

Living in a miniature world

By Colette Hutchings
Battalion Staff

On a silver platter on the kitchen table sits a glistening array of pastries so tempting your mouth waters.

Normally you'd pop one into your mouth in a minute. But these particular confections are no bigger than your fingernail and the table no bigger than an aspirin bottle.

These teeny items were part of a display in Manor East Mall last Saturday at the 1st annual Miniholics Non-Anonymous miniature collection show.

Miniature collecting is the second largest hobby in the U.S., after stamp and coin collecting, Miniholic member Susan Sweet said.

The Bryan-College Station Miniholics Non-Anonymous is seven years old and has five members.

Sweet, who recently joined the club after she moved here from Pennsylvania, said the

hobby is becoming popular in Texas.

"Antique miniature collecting is really popular in the Northeast, though," Sweet said.

Judy Kent, one of the founders of Miniholics, said the bigger cities in Texas boast a large number of miniature collectors. Houston alone, Kent said, has over 600 members in miniature collecting clubs.

Sweet had made several items for sale in the show, including 5-inch Christmas trees, (complete with candy canes and tinsel) half-inch baskets of fruit (made from bread-dough) and even a \$1,250 doll house complete with "indoor plumbing" and electricity.

Kent has been collecting miniatures since she was in college.

"It all started when my mom bought a doll house," Kent said. Since then, she's been collecting and making furniture, dolls and other knick-knacks.

Kent, now an eighth-grade teacher in Bryan, said she col-

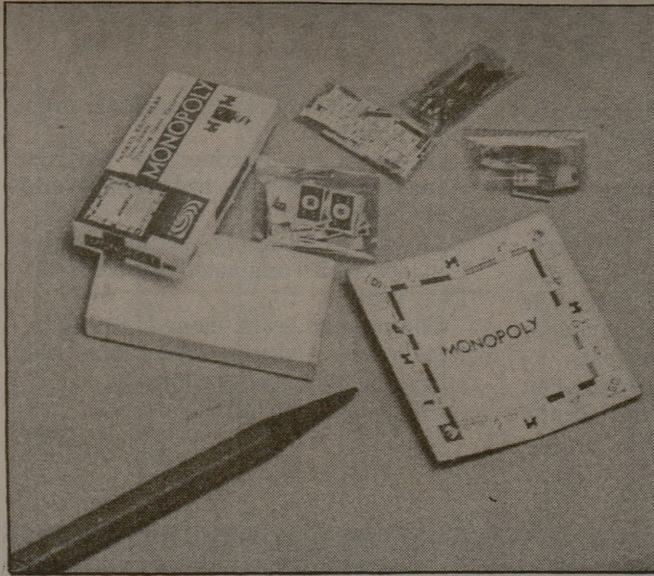


Photo by Greg Gammon

A pencil shows the relative size of this miniature Monopoly game, which sells for \$16.

lects for the enjoyment of it. Sweet said although she too

they're not always household items.

On display Saturday were playgrounds with teeter-totters, wooden merry-go-rounds and miniature trash cans with one-fourth-inch coke cans in them.

Also on display was a greenhouse with little packs of seeds and an old general store complete with canned goods and bolts of material. It even had quarter-inch coat hangers.

Kent said several national publications cater to miniature collectors. (Kent also belongs to the National Association of Miniature Enthusiasts.)

A major debate right now in one of the publications, Kent said, is whether doll-houses should have dolls in them or not.

Sweet said there is also a new trend for miniatures switching to smaller proportions.

For example, now the standard miniature scale is one-foot equals one-inch, whereas the trend says one-foot equals one-half-inch.

Those interested in miniature collecting are invited to join the club or just attend the monthly meetings. For more information call Bi-City-Hobby-Kraft in Bryan.

Kent said members will be happy to lend a few pointers to would-be-miniature makers.

And remember, one nice thing about miniatures is that they don't take up much room.

Old dolls need love; make an investment

By Colette Hutchings
Battalion Staff

That old, discarded doll hiding in the bottom of your grandmother's trunk is crying for attention, and doll collectors may be eager to love her.

Melba French is one of those collectors. The Bryan-College Station resident has a collection of 700 antique dolls — and a name for every one.

French, also president of the B-CS chapter of the Hub-of-Texas Doll Club, was at Manor East Mall Saturday with several of her dolls, all neatly dressed in costumes reflecting the time in which they were made.

And one can't help but

wonder what those dolls would say if they could talk

French started collecting dolls six years ago after she adopted two Mexican-American girls, now 12 and 14.

After raising three boys and being widowed, French once again became a mother to young children — this time to girls. She said she wanted to find something she and her daughters could enjoy doing together.

"I needed to do the things little girls liked," French said, "so I started collecting dolls."

French said she is glad she began to collect the dolls, because it will give her girls a bit of heritage as well as a hobby they can pursue later on in life.

"They came in on the tail end of my life and now I have something to leave to them," French said.

Antique doll collecting is an expensive hobby. Prices for dolls range from \$50 to \$700-and-up, depending on age and condition of the dolls and whether the dolls are originals, French said.

Most of the dolls have historic significance. Owners can discover a doll's background and origin through signatures or identification numbers engraved on the back of the doll's neck, or the information can be found in encyclopedias.

One of the most famous dolls, French said, is the "Bye-lo" baby designed by American sculptor Grace Putnam in 1920. During that time children and babies were thought of as little men and women,

French said, and Putnam wanted to create a doll resembling the "perfect baby."

Putnam searched World War I hospitals looking for her model. She molded a wax likeness of a three-day-old infant and sold the copy to Germany, where the doll was made out of bisque china, French said.

Since over a million copies were sold, the doll was also known as "the million dollar baby", French said.

The "Shirley Temple" doll was another famous doll of that era, French said.

The Ideal Corp. bought the rights for manufacturing and selling the doll, she said, and because of that restriction other companies made similar copies of the doll and called them "Shirley Temple Look-A-Likes."

"They (the manufacturers) had a lot of problems back then," French said.

For those who are interested in starting a doll collection, French said, two dolls, John Wayne and W.C. Fields, are being distributed as limited editions this year. "Those dolls will be worth a lot of money soon," she said.

French classifies doll collectors into two types: those who collect merely for satisfaction of owning the dolls and those who collect for the investment, French said.

For the later, French advises joining a professional doll club such as the Hub-Of-Texas for advice.

French invites all doll enthusiasts to call for an appointment to see her collection. Appointments may be made by calling 775-5409.



Photo by Greg Gammon

Melba French holds the "Bye-lo Baby," a German doll valued at \$700, which first sold for \$25 in 1925.

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