

Record

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during the pandemic.

Tens of thousands of advertising pencils are neatly tucked away in containers. Many are labeled and sorted alphabetically by the states the pencils came from. When it comes to Iowa and Minnesota pencils, they are divided even further by the cities they came from. This is the result of years of dedicated collecting.

Upon his graduation from Wartburg, Bartholmey found more free time to expand his collection by going to flea markets and traveling the state. Searching through flea markets and thrift stores was a hobby he was well accustomed to, in part because it was something he and his grandfather would regularly do.

“It was a magical time,” he said. “I’ve always loved old stuff, especially once I had something to collect. All the older dealers enjoyed seeing a kid run around, and they wanted to teach you everything they could. It was at one of those flea markets early on that somebody told me about a pencil collector’s club.”

It would be several years later before Bartholmey joined the American Pencil Collectors Society, some of whom were present during the count at the Colfax museum. The nonprofit hobby group of about 130 members traces its roots back to the 1950s. Bartholmey now serves as the group’s secretary and treasurer.

“We have members from all across the country and a few international members. Every other year we have a convention. We have a newsletter that comes out every other month,” he said. “Everybody’s got their own niche. Some do



Bill Bean, a member of the American Pencil Collectors Society, unwraps a bundle of pencils that needed to be counted during Aaron Bartholmey’s Guinness World Record attempt for largest pencil collection.

xxxx/Jasper County Tribune

the bullet pencils or the mechanical pencils. You just kind of find your own little area.”

Bill Bean, of Rochester, Minn., is a longtime member of the American Pencil Collectors Society, and he has even served as board president at one point. At the count in Colfax, he would unbundle all of the pencils in their boxes before presenting them to the two counters.

“This is a very good collection,” Bean said while unfastening the paper strips holding the pencils together. “I think it’s even bigger than mine. Of course I’ve never counted mine, which I think is around 45,000. I was surprised to learn the record was 24,000. I could have beat that. But I don’t want to go to all this work.”

As far as Bean knows, Bartholmey is but a handful of

the younger collectors in the group. Pencil collecting may be more of an older generation’s game, but Bean again emphasized that Bartholmey’s collection far exceeds his own. As different as their collections may be, they both enjoy “the hunt” the most.

Bartholmey loves the camaraderie and life-long connections by being a part of the American Pencil Collectors Society. Conventions, he said, feel like family reunions. For many members of the group, the Colfax count was the first time they had ever seen Bartholmey’s collection in full. He was thrilled to see their reactions.

“It’s fun to see the other big collectors who have their own massive collections dig through the stuff and go, ‘Oh this is cool!’ or ‘I don’t have one of these!’”

His collection has never been a secret, and it was never meant to be either. As a seventh- and eighth-grade math teacher at Colfax-Mingo Community School District, he frequently shared his collection with students. The novelty pencils in his collection were clear favorites.

“It was something they were all well-aware of,” he said. “I’d bring them in and show them off. They all knew that I was the pencil collector.”

Bartholmey’s wife, Allison, knew of the pencil collection almost immediately. They have been married for four years, but they first met in college around 2008. His wife was originally from Oskaloosa, and around that same time the city was hosting a pencil convention. Bartholmey

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