

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

(The first in a series of profiles of SCBA members with novel avocations or sideline careers.)

# Floyd Sarisohn, Esquire: The "Mother" of All Chess Collectors

By George L. Roach

*Local lawyer to exhibit collection at Smithtown Historical Society from September 14th through November 14th ... A must see!!!*

I'm always fond of saying I am more impressed by what people do than by what they are. In the case of SCBA member Floyd Sarisohn and his bride, Bernice, what impressed me is one of the most magnificent chess set collections I have ever seen. A visit to Floyd and Bernice's is not only a visit to their home, but a visit to a veritable chess museum. The experience was both fascinating and captivating.

If you visit Floyd and Bernice's in Commack, and I hope you do, you will not have to look for the address number on the house. Ten-foot giant chess pieces welcome you to one of the finest private collections of chess sets you will ever get a chance to view. Greeted by Floyd and Bernice, adorned in their curators' chess attire, I was guided through room after room of chess sets. Like "Alice in Wonderland," I saw every conceivable type or theme of chess set imaginable on display. Everything from the exotic to, yes, the erotic.

Floyd and Bernice have spent over 40 years of their married life together traveling the world to its remote outposts in search of chess sets. What first strikes your mind is exactly how many chess sets are collected under their roof. Bernice estimated that at last count there were over 850 sets on display. Their collection is absolutely mind boggling and must be seen to be believed. Those sets with political, legal, or historical themes will be on public display locally at the Smithtown Historical Society, located just next door to the Smithtown Library, from September 14th through November.

The themes and materials are of infinite variety. One set has a good versus evil motif. One side of the chess board features busts and likenesses of U.S. Supreme



**Floyd and Bernice Sarisohn with some of their chess sets.**

Court Justices as well as J. Edgar Hoover. The evil side was adorned with the likes of Al Capone and Bonnie Parker as king and queen; pawns were infamous personages such as Sacco and Vanzetti, Leopold and Loeb, Bruno Hauptman, Carol Chessman. The largest set, in terms of piece size, was a full set of Old Crow bourbon

bottles glass blown in the traditional chess set forms we know today and followed closely by War of the Roses Scotch bottles. Another set was constructed from real egg shells. Another featured hand carved wooden fruit versus hand-carved wooden vegetable. Sets acquired in exotic venues were of hand-carved mammoth tusk ivory over 2,000 years old. Eskimo, Hopi Indian and whale tusk ivory are all on display. My personal exotic favorite: the shrunken head chess set from the wilds of Borneo. The oldest set in the collection is of Venetian glass and dates from circa 1780. There is also a replica of the earliest known complete chess set from the Isle of Lewis circa the 11th century (1050).

Sports memorabilia fans will be in for a real treat to see the Golden Age of Baseball set featuring the American League versus the National League, complete with statistics. You will see ethnic sets, cartoon character sets, Irish leprechauns, Celtic warriors, Battle of the Sexes, Greek women versus Roman men, gods versus mortals, historical themes (Civil War, American Revolution), and the Crusades. I asked Floyd if he had a personal favorite among his collection whereupon he led me to a large set made from Danish porcelain manufactured in Copenhagen by Bing & Grøndahl depicting, what else, the Moors versus the Saracens (Sarisohns - get it!).

This collection is mind boggling and must be seen to be believed. I wish to thank Floyd and Bernice, my gracious hosts, for inviting me into their home for a truly unique experience. I intend to go back and this time bring my family. If you run into Floyd in the courthouse, diary a date to see this other side of an attorney-at-law. See you at the Smithtown Historical Society.

*If you have a unique talent, collection or hobby that you would like profiled, please contact the Suffolk Lawyer, Dorothy Ceparano, Editor-in-Chief.*

*Editor's Note: The author is the Second Vice President of the Suffolk County Bar Association and a Past Dean of the Suffolk Academy of Law.*