Jackson Pollock's abstract painting "Convergence" in puzzle form. This mesmerizing puzzle, manufactured by Springbok, sold more than 100,000 copies in a few months and continues to be known as one of the most maddening puzzles ever made.

Wooden puzzles also have made a comeback. A few dozen artists are currently crafting stock and custom-ordered wooden puzzles that rival the finest old puzzles in difficulty. Prices start at around \$75 and rise to several thousand dollars.

According to Williams, a puzzle's value is largely determined by its age, rarity and graphic appeal. The quality of the craftsmanship, both in the picture and the cutting, and the number of pieces may have a bearing on the puzzle's value, as will its condition, completeness and presence of the original box. Puzzles by known makers are preferred.

PRICES VARY widely, although most available examples fall into the \$5 to \$100 range. Cardboard puzzles for adults dating from the 1930s on usually sell for less than \$10, but children's puzzles from this period will be a bit more.

Children's puzzles from the 1800s may sell for \$50 to \$400, while a complete 19th-century puzzle in its original box may fetch \$200 to \$500. A rare example such as a Spilsbury, of which only a handful are known to exist, may cost \$1,500 to \$3,000 or more.

Missing pieces or boxes, poor condition or lack of visual appeal would lower these estimates.

It's always risky buying a puzzle in an un assembled state, Williams said. Missing pieces are the most common puzzle flaw. As with most collectibles, however, it's often worth buying a less than perfect puzzle, if it's an unusual or rare example.



A Big Picture

His voice has been described as a hybrid of Lou Rawls and Arthur Prysock and his recordings include "This Feeling," a full-length LP released in May 1987, and singles "My Love and 'Show a Little Faith.' He's Jeff Scott and he will be appearing with Big Picture — Duane Harlick on guitar and vocals, Myke Hynes on bass, Pat Murphy on

drums, Chris Collins on saxophone and Todd Ague on keyboards — at OnStage in Grand Circus Park in downtown Detroit. The group will perform two shows — 9:30 and 11:30 p.m. — every Friday and Saturday through Dec. 17. The group is known for its fresh, energetic pop-soul music. For information or reservations, call 965-2920.

'Boomers' rediscover home work

(AP) — Magazine editor Nick Sullivan has abandoned the bustle and commuting chaos of Manhattan to live with his family in a converted barn in rural Massachusetts — without giving up his job.

Sullivan edits and writes on a personal computer, sends and receives memos on a facsimile machine and, every couple of weeks, spends a day or two in New York at editorial meetings.

"I like it. I'm living in a spot I ordinarily would get to only on weekends — semi-rural with nice beaches," Sullivan said recently.

Sullivan is one of a growing number of Americans — nearly 25 million by one count — who have taken advantage of a boom in information technology and slowly changing attitudes to quit commuting and work full- or part-time at home.

The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, in a one-time survey in 1985, found 18.1 million people out of the total work force of 97.7 million worked at home at least some of the time.

By 1987, 23.3 million people worked at home at least part-time, and the number climbed to 24.9 million this year, according to Link Re-

sources, a New York consulting firm that has begun surveying the trend. The 1988 figure amounts to 23 percent of the non-farm work force of 107.1 million.

The government data from 1985 show about 54 percent of those who work at home hold managerial and professional jobs, while 28 percent are in technical, sales and support occupations. A variety of other categories, including crafts, service and manufacturing, account for the rest.

The government found only about 7 percent of those who worked at home in 1985 did so full-time. The Link survey found 21 percent of the home workers were full-time in 1987 and 24 percent, or 6 million, considered themselves full-time home workers this year.

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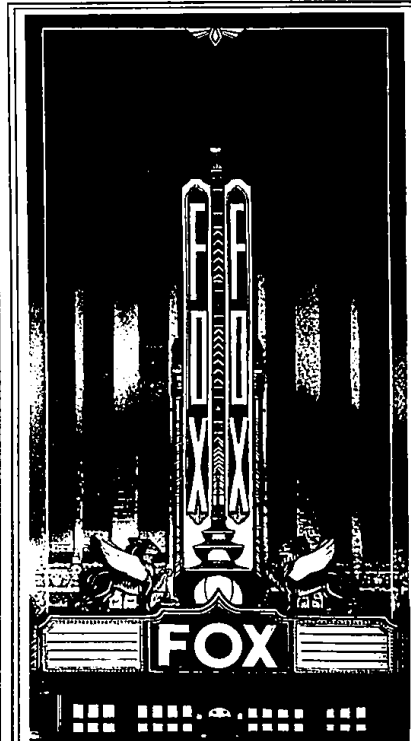


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