

Important Pieces Of Glengarry History Stay In The Area

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There were moments of tension on holiday Monday when the accumulated heirlooms of one of Glengarry's most historic and colourful families were featured at an auction at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Glen Walter.

Over four hundred people attended the public auction to dispose of several thousand items from the estates of R. R. McLennan (Big Rory) who died in 1907, Frank & Adelle Markham, and the living estate of Barbara Joan Markham, Miss Canada 1954.

The worry was that bits of Glengarry history could easily vanish to dealers and buyers bidding on the Internet, but in end, local historical institutions secured the most important historic items.

Two lots in particular were of interest to local museum curators.

A nervous Leon Chamois, curator of the Regimental Museum of the SD&G Highlanders in Cornwall, came ready for battle hoping to buy the dress parade pith helmet Roderick Rory McLennan wore when he served as Lieutenant Colonel of the 59th Stormont and Glengarry Battalion, 1897-1900.

Mr. Chamois was visibly relieved when his final bid of \$2,100 insured that the important piece of Glengarry Military history would stay in the region. Also won for the military heritage museum was the Lieutenant Colonel's forage cap, an officer's grooming set and a swagger stick.

Attending the auction with Mr. Chamois was Williamstown resident Brent Lafave, the former commanding officer of the SD&G Highlanders. He was thankful that the items were being returned to the "regimental family."

"It's wonderful that after all this time these artifacts will return to the regimental fold where they will be put in a setting designed to look after them rather than sitting in someone's private collection," said Mr. Lafave moments after the pith helmet, its case, and a photograph of the Lieutenant-Colonel wearing the helmet were won.

He added: "These artifacts are also for our new young soldiers. One of the first things new members of the regiment do is tour the museum to discover where they come from and the heritage they are inheriting."

Another highlight of the sale was when auctioneer Theresa Taylor stepped forward to describe the silk evening gown and cape worn by R.R. McLennan's grandniece, Barbara Joan Markham, when she competed as Miss Canada in the 1954 Miss USA pageant.

Despite fears that the dress and cape would shoot past local museums and into the hands of an internet bidder, Ian Bowering, curator of the Cornwall Community Museum in the Wood House in Cornwall, won the lot for \$750, delighting himself and members of SD&G Historical Society.

The auction featured thousands of items from the Markham house in Cornwall including furniture, art, porcelain and glass, and a large collection of Barbara Joan Markham's couture wardrobe.

Of special interest to many were the manuscripts and maps, diaries and books, and contracts and photographs belonging to R.R. McLennan, the larger than life Glengarrian who was made his fortune first as a contractor building the Canadian Pacific Railroad during the 1870s, and later as a successful businessman in Alexandria where he settled rising to prominence as member of parliament for Glengarry, Conservative, and serving as a militia officer.

Today, R.R. McLennan is perhaps best remembered as an outstanding strength sport athlete who tested his remarkable prowess at Highland Games throughout North America.

At the auction, local historian David Anderson paused to describe McLennan:

"He was one of those great local figures who commanded respect from all sides. And what did we admire more in that time than a strong man, who was not only strong, but also rich. He had every virtue the 19th century admired."

By the end of the day, one of the largest and most prestigious Glengarry auctions in recent memory offered satisfaction for almost everyone. Throughout the sale collectors and local people, eager to step away with a piece of Glengarry history, carried boxes of treasures to stash in their cars.

Among them was Jenna Lafave of Williamstown who purchased a 19th century European genre oil painting of a villa perched high on a cliff above the ocean.

"I saw it at the preview and liked it. I ended up spending a bit more than I anticipated but I'm delighted with it."

Another pleased purchaser was Sylvie-Anne Labonte of Bainsville who found a real bargain in a large maple chest of drawers and a delicate green Bristol glass compote dish. Also in the crowd was Terry Mercer of Glen Walter who attended the auction with his wife Sharon, an avid collector of Blue Willow pattern china, who hoped to add to her collection.

Among the large number of dealers interested in military items was Mike Pariseault of Pointe Claire who won a ceremonial sword belt. Mr. Pariseault explained that he and other dealers in the room had not bid against the Regimental Museum in Cornwall in order to "preserve the artifacts and the family's heritage for the region."

"I think we all agree that some of these items deserve to stay here to preserve the sense of historic continuity. I didn't bid against the museum because like many of us interested in military artifacts, we like to see them remain where they can be viewed and properly cared for."