

The Smart Collector: David Winter cottages still sell

The Smart Collector

Q: We're thinking about selling our 13 David Winter cottages. Is there a reputable Web site to contact?

— Joan, Tucson

A: The bad news is that the collectibles market bottomed out years ago. The good news is that David Winter cottages weathered the crash well. To sell, you need to find a motivated buyer, and that makes eBay the perfect place for those cottages. Before posting, check completed sales to see how cottages such as yours sold. If you don't want the hassle of selling, a trading assistant (find one on eBay) will do the work, for a percentage of the take.

Q: How do I have my first-edition 1885 book, the personal memoirs of U.S. Grant, authenticated? Handwritten in the front is a dedication by Grant.

— Lance, Tulsa, Okla.

A: Let me guess: The fact that the book is a first edition gives you an idea it might be valuable. Authentication would determine if the written dedication is truly that of the Civil War general, later president. The appraisal is to assess the item and determine value.

Let me save you some money. Smart collectors know I always suggest that readers find and research books on www.abebooks.com, www.biblio.com or www.bookfinder.com. If the book is of antiquarian interest, find a seller on www.abaa.org.

Following that rubric, I started with the ABAA site because the book dates to 1885. I discovered that Grant's memoirs were published in two volumes. So, if you have one book, you have only half the set. I also saw that prices are all over the place, based on condition. And I learned that the memoirs have been reprinted in both softcover and hardcover versions. Finally, I found value from checking what booksellers ask for differing versions.

All that info was free! See how easy it is to dig on your own? For ballpark info, digging works. For the bottom line, you need to ask an experienced bookseller, preferably one affiliated with professional organizations.

Brad Jonas, owner of Powell's Bookstores in Chicago, www.powellschicago.com, told us, "This is not a valuable set." He added that single volumes have less value than the pair.

Demand for Grant's memoirs is low, and supply is plentiful. Unfortunately, the "written" dedication is a printed facsimile of his handwriting.

Q: Occasionally, you tell readers to check completed sales on eBay. I tried to do so, but I can't seem to find that area. Can you tell me the steps?

— Cybercollector

A: You must register on eBay to access completed sales. The one-time process is simple and does not obligate you in any way. Once registered, key in the item you seek and view active sale items. Access completed sales in a sidebar to the left. Click in the "completed" box, and voilà! There are the results, including listings that did not sell.

Q: I inherited an antique desk and would like info on it. It is solid wood, made by Central in Chicago.

— Kevin, Owasso, Okla.

» AUCTION ACTION

A white jade seal dating from 1796 brought \$5.9 million in a recent sale at Sotheby's Hong Kong. The seal was part of a sale of lost treasures from the Qing palaces and was carved to celebrate the Emperor Qianlong's abdication. Just 13/4 inches high, it is a historic and symbolic piece. Along with its carved jade box, the seal was a spoil of war, removed from the palace in 1900 by a French naval officer sent to Beijing to put down the Boxer Rebellion. The sale of 34 pieces was 100 percent sold, making it what is called a "white glove" sale in the auction business.

» COLLECTOR QUIZ

Q: Designer Bob Mackie's 1999 "Fantasy Goddess of Africa Barbie" is now booked at \$300. How many (approximately) were made?

- a. 35,000 b. Fewer than 20,000
c. 28,000 d. 25,000

A: Fewer than 20,000 worldwide were produced.

Source: "Collector's Encyclopedia of Barbie Doll Collector Editions: 2008 Edition" by J. Michael Augustyniak (Collector Books, \$29.95).

A: Made in the first part of the 20th century, the handsome desk is a better grade of office equipment.

The size, brass capped feet and decorative knobs, plus the expansive knee-hole with four drawers on each side (add a center drawer), make it executive grade. Such desks are very heavy, but I'm sure that's not news to you.

The maker was one of many Midwestern businesses that churned out office furniture for the burgeoning managerial class. Today, less is more in office furniture, and massive solid desks are a personal taste. Valued, it might retail up to \$500, providing you find a motivated buyer.

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Send e-mail to smartcollector@comcast.net or write Danielle Arnet, c/o Tribune Media Services, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60611. Please include an address in your query. Photos cannot be returned.

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