

Looking for a history lesson? You need look no further than downtown Winslow, where Bainbridge resident Christopher Charles' houses his vast store of maps, charts, books and other items of historical significance.

With the opening of Fleetstreet just over a year ago, Charles' continues to nurture his passion for collecting which began as a youngster collecting coins, stamps and books. As he grew older and began travels including a stint with the Peace Corps, his appreciation for history continued to grow.

The business name comes from the London street which was the center of the publishing industry. It was also the street leading from the downtown business district to the wharves, where naval fleets docked. The maritime and publishing connotations seemed especially appropriate for Bainbridge Island.

Many of the charts and maps you find for sale in the shop are from Charles' personal collection, amassed over the years. Others come from scouts in London, Paris and beyond who search specifically for pieces relating to the Pacific Northwest.

Charles' estimates he has between 400 to 500 collectors maps of the northwest, including a series detailing the delineation of Washington as a state. "This intriguing set of maps illustrates how Washington territory came to be what we know today, dividing from Washington, to Oregon, Idaho and Montana. Other original maps of exploration and discovery of the Pacific Northwest include Cook's charts. Collections also include maps detailing Meares mythical voyage to Vancouver, the first map to show Vancouver as an island.

Other treasures in store are original maritime navigational maps, and historical documents handwritten in painstakingly detailed calligraphy. Christopher is currently attempting to decipher a newly acquired manuscript from 1688 which dates back to the time of transition between the Dutch and English. The oldest piece in his collection is a hand written manuscript from the court of King Henry IV in 1406.

In the store you will also find original art created for Diderot, publisher of the first known encyclopedias from the 1700's. Diderot's intent was to show the evolution of the technologies of the day. Illustrations include everything from the art of fencing and glassblowing to the crafting of beer.

A recently acquired collection of political cartoons from European magazines provides an interesting perspective on the politics of the day. Captured in color that is still crisp in detail, well-known artists such as Gillam and Keppler provided an entertaining twist to political life with their imaginative caricatures. Yet another (treasure) allows you to glimpse a bird's eye view of a medieval French town. Though the illustration is from 1573, the town remains much the same today. Because most of the illustrations are done on 100% hand-laid paper, using natural inks, the color and vibrancy remains despite the age of the documents.

Whether you are looking for historical perspective or searching for a gift for the history buff in the family, Fleetstreet is definitely worth the trip!

