

One of a kind

Victoria lawyer Jonathan Arnold has an Internet hit with his Museum Of Legal Ephemeron.

By Ava Chisling



“I just want people to have a physical bond with legal history, with some of the things that have affected our lives.”

Jonathan Arnold, Victoria
with exhibits from his Museum
Of Legal Ephemeron

In 2005, criminal lawyer Jonathan Arnold thought it would be fun to own a Carboloc Smoke Ball, the anti-flu remedy famous to law students everywhere. He began scouring the Internet looking for one to purchase.

After a long search, he was excited to finally find one — although it was a lousy copy and cost \$300, way out of budget for a University of Victoria law student. But as Arnold says, “it got me started to see what else was out there.”

Three years later, that simple hunt for an iconic smoke ball has turned into a unique collection of legal

TONY BOUNSALL

Une collection unique

Découvrez le musée de souvenirs juridiques de Jonathan Arnold.

Avocat spécialisé en droit criminel à Victoria, Jonathan Arnold a un hobby qui sort de l'ordinaire: il est collectionneur de souvenirs juridiques. En 2005, alors qu'il était étudiant à l'Université de Victoria, il a fait l'acquisition sur Internet d'une bombe fumigène, autrefois employée comme remède contre la grippe et qui avait fait l'objet d'une décision judiciaire légendaire.

Trois ans plus tard, les photographies de toute une collection de souvenirs juridiques figuraient sur un site Facebook, nommé le *Musée Of Legal Ephemeron* (M.O.L.E.) ([http://www.face](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2465756660)

[book.com/group.php?gid=2465756660](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2465756660)). Plus de 250 membres, éparpillés à travers le monde, peuvent y visionner les 125 objets du musée: de vieilles munitions trouvées dans les champs de bataille de la guerre civile américaine, une collection complète d'un jeu de cartes de collection du procès de O.J. Simpson, un jeton de monnaie datant de 1934 qui marque le procès de Bruno Hauptmann, condamné à mort et exécuté pour l'enlèvement et le meurtre du fils du célèbre pilote Charles Lindbergh. Également dans sa collection: une photo dédiée par le juge Wapner, de l'émission télévisée américaine *The People's Court*.

M^e Arnold estime qu'il est le seul à posséder un musée contenant une collection de souvenirs rendant compte de l'histoire de la pratique du droit. Les objets du M.O.L.E. sont actuellement exposés dans son bureau. L'avocat achète la plupart des articles sur eBay, sans jamais payer plus de 20 \$ par item.

Son objectif: rendre sa collection accessible au public. Il l'imagine bien dans la bibliothèque de droit de l'University of British Columbia et il attend des nouvelles à ce sujet. M^e Arnold compte parmi les possessions les plus précieuses du musée la bombe fumigène, une copie du Code criminel datant de la Russie de Staline, ainsi que la photo des trois évadés de la prison d'Alcatraz. ■

— Yasmina El Jamaï

memorabilia called the Museum Of Legal Ephemeron (M.O.L.E.), currently available for viewing on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2465756660>).

More than 290 people from close to 30 countries are members of the online M.O.L.E. group. The real items, however, are located in Arnold's law office in Victoria.

Arnold started with 30 items and now has 125. In his collection are the serious and the silly. You'll find battlefield bullets from the American Civil War and the complete 1994 O.J. Simpson trial trading card set. There's an encased 1934 penny token from the trial of Bruno Hauptmann for the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby and a signed photo of Judge Wapner of *The People's Court*.

The M.O.L.E. collection is eclectic, and as far as Arnold can tell, it's also one of a kind. "I cannot find any museum in the world devoted to practical legal history," he says. "The ABA has a museum dedicated to the development of law, but it does not have articles like mine." He says there are many museums devoted to things like police and prisons, but there is nothing that's actually a collection of memorabilia.

An avid collector of comic books and hockey cards since his younger days, Arnold was born in Montreal but raised in Labrador City. His father was a doctor for the Salvation Army Hospital. His family was supposed to spend one year out east, but stayed for 11. He moved numerous times, to Sarnia, to Kingston (Queen's University), and eventually to Toronto, where he opened a consultancy for emerging technology companies.

Those were the bubble years, of course, and Arnold didn't want to sit around waiting for the bust. He started law at the University of Victoria in 2003, and was called to the bar in December 2007. But technology came into play again when he struck upon Facebook as the ideal vehicle for his collection.

"I put the stuff on Facebook without much expectation," he recalls. "I emailed my friends in the hopes that I could find a few pathetic individuals who would take a look at it. Now we have [290] members."

Arnold buys almost all of his items on eBay and sets a limit of \$20 per purchase. He gets priced out a lot, but from time to

time, deals come along that allow him to add to his collection. His goal is to display his collection publicly.

"I've spoken to UBC about putting my collection in its library, so students can see, touch and feel the items," he says. "UBC is building a new faculty of law, and U Vic is renovating their law library, so they don't want to take anything on right now. They seem interested, but we have to wait."

Arnold wants the legal and broader communities to get in touch with history via his collection. "In my experience, there is very little out there that allows you to do that. I just want people to have a physical bond with legal history, with some of the things that have affected our lives. To be able to see that in the flesh would be great.

"A lot of people are not aware of how law affects their lives on a day-to-day basis. These are things you would never see in your lifetime if you didn't take the opportunity to go see the collection."

Judging by the collection, it's hard to tell if Arnold loves law or he simply loves things, or both. "At this point, they go hand in hand," he says. "I get a kick out of the novelty of the items, like the Watergate ashtray and the Wapner photo. I haven't got Judge Judy yet."

Among his many items, Arnold has his favourites. "I believe the top three items from my collection are the Carbolite Smoke Ball, the criminal code from Stalinist Russia — that's a pretty rare item — and... I don't want to say Judge Wapner, so I'll say it's the original picture of the three escapees from Alcatraz."

If there's a holy grail for M.O.L.E., it's the original ginger beer bottle from the landmark *Donohue v. Stevenson* case. "There's a retired Court of Appeal judge in Vancouver who apparently has that bottle. The closest I've gotten, as you can see on the site, is exactly the same bottle, manufactured by the same people but for a different brewery.

"I would also love the Magna Carta," he adds. "But the last one went for \$13 million or so, which is a little out of my budget." ■

Avia Chisling is a media lawyer in private practice and the managing director of *Strut Magazine* in Montreal.