

Antiques appraiser portends windfalls - or bursts bubbles



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NEW BRAINTREE - In small towns like this one, Wayne Tuiskula is likely to find a senior citizen carrying a musket worth about \$1,500 or an unusual painting - found tucked in an attic - that could fetch thousands at auction.

Sometimes, the auctioneer and appraiser might see a doll that looks old but bears a "Made in China" stamp, proving it's not the treasure it seems.

Every so often, at the events where he offers free appraisals during programs at historical societies and the like, he makes people's day when their item is worth more than they ever thought.

Other times, he breaks their hearts.

Mr. Tuiskula has done appraisals on "Antiques Roadshow" and teaches "Evaluating Your Antiques" at Worcester's Night Life adult education program. He's been a dealer at the Brimfield Outdoor Antiques Shows and run antiques shops, as well as running Central Mass. Auctions. Sunday he appraised items at the New Braintree Town Hall in a program sponsored by the Quaboag Historical Society.

Ed Londergan, Quaboag Historical Society's executive vice president, said the appraisal events are popular and it's fun to watch what people choose to have appraised.

"I didn't think we had anything to bring but as I am sitting here, I'm realizing we have quite a few things we could have brought," he said.

Sunday afternoon, there was a carriage, Victorian-styled and old-looking with interesting woodwork on the handle - but it was a reproduction.

"It's a good look but it's a modern copy," Mr. Tuiskula told the owner. "Maybe (worth) \$50."

A set of composition dolls from maybe the 1930s or 1940s, clad in sailor outfits and hats labeled Holland America Line, are collectible - though a bit of damage on the face of one reduces its value. Still, there are those who specifically collect cruise ship memorabilia and others who collect dolls, widening the audience for such pieces and making them more desirable, Mr. Tuiskula explained. In good condition, one doll was valued at about \$200, while the damaged doll's value was about half that, he said.

Popular items include specific sought-after political pieces, uncanceled stamps - especially from mainland China or Hawaii when it was known as the Sandwich Islands - and the occasional baseball card.

Some of the items Mr. Tuiskula has seen fetch high prices at auction were _____, which sold for \$46,000 in 2012, a 3.5-carat diamond and a painting by a Canadian artist, he said.

Leather firefighting buckets were also a popular item.

These days, folks can list items for sale on sites like eBay, and they can also use online auctions to help determine what their items are worth. But with a worldwide audience one is likely to learn that items thought to be valuable aren't worth what they thought, because there could be dozens of them on eBay, Mr. Tuiskula explained. Still, online auctions are a good barometer of the real value of an item.

Mr. Tuiskula said the fun of doing the appraisals is that he never knows what he might see. Once, it was some postcards signed by Alexander Graham Bell, whose invention of the telephone paved the way for later inventions which now allow us to sell items, like his postcards, online.



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