

Oltjenbruns share enthusiasm for depression glass at museum display

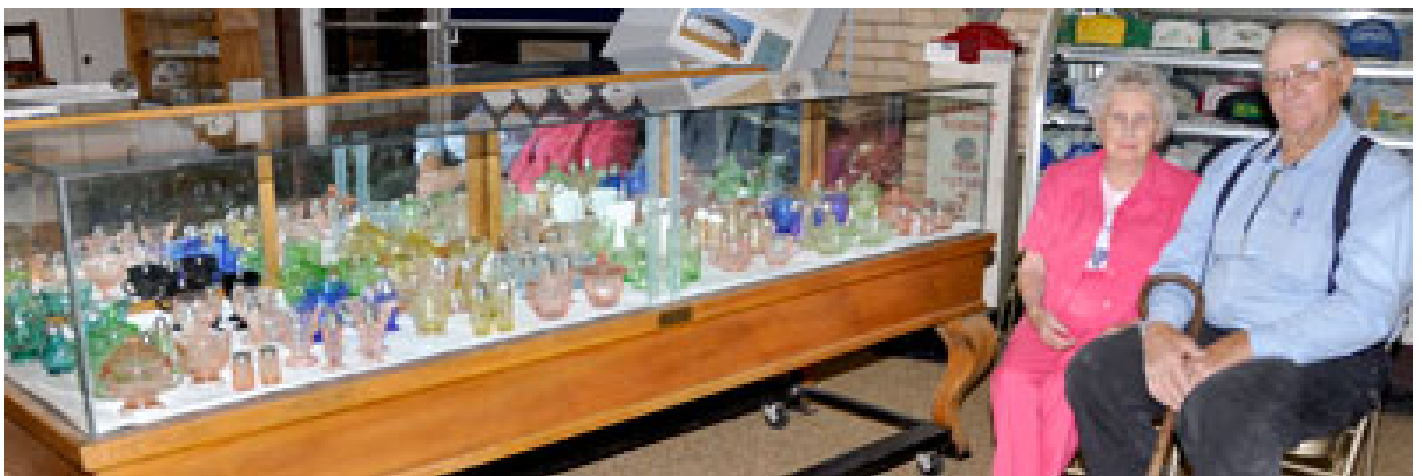
Written by Darci Tomky

A collection 40 years in the making recently found a new home at the Phillips County Museum in Holyoke. Dozens of select pieces from Milton and Leona Oltjenbruns' depression glass collection are now on display at the museum.

Named for its start during the Great Depression, this type of glassware is clear or colored translucent glass. Colors include pink, green, amber, ruby, blue, yellow and crystal. It can be found in over 100 different patterns—from Princess and Miss America to Crisscross and Royal Lace.

The Oltjenbruns' fascination with depression glass started four decades ago when they brought home some green cups. Unfortunately, they were not a match for their daughter's set like they had hoped, but the cups were a great start to a depression glass collection.

"It's kind of a disease," explained the Holyoke couple. "We don't bowl or golf, and that's our recreation."



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Phillips County Museum's newest addition is a large collection of depression glass ranging from pink to blue to amber in a wide variety of patterns. Leona and Milton Oltjenbruns proudly display their donation, a fascinating collection that began 40 years ago and has kept them busy searching for rare finds and great bargains. —Enterprise photo

Sometimes Milton and Leona are looking for specific pieces to fill in sets, but other times they just can't pass up the great bargains.

Depression glass can be found "anywhere and everywhere" including garage sales, auctions and glass shows. Pieces in the Oltjenbruns' collection have come from Houston, Texas; Astoria, Ore.; and everywhere in between.

Some depression glass is more rare than others, and of course they range in price. Salt and pepper shakers can be anywhere from \$50-400, for example.

The glassware was a very inexpensive option during the 1930s, so a lot of it was distributed in the United States during the Depression. The Oltjenbruns explained how it could be bought in a dime store, and the glass pieces were even included in some food boxes or given out at movie theaters for an incentive to customers.

Manufacturers continued making the glassware in the '40s and '50s. "Most everyone you talk to had some depression glass," said Leona.

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Since there is so much depression glass out there, the fun thing for collectors now is to piece together the puzzle, finding sets that match in color and pattern.

Milton and Leona have assembled complete dining room and luncheon sets for their three children in addition to some sets they have kept for themselves.

The couple recalled the time they found a salt and pepper carrier and one of the shakers in Fort Collins. By chance, they soon found the matching mate in Lincoln, Neb. “Any time we found a bargain like that—that was fun,” added Leona.

After 40 years of collecting, the Oltjenbruns have gotten some of their friends started on the addiction too.

They said they thought they were done collecting, but since then they have purchased more depression glass that was simply too good to pass up.

Now Milton and Leona’s colorful collection can be seen in a permanent display at the museum. A book accompanies the glassware explaining the wide assortment of shapes, colors and patterns.