

Westport's Foley House Holds "Sale of Century"

By Alison Korn - The Ottawa Citizen

Contents of historic house where John A. Macdonald stayed to be auctioned.

The historic contents of an 1867 family estate that hosted Sir John A. Macdonald will fall under an auctioneer's gavel tomorrow after being in the family for generations.

More than 400 items in the Foley House on Westport's Main Street will be sold, including a walnut cylinder desk, a gramophone, a Victorian sofa, vintage clothing and a hat pin holder. The house is also up for sale.

"As people in the family died, their treasures also came in," said Naura Gilhooly, great-great granddaughter of Declan Finbar Foley, one of Westport's founders, who opened a general store after arriving from Ireland. "We couldn't give it the love and care it deserved. I suspect this is going to be painful but we're all comfortable with the decision."

Her parents decided last summer to sell the property and when Ms. Gilhooly's father, Frank, died suddenly at age 83, her mother, Ursula, 77, decided to go through with the sale. The nine bedroom house has a parlour, dining room, library, general store and pub. The original wallpaper still adorns the walls, but now the rooms are empty. Moving trucks brought the historic treasures to the Cornwall Civic Complex, where the auction will be held tomorrow at 10 a.m. Previews will be today from 5 to 8 p.m. and tomorrow from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m.

"It looks like you're walking in to a museum, there's no doubt about it," said auctioneer Theresa Taylor. "There's an opportunity for everyone to get a little bit of Canadian heritage here."

There are no minimum bids and no way to estimate how much people might pay for the items, Ms. Taylor said. The walnut desk, for example, might fetch anywhere from \$5,000 to \$25,000.

Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, stayed at the house frequently when he travelled by steam ship between Ottawa and his electoral riding in Kingston. The home sits on the shores of Upper Rideau Lake.

It's said that some of the house's furniture was bought by Sir John A. for his wife, but she didn't like it and suggested he give it to his friends, the Foleys. Also on display are copies of letters from the former prime minister to Declan Foley. The family gave the originals to Queen's University.

What Ms. Taylor call the "sale of the century" has upset some residents of Westport. "Seeing the moving vans lined up in the street is heartbreaking," said Barbara McBride, who lives just outside of town. "It's dissecting the town and selling it for parts."

Ms. Gilhooley, an Ottawa banker, is sad to say farewell to what she calls "my happy place," but says the estate's upkeep has become too much for her family. Though her sister, Linda, ran a pub there for the last three years, the house hasn't had a full-time occupant since 1945. "Mom and Dad have 10 grandchildren and they want to educate them," she said.

Perth real-estate agent Pauline Aunger said there's been "enormous interest" in the house which went on the market in May with an asking price of \$450,000. A list of items for auction and directions to the complex are at www.theresataylor.com.