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Know Your Stuff: In the late 1800s, jewelry and handmade hair crafts popular

BY CONNIE SUE DAVENPORT • FOR WILLIAMSON A.M. • APRIL 18, 2008

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Dear Connie Sue,

When I was a child, we lived in an old Victorian house outside of Boston, Mass. One day when I was playing in the attic, I found a pair of drop earrings that look like little birdcages. They are lined with woven human hair. I have had them for almost 40 years, and I was wondering what the history is on these strange earrings. —**Thank you, Judy**



These drop earrings are lined with woven human hair. •

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Dear Judy,

During Victorian times, human hair was fashioned into all sorts of jewelry. I've seen bracelets, necklaces, earrings, brooches and framed arrangements that look like big, brown flowers with ribbons. There were purses, too, although I've never seen one. Hair projects were a popular craft endeavor in the late 1800s, and early magazines had instructions for preparing the hair and then making your own projects. There were numerous methods used to construct items. Simple braiding on a very small scale was the easiest and most popular. More advanced hair projects employed the bobbins and patterns of bobbin lace making. Some pieces were made like macramé, with a series of knots and loops. Crochet needles were also used to form some patterns.

Victorian-era dresser sets all had a hair receiver or small bowl whose lid had a one-inch hole in the center. Hair was collected and used to poof-up existing, attached hair or collected for

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Connie Sue,

I was wondering what the Declaration of Independence would be worth. I have a copy of one that is worn and very old. Could you give me a bit of information about it. I would at some point like to sell this item but need to know what it's worth. The dimensions are 15.5 by 13.5. — **Denise Arnold**

Dear Denise,

To determine a value for your Declaration of Independence, I need to handle the paper and examine the printing method. For you and all the many people I encounter with such documents, here are a few of the simple things to examine. This will help determine the need to pursue the authenticity of your treasure.

The original document was written with quill pens. The body was recorded by people with beautiful and clear handwriting. Although skilled, they could not write in a font size smaller than our present day 12 point. This eliminates most documents that I am asked to examine. Since your example is larger than this, the next criteria follows:

The printer's name on a larger document is a very good sign. Printers of the day were strictly governed because single documents carried such great importance. They were required to mark their work and were proud professionals, so the name should be included in the newspaper page size document. Of course, this could have been cropped by someone making the piece fit into a frame. Printers used a high quality, laid paper to absorb the ink and endure the force of printing.

Thousands of reproduced documents have been sold to tourists and schoolchildren for decades as they visited historic homes all over America. John Hancock insurance reproduced and distributed thousands of Declaration of Independence copies as well. The paper of these reproductions is almost crispy feeling and often smells of tea and vinegar (used to stain and then set the contrived brown color).

We all love to see the promising words "We the People . . ." displayed in offices and libraries.

Except for a very few, the value of this document is in its words. If these simple indicators haven't eliminated your copy, I encourage on-site assistance. The values range from \$3 to more than \$100,000.

Contact Connie Sue Davenport with questions about your antiques and collectibles, as well as photos, and we'll discuss them here. Send to curios@conniesueinc.com or by mail in care of Williamson A.M.

in your voice

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