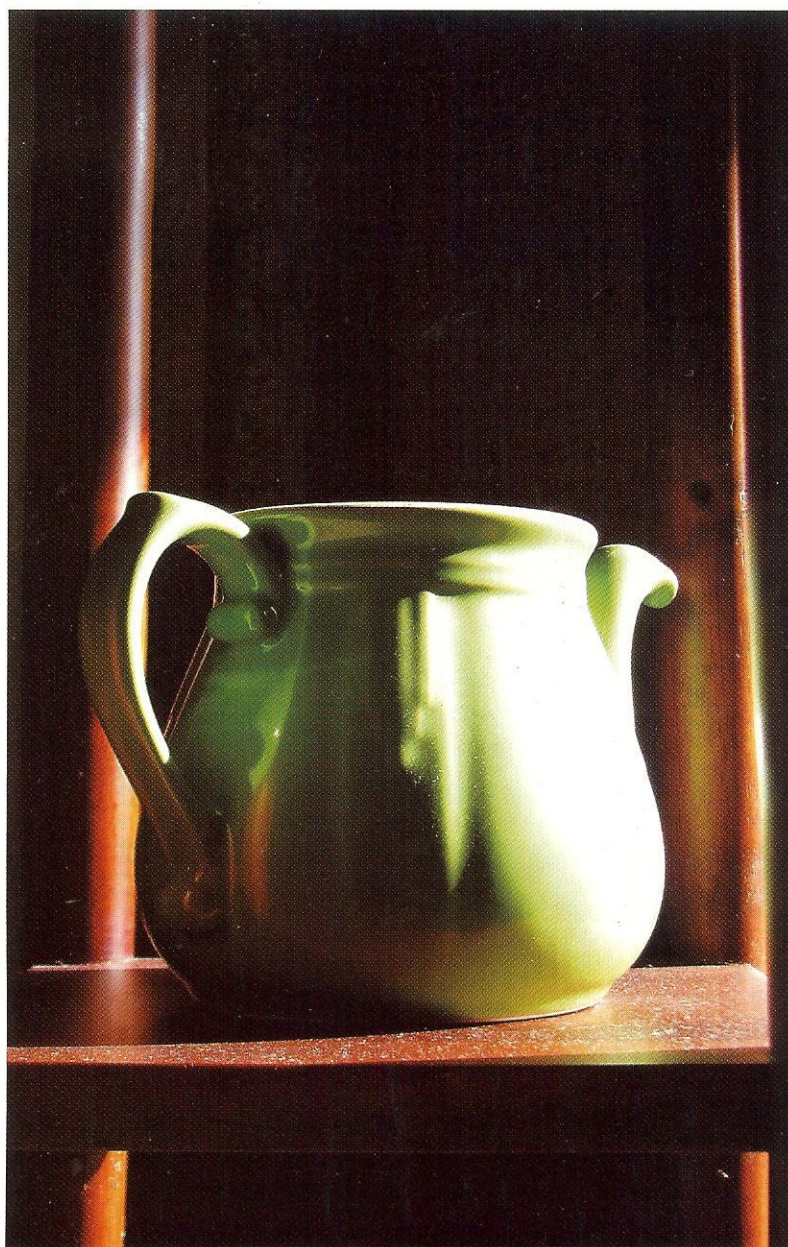


TOUCHING HISTORY

Artifacts from within your home's walls can connect you to its secret past.

BY CHARITY VOGEL • PHOTOGRAPHY BY T.J. PIGNATARO



Artifacts that you discover within the walls of your old house are keys to unlocking its hidden past lives—just as much as the names of previous owners on the title and deed, or the original master blueprints.

Don't overlook or ignore these treasures. Find them, save them, display them.

It's true: These vintage finds can become the most enjoyable and educational elements of your home's history. They're living, touchable, three-dimensional historical records, wholly unique to your home's distinctive past.

What's waiting to be found?

That's just the fun of it—you never really know. That is, until that day you unexpectedly stumble over a dusty object tucked behind an attic beam, hidden in an unused coal bin, or trapped behind some aged plaster. Is it an antique coin, a faded photo or a military medal that somehow slipped away from its owner? People find these things and more, in the vast curio cabinets that are America's older homes.

One person found a set of the architects' original drawings for his 1920s-era home when he searched through an antique sideboard that he had purchased along with his house.

Another woman happened upon an antique silver religious medal while restoring the mantel of her downstairs fireplace. In the same house—a veritable pirates' chest of artifacts—Karen Kennelly and her husband, Mike, also unearthed an old-fashioned telephone battery while working in their basement one day.

"We found the old telephone battery on top of a floor joist in the basement, still connected to wires," said Karen. The battery, which is stamped with the date Oct. 23, 1939, was so well-preserved over the years that it looked almost new.

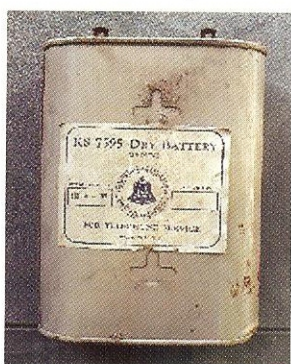
Today, the Kennellys display it on one of the shelves of a built-in bookcase in their foyer, next to an original electrical outlet the couple also found.

Think about that battery for a moment. Back when it was first installed, the people who lived in the Kennelly's house would have been talking about movies like *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*, and books like *The Grapes of Wrath*. They would have been listening to hit songs like "Over the Rainbow" and the "Beer Barrel Polka" on the radio. On a more serious note, they would have been worrying about World War II. And likely, they would have been discussing all of these things on the then up-to-date home phone that this vintage battery powered.

See how an artifact—even the homeliest kind—can instantly transport you back in time?

Finding these types of artifacts is, of course, nothing you can plan. You can't even be sure that your house will yield any exciting discoveries.

But try this: Ask owners of historic homes



whether they've ever discovered any neat antique objects in their home, and wait for their enthusiastic responses. Everybody who finds these things treasures them. They become valuable because they relate to the history of a place—in this case, your home.

In and around my 1898 Victorian, my husband T.J. and I found old glass bottles—some in the basement, some buried in the soil of our lawn—in green, clear and amber glass. We found a number of old railroad insulators, too, which made sense, since our village came of age in the Golden Age of Rail and was a bustling train stop for decades.

Our best find to date?

An old teapot in seafoam green, which was hidden in an unused coal vault in the recesses of our cellar. This teapot was left remarkably intact and unscathed and appears to date to the 1920s, from what I've been able to learn through research. After we unearthed it, I placed the pot on a shelf in my kitchen. I look at it often. Each year in the



spring, I take it down, fill it with purple lilacs, and display it proudly on my kitchen table.

And every time I gaze at it, I can't help wondering whose hands touched it last, before I rescued it from our grimy coal cellar. Was it a stylish woman who last poured tea for her family in the Jazz Age?

I'll never know, but I can imagine. And that's what makes such home-spun artifacts wonderful—they can connect you, imaginatively and tactilely, to your home's unique past, in a way that few other experiences can.

Treat them like the treasures they are. 🌿

Hidden History Editor Charity Vogel has a PhD in English, with a concentration in 19th century American literature and art. She owns a Victorian home near Buffalo, New York, with her husband T.J. Questions or comments can be mailed to P.O. Box 102, Angola, NY, 14006, or e-mailed to angolahome@adelphia.net.

Have you ever created a time capsule and hid it in the walls of your home? Or have you been lucky enough to find a time capsule left by previous owners of your home? Write Charity and tell her about it.