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POWAY – Forget the Honus Wagner trading card. It's nice. It's beyond rare. Forget the glasses John Lennon wore on the Sgt. Pepper album cover. Crazy. Forget everything else in Jeff Figler's stunning home museum, a Smithsonian West that makes the Hall of Champions look like my office. This guy has Sinatra's hat!

OK, so I get a bit carried away with Sinatra. But, still, Figler, who among other things is chairman of the Poway Chamber of Commerce, has Frank's hat! Priceless.

He has such an outlandish array of sports, presidential and celebrity memorabilia in a personal museum behind his house that one could spend a month in the place and not see it all. Figler, who serves on several charity boards and runs Jefferson Corporation, a Poway mailing list service, has something here.

Hundreds and hundreds of pieces. It's a lifetime's worth of work.

"I actually began serious collecting in 1998," he says.

What? All this in nine years? You have to see it to believe it. Maybe you can. Tours are conducted, with proceeds going to charity (try Figlerfoundation.com).

So I get my own tour in a handsome place that doesn't look like a vault, but really is.

We begin in the sports room. There, to the left, is the Wagner tobacco baseball card, the rarest of the rare. One of 20 or so, according to Figler. "The most pristine one just went for \$2.35 million," he says. "I'd rank mine 10th out of the 20."

Wagner had the card recalled.

"There are two theories on Wagner," Figler says. "One is that he was anti-tobacco, and when he found out his card was being promoted by a tobacco company, he put a stop to it. But, in 1948, when he coached for the Brooklyn Dodgers, his card shows him with wads of tobacco in his mouth.

"Maybe he changed. The other theory is he had the card recalled because he was only paid \$25."

The room is a cookie jar. Goodies everywhere, including two precious signed baseballs – from the '27 Yankees (including manager Miller Huggins, who didn't work much in '27 because of illness) and the 1933 All-Star Game.

There is a strong St. Louis theme, because that's Figler's hometown (his father gave him a Bob Pettit jersey long ago). I don't see much Barry Bonds stuff. A shirt and a ball, is all. There's a simple reason why. Figler can't stand Bonds, and he laughed when he read the auction house that had put a million-dollar bounty on Bonds' 756th home run ball – if it ever comes – withdrew from the bidding, saying it was concerned about public safety problems.

"I talked to Bonds once in an airport," Figler says. "He was very arrogant."

Really.



SCOTT LINNETT / Union-Tribune

Jeff Figler needs his own museum to hold his memorabilia collection.

"I think his ball will go in the \$400,000 to \$500,000 range," he says. "They say they withdrew because of security reasons, but I think there's so much adverse reaction to Bonds that the ball will go for a lot less.

"Besides, Alex Rodriguez is going to break Bonds' records, anyway. Three hundred more home runs will take him to 788. If Bonds were a decent individual, if he were a Tony Gwynn, the ball would go for more than a million."

There's Wilt Chamberlain's rookie uniform, framed with the program from the night he had his 100-point game. Balls and balls and shoes and jerseys and every coveted Hartland baseball statue (I actually have a Henry Aaron Hartland I purchased for nothing as a kid). My head was spinning.

Then we went into the presidents room. On the wall, framed, are hand-written letters from every U.S. president, including a rare William Henry Harrison, who only served a month.

"One of my three favorite items is this," says Figler, holding up a \$932.50 bi-monthly check made out to FDR in 1932. "It's one of 29 known checks made out to presidents."

There are baseballs signed by presidents. There's the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* with the famous headline: "Dewey defeats Truman." Oddly, the first paragraph of the story is upside down. There's a McKinley card that came on the bottom of a candy box.

"This McKinley card," says Figler, who puts his collection's value in seven figures, "is worth more than the Honus Wagner card."

Now how are we supposed to know these things?

The celebrity room is a gas. There's Sinatra's hat, all right, and Lennon's glasses. Figler pulls out one of five known copies of the original script for "Casablanca." I'm thinking that, if my esteemed colleague and "Casablanca" junkie Tim Sullivan saw this thing, he might grab it and run.

"It was Jack Warner's copy," Figler proudly notes.

Up on the wall is the No. 1 copy of the "Action Comics," the one in which Superman was featured for the first time. It is the most valuable comic book. On the chair is the costume George Reeves wore in the "Superman" TV series. There is a baseball signed by the cast of "The Wizard of Oz." We could go on for days.

So why, when I leave, can't I get Sinatra's hat out of my head?