

GARAGE SALES

Are Collectible Plates Worth Anything?

The Bradford Exchange — familiar to many of us from infomercial fame — is one of the best known dealers and producers of collectible plates, a market that exploded in the 1970s and 1980s. It was the first company to produce three-dimensional sculpted plates and, to this day, is the end-all, be-all in collectible plate pricing. Keep reading to learn more about collectible plates.

THE FRANKLIN MINT

The Franklin Mint was founded in 1964 and makes things like coins for foreign countries, casino tokens and commemorative medallions. It also makes dolls, coins, bears, models, sculptures and other collectibles, including plates. The first collector plate issued by the Franklin Mint was 1970's "Bringing Home the Tree," a Norman Rockwell



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Christmas plate. Since then, the company has issued a variety of plates, including animal themes, Elvis, Disney, more Norman Rockwell, NASCAR, John Wayne and others. Most Franklin Mint plates sell for less than \$10, but some may be worth more, such as the U.S. Bicentennial plates. The most valuable pieces are a set of sterling silver Audubon plates engraved with birds, the U.S. Bicentennial plates, and a

sterling silver Richard Nixon inauguration plate.

When scouring garage sales for collectible plates, look for those that are in good condition, with no scratches or cracks, and remember that, generally, the silver plates are worth more than the porcelain ones.

BLUE AND WHITE

Before the Franklin Mint, there was blue and white.

Most early collectible plates were blue and white porcelain. Experts say that the first collectible plate was a blue and white Christmas plate by Bing and Grondahl, "Behind the Frozen Window," issued in 1895. Royal Copenhagen and Rosenthal also started churning out mass-produced porcelain plates, and, in 1965, Lenox started making lead-crystal collectible plates and colored plates.

OTHER POPULAR MANUFACTURERS

In addition to the Bradford Exchange and the Franklin Mint, there are other collector labels. They include:

- London Crown: Themes from English history and literature.
- Edna Hibbel Studios: Children and mothers.
- Danbury Mint.
- Delphi: Entertainers and other figures from the 1950s.
- Hummel: Similar to the famous figurines.
- Byliny Porcelain: Russian art.
- D'Arceau Limoges: French art, culture and history.

MOST VALUABLE PLATES

Because most of these plates were mass produced, especially during their most recent heyday, don't look for big payoffs. However, the older plates, such as the Bing and Grondahl line or Wedgewood plates, can get into the hundreds or thousands of dollars. Some complete Franklin Mint sets can get close to \$100, while some are only worth the value of their metal.

Other plates are valuable for their art. Ted DeGrazia did a series on the American Southwest that can get up to \$1,000 each. The Norman Rockwell plates, however, that were everywhere at one time, are worth very little.

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SELLER'S TIP

Nostalgic Value

Unfortunately, if you're stuck with Grandma's trove of Elvis plates, you're probably not looking at anything worth very much. There is something to be said for nostalgic value, though, and you could capitalize on a resurgence in popularity of, for instance, Disney characters. Just don't look for most 1970s- and 1980s-era plates to sell for much on their own.

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