
Virginia Woman Preserves Lifelong Napkin Collection for Cultural Legacy



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A Virginia woman's decades-long passion for collecting paper napkins has resulted in the preservation of her unique archive, offering a distinctive and meaningful glimpse into American

culture and everyday life over multiple generations.

Charlotte LaRoy began collecting napkins as a child in the 1940s, gradually amassing more than 1,100 pieces. Her collection includes humorous bar prints, promotional items, political memorabilia, and designs reflecting historical events, capturing evolving social trends and cultural shifts across decades.

After years of privately safeguarding her collection, LaRoy entrusted it to the Library of Virginia, where curators have preserved it carefully alongside historical artifacts. The archive transforms ordinary disposable items into a rich tapestry of personal memories, historical references, and cultural snapshots, ranging from map-shaped pieces found on family trips to napkins marking weddings, anniversaries, and official celebrations.

Archivists describe the collection as ephemera—everyday objects rarely saved—which provide valuable insight into social history, much like old labels, postcards, or school reports, offering a tangible link to past lifestyles.

Though LaRoy rarely displayed her collection publicly, revisiting it has brought her deep personal satisfaction, especially when encountering napkins connected to her family milestones and memorable occasions.

The preservation of this eclectic collection highlights how even humble objects can serve as

meaningful records of personal, social, and cultural history, showing how ordinary moments can illuminate broader societal narratives for future generations.