

October 22nd, 2010

Upstairs, Downstairs on Cape Cod

by Jeanne Schinto

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Hyannis, Massachusetts

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Promoter Marvin Getman's latest new venture, Antiques on Cape Cod, was actually two shows, although not intentionally. Held on August 28 and 29 at the Hyannis Youth and Community Center in Hyannis, Massachusetts, the "Largest Antiques Show on the Cape" was also believed to be the first centrally air-conditioned one the Cape has ever seen. Nobody was too hot, but some people were way too cold. Temperature is among the issues that need to be resolved if the space is used in the same way again.

The Hyannis center is an enviable facility. It has two gymnasiums, two ice-skating rinks, and a skateboard park. One of the gyms accommodated 23 dealers in walled and papered booths. A floor below them, a hockey rink—its ice covered by an interlocking plastic floor—was roomy enough for 60 more dealers in spaces divided by black pipe and drape structures. Exhibitors all understood that the pricier, walled booths would more easily accommodate room settings and that the less-expensive ones would be more suitable for tabletop arrangements. Few if any, however, were aware of what the other differences would be.

For one thing, many didn't understand that the show would be on two levels, and some from each tier expressed displeasure at being so clearly separated from one another. They did not like the "upstairs, downstairs" feeling, wrongly or rightly fearing that upstairs dealers' items would be perceived as expensive and downstairs wares as bargains. They also worried about traffic flow. "Once [shoppers] get downstairs, they'll never come back up again; there's so much more to see down there," said one upstairs dealer. Meanwhile, some downstairs dealers felt they were at a disadvantage because shoppers would visit them second.

There, however, was a bigger problem for the downstairs dealers. While upstairs dealers enjoyed the air conditioning, the downstairs dealers quickly dubbed their space "The Ice Palace." To his credit, Getman had sent out an e-mail before the show strongly urging exhibitors assigned to the rink to dress in layers. Still, many had trouble enduring it even after exchanging sandals for socks and shoes. They could talk of little else.

I decided not to guess what the temperature was. I put a thermometer in an exhibitor-friend's booth and checked it periodically. It ranged from a high of 66° F. when the crowd peaked on Saturday to a low of 58° F. when dealers returned in the quiet of Sunday morning. Dealers also complained that their boxes, stored under tables, got wet from condensation. That can happen at an outdoor show, but these dealers were caught unprepared.

So, for that matter, was Getman. He told me the facility had never before used the rink for an event, and that this was also its first use of the flooring. "I was their guinea pig," he said. Apparently, not even the facility managers knew what the temperature would be in the rink with the flooring in place. "The managers called the manufacturer of the flooring, who said it would be comfortable. Anyone who knows me knows that I would not do anything that would jeopardize my good rapport with dealers."

Losing sports teams tend to notice extreme temperatures, aches and pains, and noisy fans more than winning teams do. Perhaps if more dealers had been selling, I would have heard less complaining. As it turned out, successful dealers were a rarity downstairs as well as upstairs.

My husband, Bob Frishman of Bell-Time Clocks, Andover, Massachusetts, was an upstairs dealer, so I know his experience best. An exhibitor at a couple of Cape shows in the past, he was not particularly optimistic about this one. He had signed up because he had faith in Getman, not in the Cape. So he was pleasantly surprised when he sold two French mantel clocks, a Waltham high-grade pocket watch, and a Waltham library clock. "I was very happy with the look and feel of the upstairs show, where I set up with other great dealers, and my sales were to buyers who knew what they liked and wanted it when they saw it," he wrote me in an e-mail at my request. "These were not the casual tourists, often without their checkbooks, that I've encountered at other Cape shows."

The dealer who was set up next to him, Brian Cullity of Sagamore, Massachusetts, on the Upper Cape, felt satisfied too. "I have not had a lot of sales, but they have been good ones," said Cullity, who by Sunday morning had sold a Pima basket and brant decoy, among other things. "This was my first time doing a show on the Cape." Never before on his home turf? "I thought it would be tourists," he said. "I was happily surprised that they were knowledgeable, interested people."

In the next aisle, Jackie and Michael Robinson of Miller-Robinson Antiques, who have relocated from Ashby, Massachusetts, to Wakefield, Rhode Island, were similarly satisfied with their results. They sold a "big oak icebox, tricked out as a bar," a 19th-century bureau, a swan decoy, several canes, some Arts and Crafts tiles, and a piece of redware. "It's a show worth doing," said Jackie. "I hope that everyone decides to come back."

Downstairs, I heard another success story in the booth of Ed and Charlene Dixon of Eastham, Massachusetts, on the Lower Cape. "We sold nautical pieces, country things, and stoneware. We had a very good show. We enjoyed it," said Charlene, who was wearing long pants and a cardigan.

More typically, the news was not so sunny. By Sunday afternoon, when I spoke with art dealer Donna Kmetz of Douglas, Massachusetts, who was upstairs, she had sold nothing. "Overall, for the number of people who came, I wished there had been more sales," said Kmetz, who in the show's final hour did sell one 19th-century portrait and made one other, smaller sale. "This being a new show, I think people were surprised by the quality."

Kmetz mused on the intended audience for this show. "It's an interesting net to cast." She said that beforehand she had wondered: would it attract year-round Cape Codders or people with second homes here or an equal percentage of each group? "I had hoped the show might draw more from off-Cape. That would have meant I might have seen more of my regular customers, especially those from Marion," i.e., the Marion Antiques Show in Marion, Massachusetts, postponed for 2010 and scheduled to return in 2011. "But that did not happen, and now I am sure that was an unrealistic hope."

For the record, Getman said a survey he conducted showed that 55% of attendees had off-Cape addresses, but whether they were tourists or antiques enthusiasts who had made a special trip to the show is unknown.

To be sure, a show's first year is always a challenge, but birthing one in a bad economy makes the task even more onerous. "If the show had been established five or six years ago, this year's results would be forgiven," Getman speculated. "But when a first-year show gets off to this kind of a start, it's very difficult."

Still, Getman was certain he would do the show again. "It could build to something. I could fit more dealers in the gym. I could have a great show in there, and it would still be the biggest show on the Cape. I need to analyze that possibility. I kept asking people if they thought the show had potential. More people said yes than no."

For more information, phone (781) 862-4039 or see the Web site ([www.neantiqueshows.com](#)).

Originally published in the November 2010 issue of *Maine Antique Digest*. (c) 2010 Maine Antique Digest

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David Thompson Antiques & Art, Mashpee and Wellfleet, Massachusetts—the former on the Upper Cape, the latter on the Lower—brought a set of circa 1830 Greek Revival chairs. Probably Boston-made, the six were offered at \$4500.



George and Barbara Peckham of South Dennis, Massachusetts, asked \$1295 for the dry sink with cupboards and drawer in light green paint. The 19th-century hand-carved chopping bowl in dark green paint was \$795. The 1850's dovetailed box with brass handles was \$145.



Sonya Sage, known as “The Hat Lady of Western New York,” is famous on the antiques circuit and beyond for dressing in vintage clothing. Dressed in 1940’s attire on Saturday, she balked a little when asked to pose with a fan of white egret feathers, offered at \$58 by her sister, dealer Sandra S. Willson of Churchville, New York. “It’s Victorian,” Sage protested. On Sunday, Willson said, “Sales were OK. I was happy. It was a decent show.” She sold a chocolate pot, a vase, a fig-shaped porcelain salt shaker, a sterling silver salad set, and a couple of other smaller silver pieces.



Jane and Bruce Beck of The Button Box, Cedarburg, Wisconsin, were on the East Coast for the National Button Society’s convention, held this summer in Manchester, New Hampshire, so they took the opportunity to do some shows, including this one. These are antique buttons made of shell and other materials. They range from \$25 to \$475, the latter for an 18th-century English example that features a carved scene.