

TREASURES

Antique to Modern Collecting



Enameled Beauty Items



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FAIR: A Collection of Enameled Beauty Items

When Kathleen "Kathy" Mary Burch was growing up in Pittsburgh, Penn., she was one of five sisters. As such, her home was rather cramped, leaving her no spare room for a sprawling doll or teddy bear collection. Even though her space might have been limited, her active mind and her entrepreneurial spirit knew no bounds.

"I was very industrious and loved going

door-to-door selling punchboard chances to earn money for the things I wanted," Burch reminisces. Though her house and four younger siblings didn't allow her to indulge her inner desires, she did witness her father's proclivities. Her dad was an "avid" collector. "He has collected coins and stamps, and today he collects old movies. So I guess it is in my DNA! Once I got into the antiques business, it enabled me to col-

lect and sell what I enjoyed most."

What Kathy discovered was that she adored *objets de vertu*, which translates as "objects of virtue." These include cosmetic cases, cigarette cases, opera glasses, perfume vials, and calling-card holders, among other stunningly lovely decorated enamel artifacts.

"To me, these items are extra special either in their manufacturing technique or uniqueness. The allure simply comes from the beauty and workmanship of these pieces," Kathy expresses. "Once you see them in person and actually study their detail and craftsmanship, you can't help but fall in love with them."

Her first enameled piece was a gift from her mother-in-law, and it was love at first sight. "It was a beautiful Mary Gregory enameled jewelry casket," the



Kathleen "Kathy" Mary Burch poses before a curio cabinet filled with some "objects of virtue."

THE COMPACT
CASES AND BEAUTY
AIDS OF A BYGONE
BOUDOIR ARE AT
THE HEART OF
KATHY BURCH'S
COLLECTION.



"I love imagining the stories and the places these pieces were a part of," connoisseur Burch exudes. This antique compact embodies her sentiment.

collector recalls. "I have always loved very pretty and feminine things — compacts, purses, vanity items of any kind. With the advent of the Internet, finding these things has become much easier and much more fun. Searching for items online has become a hobby and a passion."

Many of Burch's personal mementoes hail from the late 1800s through the 1930s. She loves to read about company histories and to unearth all the details that she can discover about the artists and the manufacturers of the past. Sometimes, she is surprised when a piece of accepted wisdom turns out to be false: "I have come to find out only recently that the 'Italian Sterling' compacts, which were purported in compact books to be turn-of-the-19th-century, actually were made as late as the 1960s. Even so, they are still extremely

high quality and have a rare beauty that will never fade, regardless of their 'newer' age."

In addition to being an indefatigable collector, Kathy is also a first-rate antiques dealer. She often feathers her for-sale offerings with personal collectibles that she wants to send out to other aficionados, to other homes.

"I began selling antiques in 1977 in Los Angeles when my first child was born," she recounts. "I did not want to work outside the home after having children, so I started

selling antiques out of our house. This was the beginning of the oak heyday in antiques and I rapidly outgrew our house and ended up opening my first store in L.A. Now 30-plus years later, I am still selling antiques, but OUTside the home! So much for my plan to work at home," she chortles.

Today, the mother of three, and grandmother of one, resides back in her home state of Pennsylvania once again. She is the proprietor, along with business partner Edward Grzybowski, a specialist in mid-

The purple Bucherer pendant watch has a lady on the back. Art Nouveau inspired, the watch, with the cherubs on the front, is actually a compact inside. Probably from the 1920s or 1930s, it is rare lavender enamel guilloché.





Compacts from bygone eras reflect the artistry of long-ago craftsmen and artists. Burch sees the craftsmanship as works of art that deserve to be displayed and appreciated.

century modern, of an antiques business named Tri-State Antique Center. The facility, located in Canonsburg, is right off the interstate and very near to the tri-state corner of Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. "We sell everything from period antiques to 20th-century design and decorative arts," she explains.

In addition to the brick-and-mortar construction, Tri-State Antique Center also has a presence on the Web (<http://tri-stateantiques.com>). Burch enjoys

ABOVE: "This is a unique enamel guilloché boudoir clock, ca. 1925, that has hand-painted roses on the front," Burch describes. "It is extremely beautiful and is a fine example of enamel guilloché from an unknown maker."

talking with her customers face-to-face and chatting with them online. She truly delights in exchanging viewpoints and information about her wares.

"I personally feel that owning an antique gives you a 'feel' for a period of time and a lifestyle that are totally foreign to our modern ways. I love imagining the stories and the places these pieces were a part of," the connoisseur exudes.

At home, Burch displays many of her collectibles in curio cabinets or carefully and gently hangs them on the wall. To her mind, many of these artifacts are the equivalent of precious works of art.

"For instance, enamel guilloché is an exquisite art form and is quite labor intensive," she shares. "It dates back centuries. Guilloché is the art of intricately engraving metals — usually precious metals such as gold and silver. Enamel guilloché is the art of applying enameling to the engraved

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guilloché background, which lends a depth to the color and a beauty that can be seen beneath the design. This gives a richness that is so much more attractive than a plain color would be. Oftentimes, it will actually change color when rotated under light almost like a hologram effect. It is always intriguing and beautiful, and it just speaks to my heart when I see items made this way."

Kathy is committed to buying and selling what she loves. She explains that is why there is a preponderance of these items on her website: "I honestly have no idea how many I have in my personal collection. Between what we have in the store's inventory and in my own collection, it is quite a few! To me, these are like paintings that are to be displayed and enjoyed, so I do not use them myself."

Married for over 40 years, Kathleen Burch recognizes the value of longevity and the appreciation of bygone rites and customs. She understands how collecting an antique translates into holding a bit of the past within one's hands: "We can only imagine the delightful event that a woman attended and the ambience of a time that would have allowed women to wear such gorgeous accessories or carry them as part of their evening attire. There is nothing like it today! It was a truly graceful time in our heritage, and owning one of these items is owning a piece of history." ♦