

# SENIOR LIFESTYLES

## Appraiser's value soars with antique collectors

By Kathleen Schwar  
Assistant Editor

CHURCHVILLE — In the parlor of his early 1800s Federal style home, Ed Cornwell is sipping tea and telling antique tales, apparently quite happy to host an antiques admirer.

The two are using 1850 porcelain cups with tea poured from an 1830 silver tea pot. His guest's chair is circa 1790 Hepplewhite, with beautifully painted, curved lines and is surprisingly sturdy.

"To me, that's part of the fun, that we are using these things," he said. Although the popular antiques appraiser/teacher himself is a fan of Antiques Roadshow on PBS, he takes issue with its appraisers who advise clients not to restore or repair the pieces they bring in for appraisal.

"I want it functional," he said, pointing to a 1770 Chippendale mahogany chair in excellent shape, to which he had applied tung oil. "I want to sit on it."

Cornwell has built a reputation over the past few decades. People seek him out, to the point where he reluctantly takes the phone — which has an unlisted number — off the hook.

"I found I kind of had to go into hiding," he admitted.

But Cornwell isn't in hiding when he appraises for customers at the annual antique show at Our Lady of Mercy High School, or when he teaches classes at the Landmark Society of Western New York, Brockport Historical Society, Scottsville Historical Society, Chili Community Center, and at Greece Apollo Middle School's continuing education programs. On Sun-

day, Feb. 13, he will appraise items from 1-3 p.m. at an antique show at the Ontario Arts Council, Main Street, Canandaigua. The show is from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

He's on two radio shows — Antique Talk with Michael Warren Thomas on WHTK 1280 AM, at 9 a.m. Sundays; and with Bob Smith on WXXI 1370 AM, at 1 p.m. the first Thursday of each month. People call in with questions about their antiques.

"A lot of times they are things that are dear to people's hearts," Thomas said. "They might not be as valuable as people think, but they're still treasures to them. He treats them with a lot of respect."

Thomas said he had first heard Cornwell on radio station WHAM. "I loved his voice and the warm way he dealt with people and talked to them," he said.

Perhaps because of his strict Catholic upbringing, Cornwell said; he continues to support Catholic organizations. For instance, he donates half of his appraisal fees from the Mercy sale to the school's Alumnae Association, to go toward scholarships. He has encouraged radio listeners to send donations to Rochester's historic St. Michael's Church for renovation.

To get his appraisals, his fans patiently stand in line at antique shows. John and Carolyn Walsh of Webster waited an hour and a half Jan. 29 at Mercy to have Cornwell appraise their Pennsylvania-German folk art stool. His appraisal: \$7,000.

"He is so involved in what he's doing it's contagious," John said.

In fact, the couple returned the second day of the two-day event with a child's chair from the turn of the century. The



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Antiques appraiser Ed Cornwell, of Rochester, looks at a clock brought in by Stacy Poullos, of Brighton, on Jan. 29 at Our Lady of Mercy High School. Cornwell estimated that the clock was French, from the early 1900s, and was worth \$3,000-\$4,000.

Walshes, Holy Trinity parishioners, explained that the items have been in John's family for years and they simply were curious as to their monetary value.

Jerry and Betty Dunn, from St. Thomas More Parish, Brighton, also stood in the appraisal line for an hour and a half, Jan. 30. When Cornwell saw Betty's neo-Japanese vase made in Germany, her husband said, "he knew exactly what it was."

Cornwell contends that he likes everything, whether it be an antique, collectible, or just junk. His favorite possession is a 16th-century silver Gothic chalice. His oldest is a mummified hawk probably from Egypt and possibly 2,000 years old. Among the antiques that fill his house are 35 crucifixes, of ivory, bronze, wood and plaster, some as old as the 17th century.

A late 19th century statue of St. Nicholas of Bari stands in the living room, near an early 1700s St. Joseph.

"I'm just crazy about these old saints," he said.

He does acknowledge a tolerance level for others' collecting habits, and it stops at Beanie Babies. And, he said, he does not like it "when old people are conned into buying something" from a certain mail-order collectibles company, for example, and are told it will appreciate.

In contrast, antiques are investments with returns, he said. He once sold four artworks to buy himself a cottage overlooking Owasco Lake.

"And it's a landmark," he added. His original investment: \$150. His profit: nearly \$7,000.

Cornwell was born in Rochester, on University Avenue, in 1936. His father served in the Army, and the family moved often, he said. He attended Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Boniface, Sts. Peter and Paul schools, and Charlotte High School. Later he attended Rochester Institute of Technology and studied art in Italy and England, meanwhile helping support his mother and younger of two brothers. His mother lived with him until she died three years ago.

Cornwell began collecting antiques when he was 15 or 16, from a shop in Rochester. "I decided I wanted pewter candlesticks," he said, adding he had saved \$10 for them. But later he learned they weren't pewter. And that set him on the track of becoming an appraiser.

Cornwell briefly designed windows for Sibley's. He became an art conservator at the Rochester Museum and Science Center for 10 years and also worked for Rochester appraisers Robert Loveless and Frederick Bailey.

He began teaching 35 years ago at the request of his boss while at the museum, and hasn't stopped since.

"I never set out to be a teacher, God knows, but I love it," he said. "Some of my students have been coming 20 some years. I kid with them, saying there isn't anything I haven't said."

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