

Treasures In Your Attic?

The antique in your attic or that dusty book on your shelf could be worth more than you think. An appraisal by an auction house specialist—even from a photograph—can help you find out if your property could be a valuable “hidden treasure.”

“We hear stories all the time about people finding paintings at garage sales that are worth fortunes,” says John Gallo, president of San Francisco-based Butterfield & Butterfield, a 135-year-old auction house. “And paintings aren’t the only treasures out there,” Gallo adds. “There are numerous collecting categories, each with its own group of rabid (and acquisitive) collectors.”

In conjunction with its recent expansion to Chicago, Butterfield & Butterfield (B&B) has launched a national Treasure Hunt to unearth antiques, jewelry, photographs, books and other valuable items sought by collectors. In May, B&B merged with Dunning’s, an Elgin, Illinois auction house established in 1896. Butterfield, Butterfield & Dunning, as the company will be called in the Midwest, will open a large auction facility in Chicago.

B&B specialists can be seen appraising property regularly on the popular PBS series Antiques Roadshow. “Our specialists are among the top authorities in the world,” says Gallo. “Many times, they can determine whether there’s a market for an object from just looking at a Polaroid snapshot.”

The traditional role of auction houses is to bring buyers together to compete for property, helping sellers realize the highest possible prices. “After we determine the level of interest in an object,” Gallo says, “we schedule it for auction, conduct an extensive marketing campaign and connect the seller with a buyer.”

Recent significant sales at the auction house include a circa 1730-1750 Boston Queen Anne highboy that sold for \$772,500; Lady Sewing Amongst trees (In the Garden), a painting by the California Impressionist Guy Rose, that sold for \$442,500 (a world record auction price for the artist); a rare 18th Century Korean storage jar that sold for \$1,020,000; a set of four Holland & Holland guns in their own display case that sold for \$420,500; the Mark Twain family library, including 120 books with Twain’s annotations, that sold for \$200,500; a group of laboratory props from Frankenstein (Universal, 1931) that sold for \$17,250; and five bottles of Chateau Latour a Pomerol, 1961, sold as one lot for \$10,350.

To submit your “hidden treasure” for a free appraisal by a B&B specialist, send a photo with the description, history (if available) and dimensions of the item to National Treasure Hunt, Butterfield & Butterfield, 220 San Bruno Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94103. For more information, call (515) 861-7500, Ext. 510.