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Antique Appraisal Comes to Moraga

By Sophie Braccini



A resident brings a painting for appraisal Photo
Sophie Braccini

Who has not dreamt that the old painting inherited from Aunt Bessie, or the blue china tea set found hidden behind a pile of books at an estate sale, was worth thousands of dollars? It happens. Why not to me?

The Lamorinda residents who came to the Antique Appraisal organized by the Moraga Women's Society April 27 didn't come with unreasonable expectations. They brought jewelry, stamps, furniture, silver or porcelain sets, and paintings, to get a reliable evaluation of their belongings by Michaan's Auctions. Some must have received good news, because they decided to leave their belongings with the auction house to be sold next month in Alameda.

"The man who looked at our Chinese silver tea set was much more knowledgeable and interesting than the person we had previously met at an antique road show," said Frank Comprelli after his encounter with Harry Huang, the young Michaan's appraiser who specializes in Asian Art. Huang has been with the East Bay Auction House for about a year and said he studied art and auction at Christie's in London. "I saw quite a number of interesting pieces today, mostly end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century," he said.

The Comprellis were among the 50 or so residents who came to the event at the Holy Trinity Cultural Center in Moraga. The Women's Society had planned the event carefully, with participants making advanced reservations for 15-minute appointments in one antique category.

"Normally, when you want something appraised you have to go to the appraiser," said Moraga Women's Society's Ginny Ruble. "We learned that we could have the appraiser come to us." Most people wanted to know the true value of a family heirloom. "But I would never want to sell it anyway," said Roberta Klapproth of an antique gold watch she inherited. The experts present also shared their knowledge about the pieces that were brought.

One of the most popular categories was the 'Personal Estate' table manned by Jane Alexiadis. Local resident Jane Low was having English stoneware appraised. "My mother had it," said Low as Alexiadis explained the meaning of the stamps on the back of the terrine, before taking a look at a pickle dish from a farm in South Dakota. "This one is very showy, with the flowers in a Japanese style that was very popular in the 1870s and 1880s," said Alexiadis. "This type is a bit out of favor. The value is around \$100." She went on to look at a "Blue Willow Theme" tea set, pointing out the bridge, the willow, and the birds typical of that style. "You should use and enjoy these every day," she added. "They are in very good shape."

In the center of the room Michael Rosenberg, the specialist of stamps and coins, was looking at an old dollar bill brought in by Judy Butler. "I have this old 1,000 Confederate dollar bill that comes from my husband's grandmother," she said. Rosenberg looked at it with his magnifying glass.

His verdict was implacable. "It's a fake," he said sternly.

"Today I saw a great stamp collection," he later added, "with very rare stamps from the first flight of the Zeppelin and a blue Hong Kong 1920 stamp that's probably worth \$2,000." The seasoned appraiser confirmed that he doesn't see as many stamp collectors as he used to. "You don't find anyone younger than 50 collecting stamps nowadays," he said.

A representative from Michaan's, Tammie Chambless, was there to collect the items people wanted to consign for future auctions. "We're consigning some great pieces today," she said, "that will be auctioned at our gallery on the first Sunday of next month."

The event was also a Society fundraiser to support local causes. "This is the first time we've done this event and it's just working out beautifully," said the Society's president, Jackie Reising, who brought some personal items herself. "I had a gold necklace, silver dollars and a painting appraised, so when I pass on, I can put this information in my will and my children will know not to give it to Goodwill!" she said.

The Moraga Women's Society is considering hosting this event on an annual basis. The Society's next general meeting will be held at 10 a.m. May 21 at the Holy Trinity Cultural Center, 1700 School Street, Moraga. The "speaker," Moraga flutist Carol Alban, will give a talk about the Moraga Jazz Festival scheduled this summer, before playing her flute for the group. The community is cordially invited to attend.

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[back](#)

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