



**GREATER CHICAGO  
INSULATOR CLUB  
NEWSLETTER**  
Rick Soller, editor



Volume 23, Number 2  
March 2015

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**Choices Insulator Collectors Make**

by Rick Soller

The Saturday, January 31, 2015 swap meet hosted by Tina and Arlen Rienstra caused me to make a lot of choices. These weren't the simple choices of which insulator to buy or how much money to spend but they were more significant choices that reflect a person's personality, collecting philosophy and ethical beliefs. I thought I would share these with everyone.

What to bring? Several weeks before the swap meet, I was on a break and had time to look through a lot of insulators. This is when I had to decide what to bring to the swap meet. Should I bring insulators for the auction or insulators for a sales table? If I brought insulators for the auction, it might keep people from buying insulators from the sales tables of dealers. If I brought too many insulators, bidders might get fatigued and I wouldn't sell the insulators for very much. On the other hand, attendees seemed to expect a certain number of insulators in the auction and the club benefited from the proceeds that helped pay for the expenses at the swap meet. I also own way too many insulators and auctions are the only way I've found to downsize quickly.

Part of the decision-making that went into deciding what to bring included deciding the proper balance between how many insulators and how many tables I brought. Because I live closer to Racine, Wisconsin, the decision for Randy Wesner's club event is easier. I take a truckload of tables (about 11 tables) the week before the event and bring a truckload of insulators up the night before. Since Crown Point is farther away, I only want to make one trip. Certainly I want to bring enough tables to hold the insulators I bring but I always bring extra tables because some dealers come from farther away, don't have a pick-up truck, or just assume the show host will take care of their need. In the end, I brought six tables, used three for the auction lots I brought and made the others available to others.

Where to go? On the same day as the club swap meet, an auction of insulators was also scheduled. I learned about the auction via an automated notice from AuctionZip.com but also received an email from Colin Jung who apparently received the same alert. The auction was for a large collection of insulators owned by a former lineman for the South Shore Line. Pictures on the auctioneer's web site showed a number of pieces that interested me.

I was immediately torn about what I should do. I decided I would find out if anyone else was going or could go for me. I talked to Bob Stahr about the pieces in the picture. I called Arlen Rienstra to see if he knew about the collection. I asked Robert Winkler if he was going and if he knew the collector. None of them planned to attend and only Robert knew anything beyond what was in the pictures and that was only that he knew of the collector but not any more about the collection. He did indicate, however, that his brother-in-law was going to be there and that perhaps I could have him bid on insulators for me. I decided to call the auctioneer to learn when the insulators would be sold (maybe around 1 p.m.) and if I could see them Friday afternoon

(which I did).

I was torn between the two places for a variety of reasons. First, I was only bringing insulators to sell in the club auction and it seemed inappropriate to not be there when they sold. I partly rationalized that Jim Crandall sent insulators to a club auction in Racine, WI once and that was not seen as a problem. Second, I traditionally served as the auctioneer and banker for the auction so I hoped I could ask Riley Armstrong to serve as auctioneer, for Russ Frank to act as recorder, and perhaps Marge Frank to be banker. Third, I wanted to support the club event by attending, socializing, buying insulators, and participating in the club meeting.

I eventually chose to go to the auction. I left at 10 a.m. just as the swap meet was starting. I could have waited longer but thought I might be interested in other material in the auction and that would be sold starting at 10 a.m. I also was concerned that the auctioneer might get to the insulators sooner than promised. Getting to the auction early also allowed me to get my bidder number, scout out the other collectors who were there, and make sure the insulators I was interested in were still in the same location.

There were other reasons I did not stay at the swap meet. I had a chance to buy some insulators before I left for the swap meet. I had hopes of scoring some expensive insulators at bargain prices. Finally, I thought this would be a chance to meet some new collectors and tell them about the club.

How to bid? Other collectors were at the auction and I had to decide whether to compete with them or cooperate with them. Robert Winkler was finally persuaded to come and was looking to buy insulators for an interurban museum. That seemed like a noble cause to me and the insulators he needed for the project were not ones I had to have. A while ago I bought Robert's collection but he was now rebuilding it. I visit him just about every time I pass through the area on my way to visit family in Ohio and we've know each other for over 20 years. Steve Jones was there. He is a club member that I frequently see at area shows. Dave Ramp was there. I bought his collection several years ago and he was back to collecting them again. I wanted to stay on friendly terms.

Both cooperation and competition resulted. Robert and I quickly reached an agreement about what each of us wanted. Robert ended up getting a half dozen three-skirt Lapp saddle tops that I was interested in but already owned examples of them. Steve Jones and I did the same. It was tough seeing him win a U-425 so cheaply but I owned one already so could let it go. Neither of them seemed interested in or knew the value of the CD 131 Brookfield (\$50-75), the CD 149 Brookfield (\$150-175), the CD 236 Brookfield (\$600-700) or the CD 288 Locke (\$175-200). Dave Ramp was a different story and we fought over several of these. He didn't recognize the CD 131, he outbid me on the CD 149, I went higher on the CD 236 than I wanted before dropping out, and he gave up early on the CD 288 so I got it at a bargain.

There were other collectors at the auction I did not know. They were apparently collectors that did not have a price guide or had never been to a show since they paid way too much for carnival CD 235s, blue glazed J-D porcelain, and even common brown porcelain ponies. I talked to several of them about the swap meet that was going on that day, that the National show was in the area, and that a club existed.

A troubling aspect of the auction was that the insulators were arranged in rows and the auctioneer first offered to sell the top bidder his or her choice of as many insulators as desired in the row at the winning bid. Robert Winkler faced the difficulties associated with this auction technique when he was bidding on a row of insulators that contained a multipart he was interested in and a blue J-D that, unbeknownst to Robert, was sought by another collector who

ran the price up to almost \$100 before Robert dropped out. I sensed a sigh of relief when the other collector selected the J-D and Robert was able to get the multipart in the next round of bidding for closer to \$20.

How much to buy? The number of common insulators was significant. After a few rounds of trying to sell a choice of insulators in a row, the auction would move to the next row with the intent to return to the unsold insulators and sell them in bigger lots. By the time the auctioneer had worked her way through the eight tables of insulators and returned to the beginning, I was considering leaving to get back to the swap meet in time for a club meeting. I was torn because I would have liked to buy some of the common insulators in the hope of finding a surprise beneath one of the soot-cover insulators and to do some research (e.g., number of drip points, weights, mold number variations, etc.). I finally decided otherwise since I already had hundreds (thousands?) of such insulators.

What's it worth? Naturally I had my price guide but not all insulators in the auction could be found in a price guide and other considerations made me ignore the price guide. A CD 160 Brookfield valued at \$1-2 in the price guide was worth much more to me since the former owner indicated exactly where the insulator was found on the South Shore line. Another "insulator" was a miniature multipart made by Winkler. The glaze had chipped off significant portions of the piece but, given our friendship, I was happy pay almost \$20 for it. A U-927D was missing its inner section but the flashover on the outside was so dramatic, I bought it despite what I figured was otherwise an insulator with little value.

### **What is a "Top Shelf" Insulator?**

Many collectors describe expensive insulators they have for sale as "top shelf" items. In my opinion, this term is a misnomer for insulator collecting. The meaning for the term seems to be from the liquor industry, in particular saloons and bars, where the better quality liquor was placed on the highest shelf since it was less used. There are also definitions that use the term in the context of putting something out of reach of children.

There are several reasons "top shelf" does not fit insulator collecting. First, I would not want to put my best insulators on the top shelf because there would be greater fear that if the insulator fell off the shelf that it would break. Second, I want to handle my best insulators more often than others so I would not have the same motivation to stick it on the top shelf like at a bar but I would be more interested in placing it on a shelf that it easier to reach. Third, the shelf that I put an insulator on is not always based on the price or rarity of the piece but on its size. In particular, I always put large multiparts on the lowest shelf, despite their value. The same would be true for heavy insulators like the CD 140 Jumbo. The exception to this rule is putting a heavy insulator on top of a light box. In this case, the insulator is not put on the top shelf but above the top shelf which confuses the concept of what constitutes the top shelf.

There are several alternatives to the term "top shelf." One alternative is to refer to such insulators as "light box worthy" or as part of a "curio cabinet collection." These terms recognize that putting the insulator in a place that provides them with better lighting or more protection are also ways to acknowledge their worth. A second alternative is to refer to high quality insulators as "middle shelf" insulators or "eye level" insulators. The assumption here is that the middle shelf or the shelf at eye level of a light box would be where people would look first. This shelf might also have better lighting than an insulator on the sides of the light box. Given this distinction between the middle of a shelf and the end, perhaps an even better term to describe the best insulator would be "center middle." This term would be similar to the best seats in a theatre:

“front and center.” This term also suggests another consideration, i.e., that for deep shelves in a light box, some insulators are in the front row and some hidden behind other insulators. So the bottom line is that the best term to use to describe your best insulators is not “top shelf” but perhaps “front, center, middle row.”

How to Find Insulators.

Insulator shows, swap meets, antique stores, hunts,

Online: eBay, etsy, goodwillstore.com, mercadolibre.com, ebay.fr, ebay.co.uk, New Zealand site

Online search tools: EstateAuctions.net, auctionzip, craigslist.org

Automatic search tools

### Upcoming Shows

#### **February 28, 2015 (Saturday)**

##### **5<sup>th</sup> Annual Lebanon, Indiana show, Lebanon, IN**

5th annual Lebanon IN show. Saturday Feb 28th. 9am thru 3pm. At the Boone County fairgrounds right off of I65 at exit 138. 25 miles NE of Indianapolis. Large heated room with great lighting. Get out and welcome in spring with great get together. Both bottles and insulators. As always, great meal served to all vendors. KIM BORGMAN 317-698-9177 or [kim.borgman@rnc-usa.com](mailto:kim.borgman@rnc-usa.com)

#### **March 21, 2015 (Saturday)**

##### **13<sup>th</sup> Annual NW Missouri Insulator & Bottle Show, Tracy, MO**

The 13th Annual NW Missouri Insulator & Bottle Show will be held at the Platte County Fairgrounds, 1st & Tribble St., Tracy, Missouri 64079. In between Kansas City & St. Joseph, just off of I-29, only 6 miles from the Kansas City International Airport. Set up time will be 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM, then open to the public from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. The facility was full and had great traffic last year and we expect more of the same. Sales tables are \$25 each and admission is FREE. Food on site. Host hotel is Quality Inn & Suites, 1201 Branch St., Platte City, MO 64079 (about a mile from the fairgrounds). Special room rate available until February 15th. Mention “Insulator & Bottle Show” for discount. After that date, ask for Divya Patel for possible discount. Contact DARRYL WAGNER at 816-719-0801 or email at [nwmoshow@dwagnerkc.com](mailto:nwmoshow@dwagnerkc.com) for information and/or show packet.

#### **April 10-11, 2015 (Friday and Saturday)**

##### **Yorkville, IL**

Antique Insulators, Lightning Rods, & Bottle Show. Set up and come to buy, sell or trade Friday night, Dealers set-up Friday 5pm - 9pm. Free Admission. Saturday 8am - 3pm. Contact JASON TOWNSEND 630-667-3357, [jtins76@gmail.com](mailto:jtins76@gmail.com) This is the 6th year at Yorkville., Kendall County Fairgrounds. This is a huge facility in a great location! 115 tables are available, \$30 each! No rules.

#### **April 18, 2015 (Saturday)**

### **NWIC Spring Swap Meet, Austin, MN**

The North Western Insulator Club will hold its Spring Swap Meet on Saturday, April 18, 2015 in Austin MN. Gordy Cassidy will host this event for the second year and we will be indoors at the American Legion building located at 809 12th St SW, Austin MN. Hours are 9-3 with set-up starting at 9:00. Some tables indoors will be available for your use. Weather permitting, we will also be able to set up outside but supply your own tables for outdoors. Food will be available for purchase during the entire time we are there, including breakfast and lunch so no one will be hungry. An auction is planned for noon so clean out all those garages, sheds and corners and bring your sales stock as this is a good place to move some volume of inventory. This is a great location in southern Minnesota with very close access to interstates 90 and 35.

### **May 15-16, 2015 (Friday & Saturday)**

#### **Columbia City Insulator & Collectibles Show, Columbia City, IN**

One of the bigger little shows! Columbia City Insulator & Collectibles Show, Whitley County 4H Center, 581 West Squawbuck Road, Columbia City, Indiana May 16-17th 2014. Dealer setup Friday noon - 3PM, Public 3-5 PM, Seminar@6 PM. Saturday dealer setup 6-8AM, Public 8-3PM. First 8' table \$28, 2 tables \$48, 3/\$60, 4/\$75, Contact: GENE HAWKINS [gene.hawkins@mchsi.com](mailto:gene.hawkins@mchsi.com).

### **June 6, 2015 (Saturday)**

#### **18<sup>th</sup> Annual Hawkeye State Insulator Swap Meet, Tama, Iowa**

The 18th Annual Hawkeye State Insulator Swap Meet will be held on June 6th from 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM at the Tama Civic Center, 305 Siegel St. in downtown Tama, IA. Dealer set up starting at 7:00 AM. There will be no cost to set up and lunch will be provided for those who attend. We again look forward to hosting many great Midwest collectors and friends that have shown up over the years to support this fun and relaxed traditional event. We encourage you to join us for what hopes to be a great time in the Hawkeye State! For additional information feel free to contact DAVE SHAW at (641) 484-5463 or e-mail at [dashaw@mchsi.com](mailto:dashaw@mchsi.com)

### **July 3-5, 2015 (Friday to Sunday)**

#### **46<sup>th</sup> Annual National Insulator Association Show, Sale, & Convention, Sandwich, IL**

46th Annual National Insulator Association Show and Convention. 135+ Dealer tables, 25 Displays. This year it will be held at the Timber Creek Inn & Suites and Convention Center. 3300 Drew Ave., Sandwich, IL 60548 for hotel reservations call: 630.273.6000 and mention NIA for special rates. For more show information visit: [www.2015niashow.com](http://www.2015niashow.com) Host: JASON TOWNSEND, call: 630-667-3357 or email: [jtins76@gmail.com](mailto:jtins76@gmail.com) or BOB STAHR 630-793-5345 or email: [bob@hemingray.com](mailto:bob@hemingray.com)

21ST ANNUAL



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*July 24th  
at 5pm*

**Contact: Alan Stastny**  
8784 Grubbs Rex Road  
Arcanum, OH. 45304  
Cell: 937-546-4745



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## **INSULATOR SWAP**

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Lightning Rod Collectibles  
Milk Bottles  
Other Vintage Collectibles  
*Saturday, July 25th, 8am - 2pm*

