

Weathervanes Popular With Collectors

While weathervanes are a quintessential sight across the American countryside, these architectural amusements have a far more ancient history. A Greek is credited with inventing the first around 48 B.C., shaping the 8-ft. long structure into the likeness of Triton, the Greek god of the sea.

Roosters became a common motif on weathervanes across 9th-century Europe, where they served as a symbol of Christianity on the orders of Pope Leo IV. Weathervanes later became a common sight on Viking ships, where they served as both a status symbol and a navigational tool. In fact, Swedish and Norwegian ships continue to use this ancient technology today.

“Vane” comes from the Old English word “fane,” meaning flag. The key piece of a weathervane is the central pivoting arrow or pointer. The pointer is usually tapered at one end to provide balance and catch even light winds. The larger end of the pointer acts as a scoop that catches the wind. Once the pointer turns, the larger end will find a balance and

line up with the source of the wind.

Traditionally, weathervanes are built with a tail to catch the wind and an arrow that points in the direction it’s blowing. Blacksmiths and metalworkers crafted them, and they were a common sight on barns, porches, town halls and carriage houses. Some towns even powered their public clocks with wind. Most large dairy barns in the Midwest built before the start of the 20th century have a weathervane on the roof.

Across America, farmers used weathervanes to gauge shifting weather patterns for both storm avoidance and energy use. The devices helped people predict wind direction and intensity before operating windmills for large-scale projects such as grinding grain or drying corn. Wind-driven sawmills even cut and shaped lumber.

American weathervanes adopted increasingly patriotic designs, such as the Goddess of Liberty and the Federal Eagle. During the Victorian Era, elaborate designs took precedence, while simpler, rural-inspired



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forms won out by the 1900s. Today, modern weathervanes are made in a variety of shapes and styles.

By the mid-19th century, wind power had become less important as steam and coal began to take its place. The modern world’s abundance of weather-prediction tools has transformed weathervanes from practical instruments into decorative ones.

Even so, famous weathervanes abound across the country. George Washington’s Mount Vernon vane was made of copper and shaped like a dove, complete with an olive branch of peace in its mouth. Likewise,

the copper grasshopper decorating the roof of Faneuil Hall in Boston is considered America’s most famous weathervane. These historic artifacts are increasingly collectible and can be found in antique shops and on online auction sites. Some can fetch over half a million, and one sold for \$5.84 million to the Executive Vice President of Polo Ralph Lauren.

If you’re lucky enough to own a historic weathervane, keep it safe. These pieces of Americana will always find an appreciative audience.



Emmerich hand-pollinates thousands of daylily blossoms each summer. She estimates that one out of every 400 seeds she plants results in a new daylily variety that reaches commercial introduction.

God Told Her To ‘Paint The World With Flowers’

Karol Emmerich had an exciting career as a senior executive at a major Minnesota corporation. She could have retired easily, but she says God had other plans for her. Today, she is “living her dream” by creating

spectacular new daylily varieties on a 140-acre farm near Jordan, Minn.

She and her husband, Dick, were living in a Twin Cities suburb, and she had run out of space to grow flowers on their city lot. That’s

when God spoke to her, saying, “Karol, I want you to paint the world with beautiful new flowers, and to do this you’re going to need more space...a LOT more space!”

Today, Emmerich’s daylily farm is part of a sprawling river-bluff property overlooking the Minnesota River Valley. At Springwood Gardens, she hand-pollinates thousands of daylily blossoms each summer. She then nurtures her daylily seedlings in a giant greenhouse at the center of several acres of beautiful garden beds. Emmerich estimates that one out of every 400 seeds she plants results in a new daylily variety that reaches commercial introduction.

Emmerich says she decided to specialize in daylilies because they’re easy to grow and display marvelous, surprising colors, shapes and sizes. When she discovers a new daylily that excels in every category, she gives it a name or phrase from the Bible.

“I always thought that daylily names were kind of boring, so I decided to give my new varieties Biblical names,” she says. “I love the Lord, and it was a way to trigger spiritual conversations.”

Her biblical names sometimes lead to interesting discussions.

“One lady who visited came up to me and asked where she could find the variety named ‘Women at the Wheel.’ It took a few seconds, but then I realized she was asking about ‘Woman at the Well.’” (John 4:4-42).

The house at Springwood Gardens, where Karol and Dick live year-round, has quite a history. It was built in 1862 by a railroad baron, had many owners over the years, and at one point even served as a stagecoach stopover.

“When we first saw the giant old house, it looked like it was haunted, with spooky vines growing up the side, bats in the top floors, and snakes in the foundation,” she says.

The house was constructed with 2-ft thick limestone-block walls covered with a brick facade. The couple hired contractors to completely remodel and restore the house, adding additional rooms, an attached garage, and living quarters, which became a 2-year project.

Springwood Gardens is now a daylily breeding and propagation business, selling daylily plants to wholesale growers across the U.S. and by mail order to daylily collectors around the world. Emmerich loves hosting tours during the growing season. In addition to garden clubs, many visitors come for the spectacular photo opportunities among the colorful daylilies and the surrounding river valley.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Karol Emmerich, Springwood Gardens, 7700 Old Hwy. 169 Blvd., Jordan, Minn. 55352 (ph 952-941-9280; www.springwoodgardens.com).

Victory Garden Posters Offer A Glimpse Back In Time

For Americans who grew up in the first half of the 20th century, war-inspired communal gardens were a common sight. These so-called “Victory Gardens” helped define an era, and surviving posters offer a window into that time.

Contrary to popular belief, America’s communal gardening movement began during WWI. Much credit goes to Charles Lathrop Pack, a wealthy businessman and forestry expert who founded the National War Garden Commission in 1917.

At the time, the U.S. was preparing to enter the Great War, and the food supply was already a concern. Citizens were encouraged to grow fruits and vegetables in yards, vacant lots, parks, school grounds, and other underused public spaces.

Originally intended to ease shortages in Europe, the food soon fed local mouths as well. Because pesticides, gardening tools, and fertilizers were scarce, the War Garden movement emphasized shared, practical growing spaces rather than private, resource-

intensive gardens. Those who couldn’t garden were urged to help preserve produce for others.

Pack helped publish several propaganda posters and instructional pamphlets for War Gardens. Many of these pamphlets featured cartoons poking fun at the mishaps of inexperienced gardeners. Runaway chickens, digging dogs, and post-vacation weeds were all fair game. Other cartoons offered a more direct link to the war. Some compared fighting insects to battling the enemy and pesticides to “trench gas.”

Along with detailed growing tips, many posters featured patriotic slogans such as “Uncle Sam wants you!” Columbia, an allegorical figure representing the United States, was also popular and often depicted walking along rows of soil, scattering seeds from a basket. These posters remain collectible today and can sell for nearly \$300.

After the war, gardens became Victory Gardens. The term became so popular that it was adopted during WWII as part of a

grassroots effort to rekindle patriotism across generations.

Surprising as it may seem now, the federal government was initially skeptical of Victory Gardens and favored greater investment in large-scale agriculture. Still, the health, recreational and morale-boosting benefits of community gardens helped them surge in popularity again. Their output was substantial. By 1944, an estimated 18 to 20 million U.S. families were growing up to 40% of America’s produce.

After WWII, Victory Gardens fell out of favor. Many first-time gardeners discovered the decidedly unromantic reality of growing food and wanted to distance themselves from wartime hardships. Likewise, postwar America saw a housing boom, with large suburban backyards that made communal gardens unnecessary.

Even so, at least two Victory Gardens have remained in continuous production since WWII. These are the Fenway Victory Gardens in Boston and the Dowling Victory



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Garden in Minneapolis. Each inspires guests and gardeners alike with the potential power of collective action.