

CULTURE

How Much Is Your Old Menorah Worth? One Collector Might Know

Tsadik Kaplan, who collects and sells prewar Judaica, will host an 'Antiques Roadshow'-style appraisal and lecture in New York this month

By Tyler Blint-Welsh / Photographs by James Sprankle for The Wall Street Journal

Dec. 16, 2019 5:12 pm ET

Tsadik Kaplan makes a living selling antique Jewish objects to wealthy clients.

But his trade is about more than money. It's his passion.

His proudest accomplishment, he says, isn't the \$30,000 jewelry box he sold to a collector, his biggest sale. It's the fact that the New York Historical Society currently has a plaque of his, honoring the children of Jewish migrants who served in World War II, on long-term loan.

"I don't treat these objects like it's the stock market," Mr. Kaplan said. "For me, it's purely an emotional, historical ride that I am taking when I try to get something I see as valuable."

His decadeslong obsession with antique Judaica has led him to amass a collection of dozens of menorahs and other artifacts.

He has loaned some, like a menorah made in a displaced persons camp during World War II, to museums in Europe. Others, like a rare ceramic menorah from the same era worth nearly \$25,000, sit in a storage unit because of security concerns.

It was Mr. Kaplan's trove of early 1920s dominoes and card games that first caught the eye of Renate Evers, director of collections at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, one of the world's largest archives of German-Jewish history.

Mr. Kaplan offered the games to Ms. Evers on loan, giving the institute the ability to digitize them. As she learned more about his work, Ms. Evers said, she realized what a passionate collector Mr. Kaplan was and decided to look for another opportunity to showcase his



Tsadik Kaplan was recently outside of the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan.

This year, the institute—which is part of the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan—will have eight of Mr. Kaplan's pre-World War II menorahs on display until Dec. 30.

And in an experiment of sorts for the Leo Baeck Institute, Mr. Kaplan will also host an Antiques Roadshow-esque appraisal event in New York on Dec. 22 that invites visitors to bring in old menorahs, Kiddush cups, candlesticks and Torah ornaments to learn their potential value.

Such interactive lectures are a rarity for the institute, Ms. Evers said, adding that budget constraints typically make it hard to gain access to a collection as deep as Mr. Kaplan's.

"We're very confident because of what we have seen from him and what he knows," she said.

"He's an expert, and his collection is just first-class."

What started as a "little obsession" has grown into a daily endeavor for Mr. Kaplan. He scours the web for hours, searching for rarities and chatting with auction houses across Europe. He even writes a regular appraisal column for the Jewish Press, the largest independent U.S. weekly Jewish newspaper.

Mr. Kaplan's collection is exclusively pre-World War II artifacts, an interest he said was carved out by his family's own experience with the Holocaust. His grandparents met in a displaced persons camp, after his grandfather's family was slaughtered and after his grandmother was released from years in forced labor and concentration camps. His mother, he said, was born in



A silver-plated brass menorah in the Art Nouveau style, center, was displayed at the Center for Jewish History.

“It becomes much more meaningful, obviously, and emotional when you’re dealing with items belonging to Jews that lived in Europe before the

war, where a great many did not survive,” he said.

Mr. Kaplan, 43 years old, has sourced antiques from countries including England, Denmark, Germany and France. But it’s the attics of Upper Manhattan, he says, that have consistently brought him value.

One of the menorahs on display at the Leo Baeck Institute—a brass, art nouveau-style ornament dating to around 1900—was brought to the Upper East Side by a family that settled there after fleeing Germany in the 1930s.

“There are more unique Jewish objects in the attics of New York City apartments and homes, than there are in all the Jewish museums in America, just waiting to be discovered,” said Mr. Kaplan.

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