

Calgary Herald

Brier collectors barter in pin-trading paradise

By Robert Remington, Calgary Herald March 14, 2009.

Roger Degagne is a stone's throw away from having his ultimate curling pin collection.

If he can locate a rare pin from the 1940 Brier, he'll have every Brier "door pin" ever made.

Degagne recently bid \$1,600 for one on eBay, but failed to get it. If another comes up, he's prepared to go well above that figure.

"It's the only I don't have," says the affable Winnipeg man, dubbed the "Prince of Pins."

He is attending his 10th consecutive Brier and 15th overall.

Degagne is one of several avid pin collectors at the Brier who have tables set up at an upper concourse at the Saddledome. Spread out on pieces of red felt or neatly tucked inside protective plastic covers, their pins glitter in the sunlight that streams in from a window behind them. In this pin-trading paradise, the most sought-after pins are bought and sold. Others are traded for another pin of equal value, or negotiated for the price of a beer or glass of wine. This is, after all, the most social game on the planet.

The rarest and most valuable Canadian curling pins are the so-called "gold heart" pins from 1927, the first year of the Brier. Only 12 were made. The Halifax Curling Club is in possession of four of them and is said to have once spurned an offer of \$50,000 for the set.

Heart pins are given to competitors, officials and sponsors and are generally not available to the public, although they are becoming more common. So-called "door pins," the official pins made for every Brier, were first manufactured in 1940, the year Degagne is missing.

There are about 40 official pins at this year's Brier, including door pins and 33 put out by sponsors.

Degagne doesn't collect the vintage heart pins, which are expensive beyond most people's reach. In addition to his Brier door pins, he'd rather collect pins from individual curling clubs.

"I'd like to collect every club pin in Canada, but I don't think I can," says Degagne.

It would be Herculean task. There are about 12,000 curling clubs across the country.

For Degagne and other hardcore collectors, curling has become almost secondary to their pin-collecting passion.

"For me, the Brier is about people first, then pins, then the curling."

Degagne says he wouldn't part with his collection for \$10,000.

Calgary pin collector Alex Biletski is searching for Brier door pins prior to 1952. "I also need a '58 and '55."

Vic Freidin of Toronto, on the lookout for 1950s-era door pins, bought one this year for \$300, a good price. "My buddy gave me a deal," Freidin said.

Collector Jim Easson says a 1950 door pin sold for \$350 two weeks ago on eBay.

Like many Calgarians, Scott Hayes started collecting pins at the 1988 Winter Olympics. His passion is postal service pins from around the world. He has about 2,500 in his collection, along with about 200 curling pins.

Calgary's Gerry Malin, who also got bitten by the pin-collecting bug at the 1988 Winter Olympics here, began amassing curling pins at the 1997 Brier. He has about 1,200.

"Some of the people who have been at it for years have 5,000 or 6,000 or more," Malin said.

Malin specializes in collecting pins from Briers, world championships and provincial men's championships.

None of the collectors say they are in it for money.

"It's a hobby," says Malin. Says Freidin: "Half the fun is

meeting people and talking to them between games when they come by the table."

Pin collectors say there is another benefit to collecting pins. Minding their tables keeps them out of the Brier Patch.

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