

# Napoleon's Tooth: Junk or Jewel?



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s inexplicable as the acquisition of “trout lips” by women in pursuit of the pouty look popularized by numerous entertainment personalities and Dennis Rodman, is the coveting of antiques.

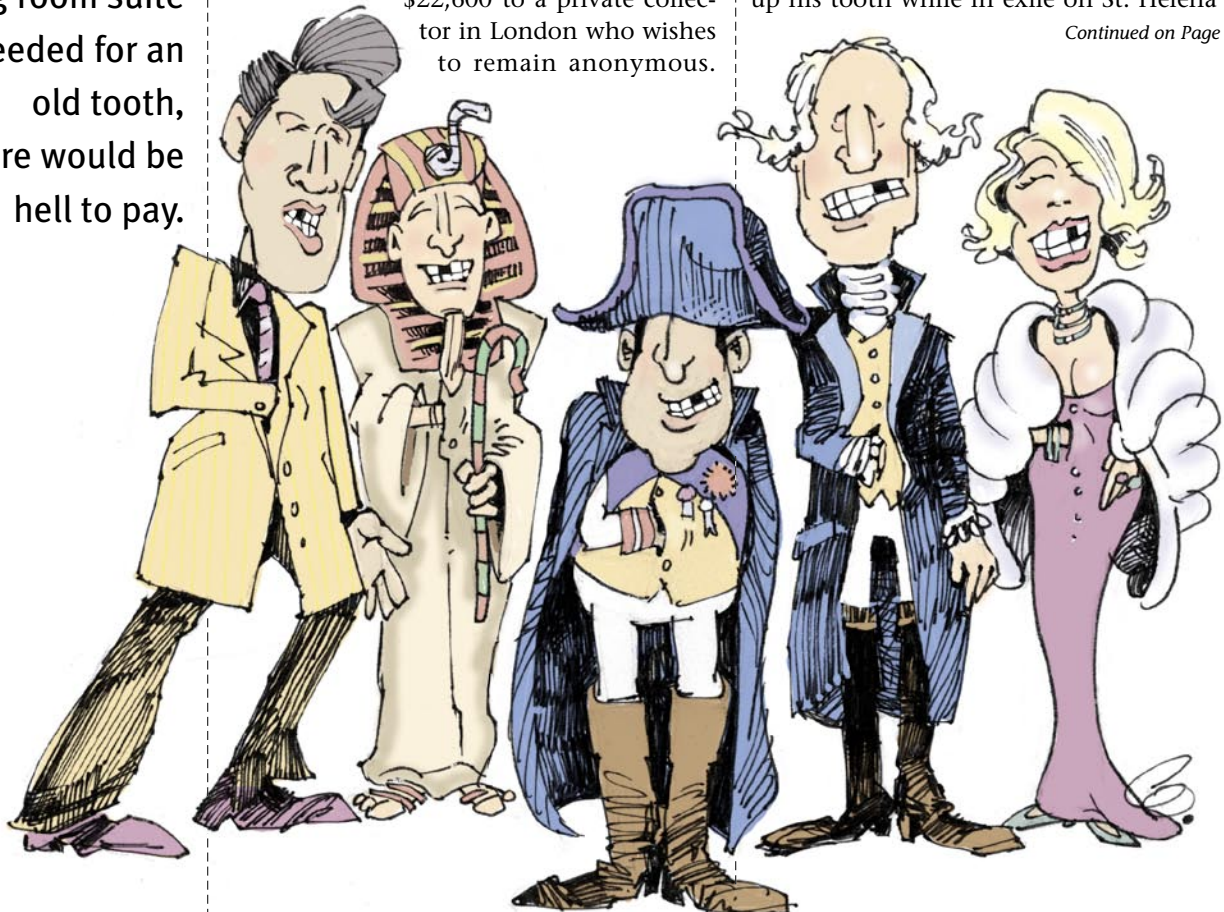
An antique by any other name would not cost so much, but label a piece of junk as an “antique” and anyone can become rich if he can just guess when that piece of junk becomes a rare antique.

Case in point: Dominic Winter, an auction house in Swindon, southwest England, has just sold one of Napoleon's teeth for \$22,600 to a private collector in London who wishes to remain anonymous.

Understandably, for if his wife ever found out he had blown the new living room suite they needed for an old tooth, there would be hell to pay. Pity, because we know of at least 100,000 dentists who would like to have a chat with him. The dentists have on hand upwards of a million extracted teeth, any one of which could be foisted off as formerly gracing the mouth of anybody from King Tut to Marlene Dietrich.

If you can believe the authenticating papers accompanying the Napoleonic dentition, the little former French emperor gave up his tooth while in exile on St. Helena in

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1817. His physician, Barry O'Meara, who is said to have been the exodontist, shrewdly figured the price of the famous man's tooth would increase as its usefulness to its owner ended. It was then apparently squirreled away with other valuable assets such as Bonaparte's vest with the missing button for easy access to his tiny chest by his right hand, only to materialize 188 years later at auction. Let us hope that this one Napoleonic tooth will not lead to a disinterment to discover if any of the other 31 are up for grabs.

George Washington's dentist, John Greenwood, either restrained by higher ethical standards, or not realizing one man's defunct tooth might be another man's treasure, missed the collectible boat entirely. George was supposed to have had only one natural tooth of his own at the time he became president. Think of what this artifact would bring on the auction block today!

The mania for deceased persons' preserved parts shows no abatement. Witness Michael Jackson's attempt to own a piece of the Elephant Man and even more recently, the debacle on eBay. That bizarre event occurred when what was purported to be one of Elvis Presley's teeth was put up for bids. Not since the celebrated bidding war of 1983 when an embroidered white satin shirt with

authentic gravy stains and a scratch-and-sniff area emitting a certified porkchop aroma had there been such excitement! Within hours, the Elvis tooth bidding had gone well past \$1 million and was rising rapidly to something rivaling the national debt. Alarmed eBay officials, sensing a hoax, were forced to withdraw the item with its corroborating pictures from the Internet.

Dentists, logging on to witness this strange event, were much amused, because the Elvis tooth was nothing more than a molar PFM — no tooth, no roots and exactly like tens of millions of other molar PFM crowns from people you never heard of.

It was, however, the occasion for some introspection. Suppose we search our records for celebrities, real or imagined. If we have a live one, keep him or her on a rigid recall until, sooner or later, one of them loses a tooth. Do not allow the Tooth Fairy to horn in on this scenario. Hang onto this potential gold mine, keeping it safe in some glycerin and water and voila!—a hundred years from now, some pigeon will think it an honor and a privilege to pay an emperor's ransom to redeem it. Think of it. One of Johnny Carson's impacted thirds, or an original rendition of Bugs Bunny's centrals!

And we think the botox people are nutty. Go figure!

**CDA**