

Occupational Shaving Mugs

THE ANNA SAFLEY HOUSTON COLLECTION



During the 1800s, when indoor plumbing was a luxury, men often visited the barber shop for a shave. Barbers would use one mug, containing a bar of soap, to provide lather for all their customers.

In the 1870s a fungus known as “barber’s itch” spread to some shops. Barbers encouraged men to order their own shaving mugs, though it was likely razors that were at fault.

Customers names were shown in gold on these mugs, but since many men were illiterate, mugs showing trade symbols, flowers, and other decorations later became popular.



Houston Museum
of Decorative Arts

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Anna Safley Houston, pioneering businesswoman and antiques collector, curated a remarkable collection of over 15,000 items, spanning glassware, pottery, textiles, furniture, and much more.



From 1891 to 1914 occupational shaving mugs experienced their heyday.

After safety razors with disposable blades became commonplace, the number of barber shops began to decline. By the 1950s, these examples of American Folk Art had become collectible.

