

A Note from  
CHS President Gary T. Johnson

---

[Whose Portrait is Hanging in Gary's Office?](#)  
[Archived Articles Index](#)

**June 1, 2006**  
***Museums Exist Because of Collectors***

As a museum president, I am reminded of this simple truth every day. There are times when a false dichotomy is drawn between private collectors and public museums, but the fact is that our museum, any museum, exists to a great degree because of the impulse to collect by private individuals. The rich and idiosyncratic collection of Charles Gunther was the biggest factor in restoring the Chicago History Museum during the decades after our collection was destroyed by the Great Chicago Fire. We have benefited from donations of collections over the years, and we continue to do so today. I often have meetings that move on to a new exciting stage when one of my guests reaches into a briefcase and pulls out treasured objects to show me. Chicago is filled with individuals who are assiduously collecting one type of material or another that would be dispersed, lost, forgotten or destroyed were it not for that characteristic zeal that collectors display to form a collection and to make it complete. The irony is that this is their hobby, this is their passion, yet collectors are doing the work that we have neither the staff nor the funds to do ourselves. Some day, much of what they collect will wind up in our museum. Chicago's collectors are treasured friends and allies in the cause of history.



Gary T. Johnson  
CHS President