

What's It Worth? Historical Society may have answers

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By Lacey Sikora

Did you unearth a forgotten treasure hiding in the basement? Find Grandma's favorite necklace tucked away in the attic? Maybe you still aren't quite sure exactly what it is you got such a great deal on at that summer estate sale?

Whether you have a family heirloom, a treasured keepsake or simply a curiosity you'd like to know more about, the Historical Society of Oak Park-River Forest can help you put a value on it.

On Saturday, Feb. 8 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. they'll be hosting their fourth annual appraisal event, Family Heirloom or Flea Market Find: What's it Worth?, at the Nineteenth Century Charitable Association in Oak Park. Seven experienced appraisers will be on hand to examine items and offer a current market value, as well as information about the provenance of the items.

The appraisers

All seven appraisers are certified members of the International Society of Appraisers, and their varied areas of expertise guarantee that attendees will be able to find out about a wide variety of items. The appraisers are skilled at evaluating fine arts, including paintings, photographs and prints; furniture; decorative arts, including porcelain, textiles, ceramics, wood and silver; jewelry;



History in the appraising: Experts will be on hand Feb. 8 at the 19th Century Charitable Association for the Historical Society's annual What's it Worth? event. (Photo courtesy of the Historical Society)



Objects of curiosity: Now's your chance to learn more about that artifact you've been staring at for years. (Photo courtesy of the Historical Society)

books and ephemera; coins; and toys.

Appraiser John Leonard, of Leonard Auctions Inc. in Addison, will be on hand for the second year in a row to help appraise decorative arts and is looking forward to returning to Oak Park.

"Last year," Leonard said, "the event was very popular and well-attended. I do about 20-30 events like this a year, and this was definitely in the top two or three. Older communities like Oak Park and River Forest are more likely to have a lot of antiques and collectibles."

Leonard admits that not every item brought in will yield a high monetary value, but he says people often learn more about the history of an item, which can be quite satisfying. "The norm is that people find some of their things are not worth what the owners think they are worth, but we usually find some interesting things."

In 2013, Leonard helped appraise a camera collection for an attendee whose husband had been an amateur photographer.

"He had passed away, and she wasn't sure what, if any value, his collection had. We determined that [it] had an approximate value of \$8,000 to \$10,000."

"Another gentleman brought in a recovered barometer or compass from a ship that sank in the Northwest. We were able to find out many things about it online. It was not an overly valuable piece, but his relative had been on the ship, and it certainly had a lot of story and history behind it, so it was valuable in that regard."

Leonard notes that technology has aided the appraisers' ability to identify items quickly.

"With the antiques business, the Internet has become the best friend of all of us," he said. "We tend to subscribe to databases and have access to pricing guides since we do this every day, which allows us to quickly get at information a lay person might not be able to get at home. Also, at an event like this, people start handing us their iPhones or iPads to show us detailed photos of items. Obviously, it's preferable to see the piece in person, but we're used to seeing pictures in our daily business, so we can make some judgments from photos."

Another of the seven appraisers, Cathy Peters, of Cathy A. Peters Appraisal Services Inc., has been an independent art appraiser since 1998. She agrees with Leonard that many people come to an event like this just wanting to know what an item is.

"A lot of people who come to events like this have found something at a garage sale and want to know what it is," Peters said. "Maybe they just want you to identify it and figure out if they want to look into it further. With art, a true appraisal takes a lot longer than the 10 to 15 minutes we have with each person at this event, but we can get a good idea of whether or not an item needs a more in-depth appraisal."

Peters, who has volunteered her time at the Historical Society event in previous years, recalls some exciting finds.

"My first year, a family came in with a painting that turned out to be valued in the low five figures. Last year, an attendee had some Rodin drawings that appeared to be authentic. I was able to give them a value if the items were authentic, but with something of that nature, a formal, in-depth appraisal was warranted."

Surprise factor

Historical Society volunteer and event organizer Jean Guarino is not resistant to the possibility of finding a treasure in her own home and notes that the event always holds some sort of surprise for attendees.

"If you love *Antiques Roadshow*," she said, "you're going to love this event. You might have a 'Eureka' moment. This is the fourth year we've hosted the appraisal event, and every year, we've had something exciting. Things people thought were valuable were not, but things they thought were not worth anything were worth money."

Guarino herself always brings something to be appraised. This year, she wants to find out more about an object that has been in her dining room for years.

"I visited one of my favorite junk shops in Galena, where you have to dig for treasure and I found a 3- to 4-foot-high, rusted windmill. It has a great patina. It is a little bit crude to be a salesman's sample, so I'm thinking it's folk art. This is the kind of thing people can bring in. It might be something you've stared at on your wall for years, but you don't know a lot about it."

Details

Admission to the event is \$5, and the cost of an appraisal is \$15 for one item or \$40 for three items. Appraisals will be limited to three per attendee.

Pre-registration is strongly suggested due to the popularity of the event and the time required for each appraisal. Pre-registration and biographies of the appraisers are available online at www.oprfhistory.org or by calling 708-848-6755.

Sponsored by Forest Insurance Agency, Frame Warehouse, Downtown Oak Park and Gloor Realty, all proceeds from the event will benefit the Historical Society, a nonprofit community organization located at Pleasant Home in Oak Park.