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Stories from our town

RED ALERT: HOME TOUR INCLUDES UNUSUAL COLLECTION

By Karen Taylor Gist
Associate editor

Maybe it's no coincidence that Ed Kleppinger collects glass stained the color of passion.

It's a fitting match for a man so consumed with ruby stain glass, manufactured in the United States from 1891 to 1920, that he's filled a whole house with the stuff.

You can take a look inside his temperature-, light- and humidity-controlled 1,200-square-foot museum during Saturday's Faubourg Marigny Home Tour, which includes six homes, a couple of gardens and a glass studio in the historic neighborhood.

The museum, part of a compound of houses Kleppinger owns on Royal Street, takes you back to a time before people bought tacky T-shirts and plastic figurines, when even souvenirs and knickknacks were things of beauty. It's filled downstairs and up with rows of enclosed glass shelves glinting and glistening with every shape object imaginable: trains, handbags, dainty little slippers and pianos.

Pieces also were commonly

engraved as keepsakes. Kleppinger's "Harriet" collection is a mini travelogue that contains three matching tumblers and a milk pitcher, all engraved with "Harriet" and the various dates of fairs held in 1922, '23 and '24.

There are useful pieces such as pitchers and goblets, and the kinds of specialty items the Victorians adored — toothpick holders, banana stands, butter pat dishes and even a serving piece crafted just for sardines.

The ruby stain was added to patterned glass, designed to mimic the textures of the more expensive cut glass. That meant the ruby stain glass was so affordable, Kleppinger said, that it was found in the Montgomery Ward catalog, offering a touch of elegance for every home.

"It was made to be used," Kleppinger said. "That's one of the things I love about it."

Kleppinger said his wife, Willie, once described his personality to a friend: "He thinks that if one is good, 10 is better." That would explain why the thousands of pieces fill not only the museum, but also a storage area in an adjacent house, where the objects are cataloged and the duplicates are stored.

Hand-lettered cards in the museum list the manufacturers and pattern names, but Kleppinger is a walking encyclopedia about the glass collection, which he says includes a number of pieces that are extremely rare and valuable.

Those who prefer to see their history in the form of bricks and mortar will enjoy the other houses on the self-guided tour of



STAFF FILE PHOTOS BY JENNIFER ZDON

Kleppinger's collection of ruby stain glass includes useful but beautiful items such as the plate, above, as well as knickknacks such as the souvenir tumblers at right.

the Marigny Rectangle area. The faubourg, originally laid out by wealthy Creole landowner Bernard de Marigny (1785-1868), was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

Architectural styles on the tour include single and double shotgun, two-bay Creole cottage, a Greek Revival church converted into a glass and metal studio, and a block-long courtyard and garden where local artists will display and sell their works.

The tour also includes a two-bay Creole cottage from around 1830 and an 1800s barge-board carriage house that belong to Ed Kleppinger. If you go, you'll see that he has a passion for other forms of preservation as well.

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Faubourg Marigny Home Tour

When: Sunday, noon to 4 p.m.

What: A self-guided tour of homes in the Marigny Rectangle district of the Faubourg Marigny

Tickets: \$15, at Coffee, Friends Cafe, 2401 Burgundy St., or Sound Café, 2700 Chartres St.

Information: Call 948-3256



Ed Kleppinger's ruby stain glass collection, seen here through one of dozens of glass cases, is part of the Faubourg Marigny Home Tour. The self-guided walking tour highlights the Marigny Rectangle district of the Faubourg.