



These wagon wheels ain't rolling, but at country auctions they're likely to be bought at high prices, by those who remember them in days of use.

Chair full of antique ducks

By JOHN OUGHTON

"Who'll gimme one for these fine old sledge hammers all they need is handles hardly ever been used gimmee one gimmee one who'll say one all right fifty cents four bits start it off come on girls just the thing for correctin your husband when he stays out a little late with the boys fifty over there seventy five!"

Auctioneering is a true grassroots art, and going to an auction in the country is great grassroots entertainment. The root of our grasstrampling society feeds on material surplus like Moloch the compulsive eater.

The surplus which farmers collect tends to be somewhat different from the three car television electric toothbrush and navelforager city tradition.

The auction I went to, which was held outside Napanee, had a fascinating assortment of items like one huge headlight with a green shade from some long departed car, an assortment of handcarved duck decoys, hand-made planes and shovels, a homebuilt child's sled without a rosebud, and many intriguing tools for unknown or obsolete tasks.

"Who'll give a dollar for this whatever the hell it is buy it and

find a use for it one of a kind at this auction anyways okay Harry throw it in with the posthole auger gotta sell it somehow two dollars for this fine posthole auger and accessory do I hear two..."

Laurel and Hardy might have been the auctioneers except for their lack of efficiency. One audience member was put down for a bid on a rotting horsehair couch when he pointed at an airplane overhead. A husband and wife who were unwittingly bidding against each other on some wagon wheels were gleefully taken up to four dollars apiece before they saw the light.

The auctioneers' vocal styling went something like this: start off with a glorification of the condition and range of uses of the object in question ("this here beautiful old quilt hang it on your wall or hide your guests with it" — ventilated in so many places the light passed through like noises in a sleeping dream); set an optimistic starting price, and take off into full oral flight — "got nineteen gimmee twenty gimmee twenty", speed up to "bracketybracketybrackety" until some one bid for a new start or "going once going twice last call sold".

People were unconsciously

tapping their feet in time like bystanders listening to the caller at a square dance.

The auction took place in and around an empty frame farmhouse and for me it had metaphysical overtones. Pictures of King George IV and Victorian beauties were sold alongside the child's crib with painted teddybears eternally in mid-dance.

Allen Ginsberg wrote to Walt Whitman: "I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?" A well-used violin "copie Antonio Stradivarius faciebat 1761" lay in a handcarved wooden case which seemed a small and shapely coffin.

The people who had once owned and lived by everything now up for sale weren't around. The daguerrotype baby staring out of a locket which had outlasted everyone who carried or remembered it could almost be one of the old farmers who stood around in overalls not bidding but just watching for further evidence that time was passing. Everyone there had seen part of the play before and wanted one of the props in it: schoolbells and wagonwheels were the only things that went for inflated prices.

So go and see a country auction if you can. They're sometimes hard to find but free unless you succumb to the call to buy. Toronto Week magazine has a few listings each week but the best way to find a likely auction is to start at a small farming area town on a weekend and look around. If you don't find an auction you might discover a little peace of mind anyway hardly ever been used in the city except for worrying do I hear a dollar?

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