

# the Strange! the Weird! the Macabre!

## Oddities in the Merrimack Valley

by **Artemis Savory**

photos by **Adrien Bisson**

### **A strange and curious thing has started happening in Lowell.**

Every month or so at Mill No. 5, the fifth floor is taken over by displays of taxidermied wildlife, funeral items, doll heads in teacups, dark drawings and old maps. The Oddity Marketplace, as the event is called, draws lovers of the macabre and vendors willing to provide them with a regular dose of the unusual and unexpected.

Laura Morriseau, the first vendor I met, owns Creative Cinderella, where she repurposes spiderwebs in items such as jewelry, coasters and tabletops. She's been collecting webs since she was a kid. "An older neighbor taught me how to do it when I was 9 years old using Aqua Net hair

spray and baby powder," she said.

Morriseau cleaned houses for 11 years before deciding to put her webby talent to use. "That's where the Cinderella came from," she said. Spiders, like people, like a clean web. "They spin three to five webs a day," she said. "They don't like a dirty web filled with dead bodies. That's why they spin a new one."

Amazingly, Morriseau doesn't even like spiders. She likes to collect big webs from Joro spiders in Georgia, and from Florida spiders when they let her. "I have to ask [the spiders] very nicely to step aside," Morriseau said. "If they don't step aside, then I leave the web." She's heard a rumor that there's something about gathering spiderwebs in the



Page: The Oddities Marketplace at Mill No. 5 in Lowell features vendors selling grisly and gruesome collectables. Vendors use their creativity along with their love of history to create masterpieces. This page: Beth MacDonald, owner of The Printed Vintage, shows off her works. This shop aims to keep history alive by reproducing illustrations found in old books. These reproductions include curious and colorful examples from botanical, scientific and natural history.

prints and anatomical diagrams. Her wares are for sale online and at several antique shops. Learn more at [CreativeCinderella.com](http://CreativeCinderella.com).

Everywhere at the marketplace, Candy's Curiosities & Vintage was filled with odd antiques: warning signs of measles, scarlet fever and

Other vendors included Anthony DiDomenico. He left his band to start his business, which he named Pitch Canker after a fungus that attacks and kills trees. Appropriate to this business, the T-shirts and prints DiDomenico designs are dark and

Beth MacDonald of Printed Vintage finds old maps and prints, and then retouches them to bring out the colors. Printed Vintage specializes in surreal decorations built from old toys.

Nikki Deerest sells taxidermied skunks, coyotes and squirrels. Squirrels are her favorite. She learned taxidermy in a class at Harvard and, although she works with things that are dead, she said, "It's really fun to bring them back to life." Deerest also sells her creations on the craft marketplace website Etsy.

If you don't want to wait for the next marketplace, the Merrimack Valley boasts a brick-and-mortar oddities store in Haverhill called Evens & Oddities. When I was two doors down from the shop,

*(text continues on page 52)*



Not everything on sale at the bazaar is bizarre. Here, bottle caps have been refashioned to feature intricate artwork, covered in resin and converted into pins.

( continued from page 48 )

I saw a flattened bird head on the sidewalk and thought it probably belonged inside. When I brought owner Kyle Rowe out to look at it, he said, “Oh, poor thing.” Rowe, tall, blue-haired and wearing a black T-shirt decorated with a picture of an anglerfish, opened his Emerson Street shop last summer. We continued talking within the seeming chaos of his store. First, he had to move a mannequin from the couch to the arm of a chair so we could sit. “Sometimes her arms fall off,” he said. The mannequin held a head that was not her own. It was wearing a gas mask over its face.

Rowe was friendly, and he smiled a lot. He has been a self-admitted hoarder since 16, and the shop is one way he’s found to let things go. His demeanor proved that people interested in the strange and macabre aren’t always quiet, dark souls. He told me he almost lost his leg in a bad automobile accident a few years ago, and that his friends responded by sending him a skeletal leg. The leg is not for sale, but it’s on display in a glass case below the human skull he recently acquired from Chicago.

My favorite oddity in the shop was the deer head mounted to one of the walls. Pieces of white bone made from antlers were sticking out of the side of its face like a disease, and small paper flowers ran along one ear and up the deer head’s antler. It was creepy and beautiful at once. The head was badly damaged when he obtained it, so he added the antler tips and flowers to cover up the flaws, and from the deformities magic was born. Antler tips are typically purchased for jewelry and canes, and the rest of the horn is used for dog bones. The shop also sells taxidermied chicks and bats, alligator-foot back scratchers, and an assortment of products from the long-defunct Pan Am airline. If you ever wanted to learn a little bit about everything, an oddities shop might just be your place.

mvm

**The Oddity Marketplace** | Lowell, Mass. | [ALittleBazaar.market](http://ALittleBazaar.market)

**Evens & Oddities** | Haverhill, Mass. | (978) 891-5967  
[Facebook.com/EvensAndOddities](https://www.facebook.com/EvensAndOddities)