



**GREATER CHICAGO  
INSULATOR CLUB  
NEWSLETTER**

Rick Soller, Director of Operations

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**A Tale of a New Collector or Eight months of Delight**

by Matthew Payne



There are as many stories about starting as an insulator collector, as people who collect them. This one is mine. In my mind's eye, I have memories of insulators and recall being intrigued by their shapes and colors. They had a tale to be told, but my fleeting interest never gave me time to listen to it --- until last summer.

Eight months ago, I was helping my brother, a real railroad aficionado, sort boxes in his storage unit. He is disabled so I had the joy of moving box after box for him to see inside. Each went to a pile: one to keep, one for further review and one to throw out. The first two, of course, much bigger than the last.

Halfway through I found one with 11 insulators: 7 aqua, 3 clear, and one brown porcelain--CDs 121, 145, 152, 154 and the lone U-129. I realized then I was born to collect insulators! I kept this epiphany to myself, not even telling my brother. I still haven't because his insulator box somehow had ended up on the "throw out" pile!

Insulators out of the box and onto a table in my home office sat for many weeks. Summer means vacation and baseball. When I entered the office, they'd look at me with their glassy eyes and say, "We've got a great tale to tell..." They sat there through November when I finally took the time to hear their story.

To the internet and a brief search of "Hemingray glass insulators" (because that's all I had, except the lone, unembossed U-129). I clicked on [hemingray.info](http://hemingray.info). It wasn't the first result ([hemingray.net](http://hemingray.net)) but "Database & More!" drew me into Christian Willis' splendid site.

Little did I know how broad the insulator universe really was! Perusing the FAQ page, actually every page on the site, I developed a grasp on the hobby. I didn't understand Laugh Lines comics at first, but can now chuckle with other collectors. The View All Designs page sparked a desire to acquire more insulators. And the colors! I needed me some of that!

Having seen insulators at an antiques store in Good Hope, Illinois while going to my grandparent's farm, I thought those would be a good place to start (not in Good Hope, but a little closer to home in Appleton, Wisconsin).

There were trips to Fox River Antique Mall (Appleton), Look Back In Time (Kaukauna), Wrightstown Antique Gallery (Wrightstown) and the Originals Mall of Antiques (Oshkosh). I was solo at the first three, but joined by my wife at the last one. She has no interest in collecting but is thrilled I have a new hobby I enjoy so I thank her for her support.

After a few miles, a few hours, and a few dollars, 18 "new" insulators more than doubled my collection! I now had CDs 106, 112, 113, 122, 129, 147, 151, 162 and 203. I had my first BROOKFIELD. The backwards 1 on the dome was quite intriguing. A CD 121 with a front skirt embossing of AM.TEL.&TEL.CO. made me realize there may be a lot of insulators.

Then I discovered the wonderful world of insulator collectors. I read about names like Pony and Keg and Beehive. I read about glass makers producing thousands, millions, and billions of insulators, all allowing "modern" technology to work by blocking electrons from reaching the ground. I learned more about how the glass got its color. Collecting seemed to be right up my alley. History. Organizing. Utility. Beauty. Low entry cost. Talking with others who share my interest. Wait a minute, I couldn't check that box...yet.

The best part of any hobby is connecting with those who share our enthusiasm for collecting. I was missing that piece. I joined NIA (Member #10,450), jumped in on Facebook groups and posted to NIA Companion. But there had to be more.

The January 2022 "Beat the Winter Blahs" insulator swap meet was the best place for my first show. After a 4-hour drive and a night at a hotel (free! Thanks rewards), I arrived fresh and ready to go. The venue was small, comfortable and cozy. But that didn't limit the range of tables and displays and people.

Gene Hawkins was the first bona fide insulator collector I ever spoke with and it was an honor. I don't recall exactly what we talked about (does it really matter?), but remember one thing --- "Peru." I lived in Peru, Indiana until I was 10 and Gene told me about a CD 164 embossed K.C.G.W. with PERU on the rear skirt. Didn't have one at the show for me to purchase, but don't worry. I will have one in my collection soon!

I had one goal for the show - get some color. Purple was high on the list as my wife's favorite color. I had *some* restraint during the auction buying just 6 lots and only 70 insulators (including a small plastic telephone pole). I made good purchases from Cole King, Gene Hawkins and one other (whose name I can't recall). I now had olive green, green, dark aqua, light aqua, smoke, Hemingray blue, blue, and yes...the coveted purple insulator. Satisfaction was high.

After eight months of collecting, I'm not quite out of newbie status but headed towards amateur status. I'm acquiring tools of the trade (price guide, McDougald Volume 1 and the like). I'm reading back issues of magazines and newsletters. I've done a few online auctions. And I've even given away my first insulator to the young son of a friend.

I've read about lots of different reasons people enjoy collecting insulators, and I can say with confidence --- I agree with all of them. Happy collecting, everyone!



Most of Matthew's collection is in a temporary display. This is the rest of Matthew's collection that conveniently fits onto the windowsill next to the temporary display.



The bulk of Matthew's collection in a temporary display until he makes the time to make a better one. Yes, the purple cabinet belongs to his wife whose favorite color is purple.



Some duplicates or damaged insulators that have color which will be displayed on Matthew's front yard garden fence to compete with the "Bottle Tree" his neighbor has across the street.

### **Wheaton Show Update**

The Saturday, April 2, 2022 show will have two halls of dealers. Masks are optional. \$3 admission. The dealer-only auction already has several contributors lined up. Bob Stahr recently acquired a collection with much of that going into the auction. Items include fruit jars, CD 106s, and a variety of porcelain. Greg Delia is bringing fresh finds from his work as a lineman. Rick Soller has a box of LRBs for the auction and a large mix of porcelain and glass insulators.

## **Advice to New and Old Collectors: Look Closely & Keep an Inventory**

Look Closely. At some point, all collectors realize what insulators are common to the hobby. The temptation, then, is to stop inspecting these when you visit antique stores, attend auctions, go on insulator hunts, or scour a show looking for additions to your collection.

This is a mistake. There are many hidden gems amongst the common insulators. Imagine the thrill of finding a clear, CD 154 MR Hemingray at an antique store and learning that what looks like a \$1 insulator could fetch as much as \$800. Perhaps you could discover a large rock in an aqua CD 145 H.G.Co. beehive or the impression of a coin in the dome of a clear CD 122. A clear CD 113 might have a yellow stripe down the side, or a dirty CD 162 might have amber in it. Perhaps a nail or a graphite trail will be noticed upon closer inspection.

There are many lesser but still worthwhile gems to look for in common insulators. There are, for example, many misspellings on insulators or other embossing errors. These include missing middle bars in the letter "E," backwards letters (as in the CD 145 Hawley), misspelled words (like "Hemigay" instead of "Hemingray"), insulators with the name of the company missing and only a patent date listed on the skirt.

Keep an Inventory. In some ways, an inventory will serve as a reminder of all the fun experiences you had in building your collection. It will remind you of when and where you acquired an insulator and who was involved in the acquisition.

An inventory, however, goes beyond just being a journal about your collecting. Depending on how you set the inventory up, it can be used as an address book of fellow collectors, a record of what you paid for insulators, a small-scale price guide, and more.

In my database, I include information on who I got an insulator from if it was a purchase at a show or part of a collection I bought. In particular, I include, if possible, their name, email, eBay name, street address, city, state, and phone number. If I am going to travel somewhere, I might check my database to determine if there is a collector in the area that I have dealt with before and arrange to meet them. If I notice that I have bought a lot of insulators from a dealer, I make sure to head to their table early in a show or to contact them via email before the show to let them know what I am looking for.

When I record the price I paid for an insulator, I also keep track of what the seller was asking. This helps me know what kind of discount the seller typically charges. For insulators I bought off the internet, I also keep track of postage, taxes, and buyer premiums I paid. Collectors who don't go to many shows may find that this data helps them realize what a cost saving attending a show might be.

An inventory might also keep track of what you sell. When I buy a collection, keeping an inventory helps me know if I overpaid for it and when I've recovered my investment. My initial inventory only recorded the sales price. Several months ago, I added more information about my expenses associated with the sale such as eBay fees, hotel costs, travel expenses. I also include my estimate of what I think something will sell for. Based on my data, although I am frequently wrong about the selling price of a particular insulator, for a group of insulators, I am pretty accurate.

An inventory also helps with knowing what is in my collection. I can sort mine because it is in an Excel spreadsheet. If I am looking at an insulator on the internet, I can check to see if I own it already and, if so, if I am looking for an upgrade. If I buy an upgrade, the inventory reminds me about what I paid for the piece which helps in pricing it to sell.

## **Upcoming Shows**

**Saturday, April 2, 2022**

**Wheaton, Illinois**

The Dupage Collectors Expo will be held Saturday, April 2nd, at the Dupage County Fairgrounds, 2015 Manchester Road, Wheaton, Illinois. Hours are 9:00 AM to 3:00 AM. Items for sale & trade include Insulators, Lightning Rod items & Weathervanes, Telephone & Telegraph items, Bottles, Jars, etc. Info: BOB STAHR: [bob@hemingray.com](mailto:bob@hemingray.com) (630) 793-5345 and RICK SOLLER: [com574@clcillinois.edu](mailto:com574@clcillinois.edu) (847) 782-8602

**Saturday, April 23, 2022**

**Strongsville, Ohio**

Western Reserve Insulator Club's 23rd Annual Swap Meet & Club Meeting at the Spyglass Hill Recreation Center, 13201 Compass Point Drive, Strongsville, OH 44136. This show formerly our "Winterfest" but shifted to "Springfest" this year. Dealer Setup: 9:00am; Show Hours: 10:00am-3:00pm. Club Meeting and Lunch: 12-1:30pm. There are no admission or table charges, but space is very limited, so please contact us ahead of time if you plan to set up! Info / RSVP to JOHN HOVANEC (216)392-3622, email [jrhovanec@ymail.com](mailto:jrhovanec@ymail.com)

**Saturday, April 30, 2022**

**St. Louis Park, Minnesota**

Spring is here in Minnesota and the North Western Insulator Club invites you to our 2022 Spring Meet. The new location this year will be at the headquarters of "MATTER" located at 7005 Oxford St, St Louis Park, MN. The event will be hosted by Joel Anderson and Bruce Konold. The meeting space is large and tables are free. Hours are 9 am to 3 pm. Lunch is pot luck with water and coffee provided. Contact the hosts with questions and to confirm your tables. They are [joel@matter.ngo](mailto:joel@matter.ngo) or 651-285-0483 or [brucekonold@eaganhills.org](mailto:brucekonold@eaganhills.org) or 652-470-4961. We have long time collectors-2 or 3 so far that are in process of downsizing so there will be deals galore!

**Friday & Saturday, May 6-7, 2022**

**Columbia City, Indiana**

The 2022 Columbia City, Indiana Collectibles Show is May 6 & 7 at the Whitley County 4H Center, 581 Squawbuck Rd., Columbia City, IN. This is one of the least expensive shows to attend or be a dealer. Show info, contact Gene Hawkins [gene.hawkins@mchsi.com](mailto:gene.hawkins@mchsi.com) or Mike McLaughlin 574-377-5490 for other show info or for dealer tables. Friday dealer setup noon-2 PM Open to public at 2 PM Friday 5 PM Pizza. Friday 5:30 PM Show & Tell, where folks bring really cool stuff with special stories. Always interesting stuff comes off collector's shelves for discussion, things you won't see unless you visit them as it often isn't for sale, just special! PLEASE Bring something with a story to share with us! Saturday doors open for dealer set up at 6 AM, public at 7 AM. Saturday at 10 AM will be another auction, so clean out the closet & bring your clutter! Dealers can pack up whenever they need to do so.