

RIGHT AS A TRIVET

“Right as a trivet,” goes the old saying, and in days of yore, most housewives probably would have agreed. Wrought-iron fireplace trivets, like long-handled tongs, toasters, forks, and frying pans, played a central role in hearthside cooking. Even if the rough stones beneath lay uneven, the trivet’s three long, spider-like legs could support kettles of simmering soups and sauces squarely above the live coals. Any shape trivet — pointed, round, oval, rectangular, heart, or freeform — would work, as long as it was sturdy and could withstand the heat.

As wood and coal burning stoves began replacing open cooking hearths, trivets, with their legs considerably shortened and trays considerably broadened, took on new functions. Instead of supporting the pots, now some trivets sat in the pots. A 1893 cookbook advises placing meat on a pierced cast-iron trivet made to fit inside the roasting pan, “so that it may not become sodden in the water used for gravy.” Pennsylvania’s Griswold Manufacturing Company produced heavy duty roasting trivets like these through 1957. Some are still in use today.

The 1897 Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog marketed sad



This beautiful cast brass trivet features a spade shape and repeating heart design. It dates to the late 1800s. Dimensions: 7-5/8" x 4-3/8" x 1/2" with three feet. (All photos courtesy of Margaret Lynn Rosack, www.lynn.rosack.com, photographed by her husband, Ed Rosack.)



Contemporary trivets can be both beautiful and collectable! This is a 1950s-era cast iron trivet, signed Emig on the reverse. It features a traditional Pennsylvania Dutch design and is nicely cast. Dimensions: 8-5/8" x 5-5/8" with three short feet.

irons (a bygone term for heavy clothes irons), and their convenient accessory, sad iron stands. These pieces — short-legged, spade shaped, and pierced in a variety of attractive designs — closely resemble trivets as we know them today.

According to Margaret Lynn Rosack, avid collector and author of *The A-Z Guide to Collecting Trivets*, “It’s fascinating to think that once, sad iron stands were ironing day necessities. Even in the simplest of lives, women took special pleasure in the beauty of everyday things.” Because trivet stands were widely used and nearly indestructible, they still turn up at antique shows, flea markets, and estate sales.

The trivet’s transition from iron stand to table use probably came about at the turn of the century. It’s easy to imagine how. A housewife might first have rested her sad iron on its stand atop her table, and then later, while serving dinner, propped a pot of simmering soup on its surface.

When trivets reached the dining table, manufacturers began turning out standardized, decorative varieties. While some

mimic old fashioned sad iron stands, others feature ever popular cherubs, patriotic eagles, or geometric patterns, in addition to stylized rural themes like owls, cornstalks, or sheaves of wheat. Many of these early trivets also bear factory trademarks, slogans, dates, or initials incorporated into their designs, which facilitate identification while increasing their market value.

Prices vary. Crudely crafted, pitted, chipped, or rusty trivets of any era are generally inexpensive, as are machine made ones. Early hand forged three- or four-legged iron trivets, on the other hand, may command high prices. Rare signed or numbered trivets, the most collectible, are naturally the most expensive. A triangular hand-forged English bronze trivet, for example, or an 1880s three-legged, heart-shaped one might fetch hundreds of dollars. So might an iron Kenrick trivet with scalloped borders, a "Good Luck" horseshoe plaque trivet, with bits of its original gilt intact, or a cast brass trivet with repeating heart design.

While serious collectors seek originals, many others contentedly protect their tables and counter tops with reproductions of antique trivets or unabashedly modern creations. Because today's trivets are fashioned from a variety of materials — beadwork, ceramics, porcelain, metal, silicon, wood, cork, cloth, or glass — they can find something for every taste, dinner setting, and pocketbook.

Modern hand-painted tile trivets may feature florals, scenes of Jerusalem, pink flamingos, or whimsical Disney characters. Metal trivets feature perennial favorites, like pierced hearts, stars, eagles, scrollwork, or geometric patterns. Some classic American samplers incorporate single

letters, words, alphabets, or proverbs into their designs. No matter what their makeup is, all trivets have two things in common: they are sturdy and heat resistant.

Where do you put all those trivets once you've collected them? Ms. Rosack, who has amassed more than a thousand over 30 years, displays her heaviest trivets in sturdy, open cabinets. But the best way to display lighter ones, she advises, is to hang them on walls, "out of the way, but still decorative and available to take down and examine" — or, like generations of women before her, use. j



This is a lovely example of a horseshoe plaque trivet that dates to the 1880s. It's an unusual "Good Luck" design, featuring a dove on each side. It still has quite a bit of the original gold paint remaining. Dimensions: 8" x 6" (flat on the back, no feet).

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Eventually, the Rice Cow Creamer Collection numbered 248 pieces, spanning three continents and three centuries. In 1978, the Rices presented the collection to their alma mater. The assortment, then appraised at \$10,000, was added to Taylor University's archives.

According to Hughes, the Rice collection has maintained its integrity over the years as one of the finest of its kind in the world. "The size of the collection, age of several pieces, and diverse countries of origin of several pieces combine to make this an outstanding set," says Hughes.

Cows are not the only figures in the Rice collection. "We have creamers in the shape of elk, sheep, moose, and bull," says Hughes. "The elk is the biggest creamer in the group. It can hold almost a gallon of milk."

Hughes reports that the Rice Cow Creamer Collection is one of the archives' most popular displays at the campus. "The creamers attract much attention from students, faculty, and the surrounding community," she adds.

The Rice collection gained even more renown when it was featured on the Food Network's show, *Unwrapped*, in February 2005. Hughes says the televised program prompted great interest among the general public. "One viewer stopped at the campus on her way driving from Georgia to Michigan to see the collection," she says, adding that Taylor University's archives department has a VHS copy that can be viewed within its offices.

While the collection is not slated to be on public display in

the near future, Hughes says she and the archives department staff will accommodate individual requests to see the Rice collection by appointment. Check the university's Web site for archive department hours and directions (www.taylor.edu).

The Rices have both passed on (Raymond died in 1982; Garnet died in 1993). But interest in their cow creamers continues, some would say appropriately, in the middle of cornfields and farmland in the American Midwest. "We are honored to care for this collection," says Hughes. "It may seem unusual for a cow creamer collection to be in an academic setting, but in the archives of Taylor University we're all about preserving the past. This suits us fine." j



While most of the cow creamers in the Rice Collection are constructed with the bovine standing on all four feet, this rare Delft creamer from Germany, circa 19th century, shows the animal sitting on its haunches holding a jug.