Roadshow Warriors: A Retrospective, 1996-2006

by Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Jeffrey Dunn for WGBH Boston

For the final stop on *Antiques Roadshow*'s five-city summer 2005 tour, the ticket demand was the largest in the program's ten-year history: 17,275. That stop would be Los Angeles, and since entry is issued Noah's ark style, in pairs, the number of requests actually represents an imaginary line of 34,550 people waiting to get into the Los Angeles Convention Center. The assemblage is an even more astounding one to consider because each visitor is allowed to bring two items, meaning that the total number in search of an appraisal on that day was 69,100—and then some.

"They're *supposed* to bring two items," one appraiser told us, "but they often show up with wagonloads. 'I thought I could bring a *collection*,' they'll say."

In reality, only a fraction of those ticket requests were accommodated, 3500 pairs being the limit, due to space and time constraints—and the patience of municipal authorities. Gone are the days when thousands camped out on the sidewalk overnight, hoping to secure a minute with an appraiser. Local fire and police departments protested, and so did the people who got shut out, although some appraisers miss "the rock-concert quality of the day before," as one put it.

Those who scored the L.A. tickets did not all live within easy driving distance. "The flip side of the system is that people are apt to come to the show from anywhere these days," said Michael Flanigan, an independent dealer based in Baltimore, Maryland, who has been with the *Roadshow* since the beginning in 1996, before the advance ticketing system was inaugurated. "That's because they can be assured of getting in. We had people come down from Alaska to L.A. this summer."

Following that logic, some Los Angelenos, failing to get tickets to the show in their own neighborhood, secured them in advance for another *Roadshow* stop: Bismarck, North Dakota. "And it's hard to get to Bismarck—you have to change tractors twice," said Rudy Franchi, who appraises movie posters and other collectibles on the program and who moved to Los Angeles from the East Coast in the spring of 2005.

Bismarck was another milestone reached as the tenth season's 15 episodes were taped from June 2005 through August 2005. Not counting the show's West Coast stops over the years, Bismarck was the farthest west that the *Roadshow* had ever ventured. "And the people in Bismarck were so happy to see us," said Skinner jewelry department head Gloria Lieberman, who, along with other Skinner staff, was taped for the *Roadshow*'s pilot episode. (Monty Hall of *Let's Make a Deal* was pilot host.) "They shook our hands. 'Thank you so much for coming to our city.' We were treated like visiting dignitaries. For them it was a really big deal."

Of course, anyone who clamors for *Roadshow* tickets could get a free appraisal at an auction house. "But it wouldn't be the same," said Ken Farmer, owner of Ken Farmer Auctions & Appraisals in Radford, Virginia, who joined the *Roadshow* part way through the first season, when it stopped in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. "It's the whole scene. You're on the set of a TV show that's being shot live."

"If you have one of the best tickets to the Super Bowl, you're still on the sidelines," noted Flanigan. "If you come to the show, you're part of it." And as Nancy Druckman of Sotheby's reminded us, not everybody has the knowledge or resources to find out the worth of their items from an auctioneer or otherwise. "If you live in Greenwich, Connecticut, that's one thing," she said, "but as you get further out from that socioeconomic sphere, the big urban centers, we're like a circuit judge bringing jurisprudence to small towns."

All this reaffirms what most of us already know: the show has been a huge success for WGBH Boston, which bought the rights to produce it from Dan Farrell in 1993. Farrell in turn had bought them in 1981 from the originators of the concept, Great Britain's BBC, whose own *Antiques Roadshow* has been on the air since 1979. Why did it take Farrell a dozen years to find a buyer? "We kept hearing that it was too British," he said. TV people thought only viewers with "monocles and pipes and tweed coats" would watch it, added Leigh Keno, who early on was asked to audition as host and declined in favor of being an appraiser.

It's also common knowledge—at least, a common perception—that the program has changed the buying climate for the trade. "How do I think it has affected the industry?" Berj Zavian repeated our question. "It's ruined it." Having been recruited for the *Roadshow* with other Doyle staff, he is also a master jeweler for his family's Cluster Jewelry in New York City. "The minute they recognize you," said Zavian, "they want to know how much it's *really* worth. You can't dance."

Another New Yorker, Nicholas M. Dawes, who appraises ceramics on the show, told us what pickers have discovered in spades on their own. "The show has made a lot of people more aware of what they have. Things are more carefully sold these days. The guy who came to the house and bought from you is a less frequent scenario."

"There are no more dumb farmers anymore." Those are Ken Farmer's words. Thanks or no thanks to the *Roadshow*, some do possess a dangerous little bit of knowledge. "About once a month somebody comes in with a table they think is a Seymour," Farmer said. "It's hard for them to understand nuances."

Michael Flanigan has a rebuttal to dealer complaints. "Whenever I hear people claim that the show has ruined the business, I say, 'It has not. It has increased awareness.' I ask them, 'What would you rather have? Somebody coming in thinking their table is worth a hundred thousand dollars or not coming in at all?' Those who hate the *Roadshow* also hate eBay and *M.A.D.* The *Roadshow* is just another form of the information revolution."

The origins of only one phenomenon, it is agreed, can be traced absolutely to the *Roadshow*. Skinner's Stephen Fletcher said he and company colleague Karen Keane were giving a lecture in Newport, Rhode Island, about their *Roadshow* experiences when they asked their audience what they'd learned from the series. "Fourteen people in unison said, 'Don't refinish!'" That goes for other things besides furniture.

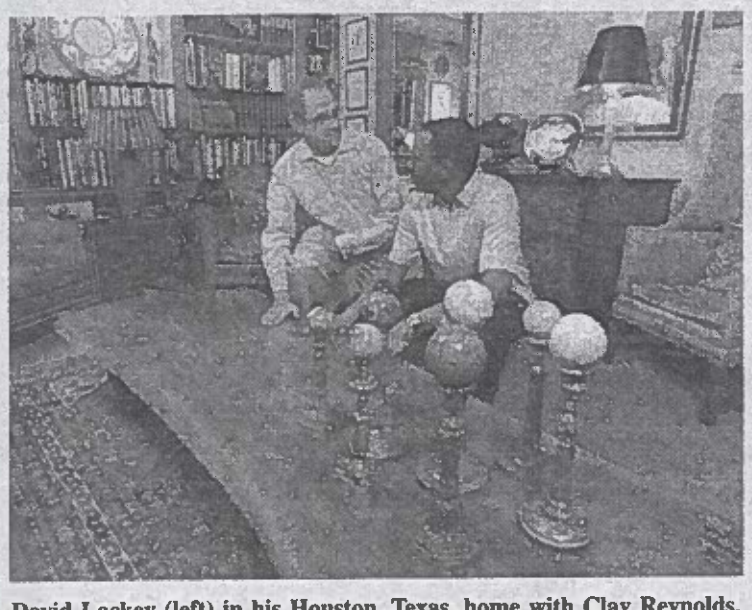
"Because of the *Roadshow*, people have stopped messin' with stuff," said David Rago, founder of the Rago Arts and Auction Center in Lambertville, New Jersey, who signed on as an appraiser partway through the first season. ("I was referred by [*M.A.D.* senior editor] Lita Solis-Cohen," said Rago. "I turned them down initially. 'I gotta do this for free?' But then I did the first one, and said, 'This is the real deal.'")

The "don't-mess-with-it" lesson may have been learned too well to suit *Professional Refinishing Magazine* (now called *Finishing & Restoration*). In its June 2002 issue the *Roadshow*'s then executive producer, Peter Cook, published a conciliatory article in response to a letter WGBH had received from Bob Flexner, the magazine's editor. It voiced what was recently said to us by Leslie Keno. "If you have a pressed oak rocker that has been painted several times, I think you can go ahead and strip it. It all depends on the piece. It doesn't apply to every single piece in the world." The Keno twins, of course, delivered the famous bad news about the refinished Boston high chest to its owner on the *Roadshow*'s debut in Concord, Massachusetts,

New host Mark L. Walberg and his immediate predecessor, Lara Spencer.

Debra Force (left) of Debra Force Fine Art Inc., New York City, in Tampa on June 25, 2005, with Patsy Anderson of Pine Island, Florida, after Force appraised Anderson's unsigned marine painting by James E. Buttersworth. "It had come down in her husband's family," said Force. "They had bought it at a New York City gallery in 1880 after seeing it in the window." Force's appraisal, $250,000/500,000, tied with the one the Kenos gave the Seymour table in Secaucus, New Jersey, as the highest recorded in ten years of *Roadshow* production. But each of those pieces was valued at only half of what an object never shown to TV audiences was said to be worth by Wendell Garrett. Brought to the *Roadshow* in Concord, Massachusetts, the program's first stop, on June 1, 1996, it was a collection of signatures that included every Cabinet member from George Washington's administration to FDR's. Garrett put its value at $1 million. Its owner, however, didn't want to be on TV and remains anonymous.

Arlie Sulka (left), managing director of Lillian Nassau Ltd., with the owner of Tiffany Studios stained-glass ceiling elements, rescued from Marshall Field's during demolition. She valued the collection, brought to the *Roadshow* in Chicago in 2004, at $35,000/40,000. In the summer of 2005 Sulka went to Tampa, Bismarck, and Los Angeles, where she did and didn't find what she expected. "In Tampa in 1999 I found an amazing Tiffany lamp," she said, recalling its appraised value was $80,000/125,000. "This time, there was not one piece of Tiffany all day!" In Bismarck she didn't see any Tiffany glass, either. "In L.A. I saw quite a lot. I also saw lots of repros, which I had anticipated because there are repro makers of Tiffany glass and Tiffany lamps on the West Coast."



David Lackey (left) in his Houston, Texas, home with Clay Reynolds. Lackey sits at one of the busiest *Roadshow* tables—ceramics. He credits the program with making people more aware of Newcomb College pottery ("a fairly obscure area") and of George Ohr.

The Kenos in Secaucus, New Jersey, with Claire Beckmann, owner of a Seymour card table that the twins appraised for $200,000 or $225,000 ("in the open market") to $300,000 ("on a very good day with everything in place"). Beckmann bought it at a yard sale for $25 (asking price: $30) about 30 years previous to visiting the *Roadshow*. It was sold in January 1998 at Sotheby's to Albert Sack, who paid $541,500.

which aired on March 6, 1997. Value: $100,000 to $200,000 if she'd left it alone—$50,000, since she hadn't.

David Lackey of Houston, Texas, said he believes the *Roadshow*, along with spin-offs like *Antiques Roadshow FYI* and knockoffs like *Cash in Your Attic*, have started another frustrating trend. "People are more afraid to part with things," said the owner of David Lackey Antiques, who appraises ceramics on the program. "Inheritors have started keeping more. The things don't have sentimental value. They aren't being used. The people may not even like them but think they should. They keep them because they're afraid to sell them."

James Callahan, who appraises Asian art on the show and for Skinner in real life, has noticed the same hesitancy in people who contact the auction house about items whose values they don't know. "Many are relieved to discover that something they've got is worth nothing," he said, "so they can in good conscience pass it on or throw it out. They want to erase it from the checklists of their lives."

Aida Moreno, the show's first executive producer, used a word that no one else did in these interviews: *greed*. "The show did tap into a greed factor," she said in trying to explain its success. "It made people think about what they had in their house. And if they did find treasure, should they insure it, sell it, or keep it?" Perhaps the weak link in the chain—for the industry, anyway—is that the program's point was never to answer the question, only to ask it.

What we find irksome about the program is the gulf that exists between experts and guests. The guests may know their item's family history but how helpless they usually seem when listening to the expert explain its broader history, and especially when being asked that familiar question, "Do you have any idea of its value?"

Innocence is, of course, sought. It's what the show's producers want as much as the appraisers want to find valuable objects with good stories. "I won't take a collector who knows everything there is to know because that would be show-and-tell," said the show's current executive producer, Marsha Bemko. "I want them to have something to learn. Otherwise, they don't need an appraiser."

Because of that mandate—to capture a certain *Roadshow* look on the guest's face when the value is revealed—Lackey has a wish that doesn't seem likely to be fulfilled. "I wish that someday I could congratulate someone on the *Roadshow* who bought something for a few thousand dollars a few years ago and now has something worth much more than a few thousand," he said. "Someone who paid a strong price for an investment-quality object that's gone up in value." But that kind of buyer usually has enough market knowledge to pay a strong price in the first place.

The producers' preference for material of uncertain value has eliminated completely coins and stamps from the program. Indeed, ticket-seekers are told not to bring them. It's not only because their values are so well documented and chances of a new discovery so slim, said Dan Farrell. "It's also because they're very small and not very photogenic."

Much more likely to get a spot on the program is an esoteric, visually exciting piece—for example, the carved and painted wood whirligig from the 1920's that Karen Keane appraised in Bismarck. "A price guide for whirligigs? Forget it," said Keane, who gave it an auction estimate of $3000/5000.

A long time ago, Watergate, along with Bob Woodward 's and Carl Bernstein's book *All the President's Men*, spurred interest in journalism careers. We asked Keane if she had noticed the *Roadshow* having any effect, even a small public-television-sized one, on people's career aspirations. More job applications from young graduates, for example? "It may be having a little effect," she said, "but people's choices for careers seem to be economically driven." (Translation: they hope for better starting salaries than those of entry-level staff at auction houses.)

More crucial to the industry's health are questions like these: Has the unprecedented demand for *Roadshow* tickets in the summer of 2005 translated into more antiques and collectibles buyers? Has any percentage of the nearly 12 million weekly viewers of the "the most popular prime-time PBS series in America" suddenly been bitten by the bug? We all know these answers too well.

Wendell Garrett of Sotheby's commented this way on the lack of any discernible upward swelling of collectors' ranks due to his or any appraiser's appearance on the program. "I haven't seen increases in the number of antiques books being bought or the number of subscriptions to *The Magazine Antiques*," he said. "I don't think there are five thousand people in this country interested in Americana. And I don't think we should expect more than that. I don't mean to be negative. I just don't think the program has affected the *serious* aspects of this field. I think it has addressed instead another need, popularizing the field. But popularization is different from serious engagement. As far as anyone being converted to the fold, I don't think so."

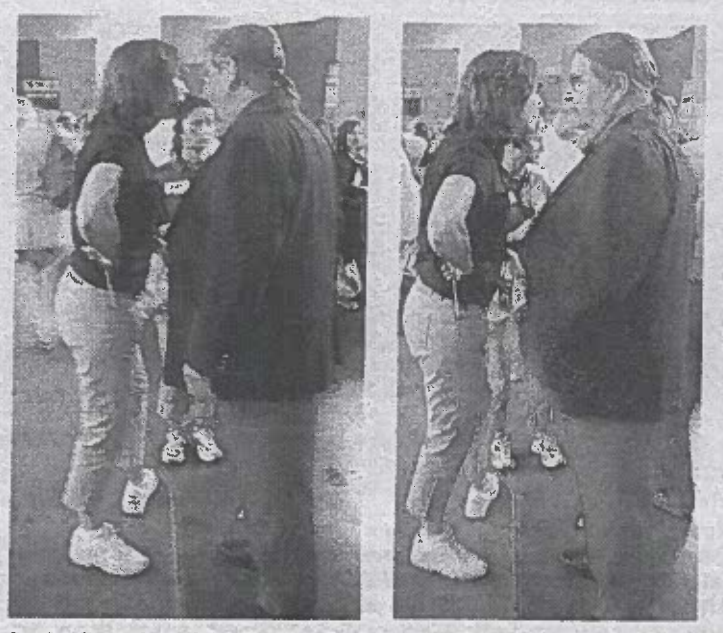
Has the show gone even so far as to actively discourage participation in collecting? A writer in another realm—food—contends that TV chefs have discouraged home cooking. "Contemporary cooking shows create a gap that separates the viewer from the reality of actual cookery," Andrew Chan hypothesized in "'La Grande Bouffe': Cooking Shows as Pornography" (*Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, Fall 2003). "The popularity of the cooking show as fantasy is paralleled by the real-world decline of culinary culture in America," he writes. "This might be the downside of TV cooking shows: rather than increase and improve the viewer's joy of cooking, they might make viewers feel inadequate or unconfident in their own culinary prowess...."

Not scientific facts, to be sure, they disturb us all the same, since we see cooking shows as analogous to TV antiques shows in at least one important way: their genesis. In the 1960's Julia Child (1912-2004) was made a celebrity by her appearances on *The French Chef*. In the 1990's Leigh and Leslie Keno (and to a lesser extent the other appraisers) were made celebrities by the *Roadshow*.

There are further similarities between the twins and Julia. Each (Julia alone and the Kenos together) managed to make an esoteric subject accessible. Each could be considered visually striking. Each comes across as effervescent, playful, with an appealing sense of humor. (Child, when asked why she massaged butter into a chicken before roasting, replied, "The chicken seems to like it.") Most important, each fell in love with a subject, and each has shared the same medium for conveying that love to TV audiences: WGBH.

When we asked Rudy Franchi how he thought the *Roadshow* had affected the industry, he took the discussion we had been having with appraisers and others in an entirely different direction. "It's made about a hundred and fifty appraisers rich," he said. (That's the number of appraisers in the *Roadshow*'s corral; only 75 to 80 of them at a time travel to any particular city.) "There are book contracts, speaking engagements...The line I use is the one about the Hawaiian missionaries: 'They went to do good, and they did very well.'"

He exaggerates, but the statement contains its kernel of truth, even discounting the obvious example of the Kenos' book deal for *Hidden Treasures* (2000) and all the etceteras that followed. Others besides the twins, in panning for gold on the *Roadshow*, have put gold in their own pockets. This has been so especially



In the first photo Marsha Bemko is being pitched an idea by Noel Barrett on the set in Providence in June 2005. We later learned he was telling her about a Buffalo Bill toy set, bought by its owners 21 years ago at auction for $400, including tax and buyer's premium. In good condition, it was made in 1903, when Buffalo Bill was still touring. Barrett's auction estimate was $15,000/20,000. In the second photo, while Barrett waits, Bemko eyes the (off-camera) family that owns the item. Were they truly innocent? That's what Bemko hoped to discover in an off-camera interview with them.

Regarding pitches, the prelude to being taped, we heard from Barrett and others that at virtually every table, a protocol has evolved. The TV-worthy, pitchable material gets divvied, no matter who sees it first. Ken Farmer, whose area is folk art, said, "If you've got one shred of decency, you make sure everyone gets taped. You know how competitive the business is. Some people like to scrap. That sort doesn't do well on the *Roadshow*. They don't get invited back."

"We work very cooperatively," Bill Guthman said about his colleagues at the arms and militaria table. "We split up the categories and time periods." Never mind that the cooperative spirit may not always stem from altruism. (Rudy Franchi, for one, said he shared "not because I'm kind. It's a matter of survival.") "There isn't a sign posted, but the *Roadshow* isn't a place for people who do not play well with others," said Michael Flanigan.

After they're taped comes another hurdle: the producers' editing process. WGBH senior publicist Judy Matthews did the math for us in Providence. Of the 5000 people who were scheduled to come through that day with 10,000 objects, approximately 80 would be chosen for taped interviews—a number that roughly corresponds to the number of appraisers. Of those 80 tapings, approximately 45 would make the final cut.

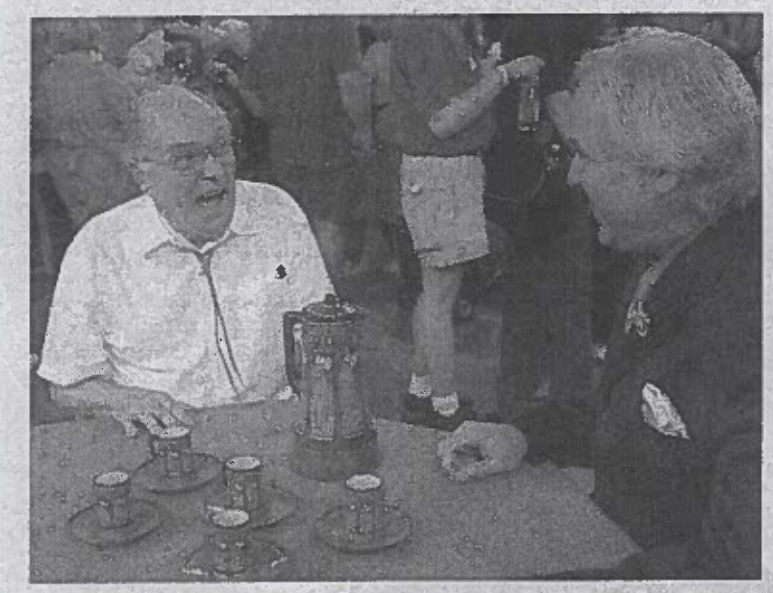
While watching Barrett and Bemko along with us, Matthews said, "Marsha also needs to decide which member of the family will go on camera with the object. In the end she wants a mix of male and female owners, young and old, in addition to a mix of flat objects and three-dimensional objects, and male and female appraisers."

Bruce Shackelford said in a conversation later, "Are they picking the right stuff? It's unfair to criticize them. I can second judge them all day, but they're the ones who created a hit TV show." Schinto photos.

Bill Guthman (right) at home in Westport, Connecticut, with part of his militaria collection. He is pictured with Clay Reynolds, correspondent for *Antiques Roadshow FYI*. Guthman replaced Russell Pritchard III on the regular *Roadshow*. The 80-year-old owner of Guthman Americana, with the looks of a Prussian general and the demeanor of a kindly grandfather, is, perhaps, the banished Pritchard's antithesis. "I'm sort of an old-fashioned dealer," said Guthman, who started collecting as a kid. "Frogs, butterflies—natural history costs nothing." For him, business wasn't at all the point of doing the *Roadshow*. "I did it for the experience. Here is a whole brand-new perspective. I think of the people I've met doing the show...That part of it has been gratifying. It's hard work, but the get-togethers make it well worth it. I've gained from it, the pleasure of it."

Rudy Franchi (right) in Oklahoma City in 2004, with the owner of a collection of numbered Bill Graham concert handbills. Franchi put the value at $28,000 to $30,000. "The *Roadshow* effect is this," said Franchi. "When we find something, all of a sudden the market is flooded. Things sitting in closets come out. When we started, we were seeing Disney cels, ordinary ones, going for six thousand to fifteen thousand dollars. Now it's difficult for a cel to get four thousand dollars."

"The *Roadshow* and eBay grew up together," added Franchi. "They have had an effect on each other."



David Rago (right) with the owner of a Newcomb College chocolate set in Savannah in 2004. Its unusual hand-decorated landscape design made it worth $50,000 to $60,000, Rago told its owner. "In my own field there has certainly been more awareness of decorative ceramics," said Rago. "I don't like to focus too much on the money aspect, but if that's what it takes to have people stop putting their umbrellas in it and hitting it with the vacuum cleaner, then so be it."

for collectibles experts or those who own smaller, specialized shops or auction houses. The cumulative financial effect on them has been, in a word—the word of tribal arts expert Bruce Shackelford of San Antonio—"huge."

Financial gains have come largely *not* as a result of consignments or purchases of items unearthed on the program. "There is a strict prohibition against appraisers conducting any business during the weekend of the event, as well as a policy against appraisers approaching owners," the press office wants us to remind readers. "We do offer the public the opportunity to get business cards for any of the appraisers as they exit, so if an owner wants to approach an appraiser after the event, they are free to do so." But returns on those specific items have been negligible. Rather, benefits have come indirectly, as a result of general TV exposure.

Berj Zavian said that the publicity has caused Cluster Jewelry to "enlarge geographically," with customers all over the country now.

"It has made the phone ring for me and increased my reach," said Ken Farmer. "Before, it was a fifty- or hundred-mile radius. Now it's anywhere in the nation and especially all over the Southeast. We're in a pretty rural area, but it's easy to reach people if they've got something you want."

"It's helped tremendously," said David Lackey. "People ask how I can justify spending all that money on travel and expenses. I ask them, 'How much would it cost me to buy a two- or three-minute national television commercial?'"

Several appraisers also spoke of bankable information being shared and networks being forged as a result of *Roadshow* contacts with other appraisers. One auctioneer commented that before, when something unfamiliar came in to his smallish auction house, "it was like groping around in the dark." Now he can call on the people he has met on the *Roadshow*. This and similar remarks made it seem that the program has unwittingly created a kind of large *virtual* auction house that operates almost like the big houses do with their many departments of experts.

Eric Silver of New York City, managing director of Lillian Nassau Ltd., was one who spoke of buying opportunities that have come his way as a result of his *Roadshow* contacts. "Because of the show we have had the opportunity to go in on things with others," he said. "Here in the shop we feel sort of isolated. When we go to the show, we get a feeling we're part of a community—I don't like to use the word 'industry.' We are competitors, but we go to dinner or to the bar, and naturally we talk." (Silver, incidentally, is the one from whom we first heard the phrase we used for the title of this piece.)

Asked for a specific example of a *Roadshow*-generated consignment, Noel Barrett named the toys and trains of Disney animator Ward Kimball. True, he was already acquainted with Ward and Betty Kimball, but only as "one of a million faces who had passed through that amazing collection." It was "Betty who especially got to know me better through the *Roadshow*," he said. "The people with the specialty auction houses, like David Rago and myself, have had the most benefit by raising our credibility level."

These rewards have been *earned*, it is clear. We could see, even on our visit to a single *Roadshow* set—in Providence, Rhode Island, on June 18, 2005—that it is exhausting work to do what the *Roadshow* requires of its appraisers. In the beginning, they made 13 stops in order to tape that many episodes. Now, mercifully, the episodes are taped in just five cities, but each day is longer, often more than 12 hours, during which most of the material they're shown is not particularly valuable or interesting. "At the jewelry table we see two hundred or three hundred cameos in each city," said Zavian. "In one city it was over four hundred." At the book table the family Bible is standard fare. Call it denial, stubbornness, optimism, or simply an abiding faith that they're worth *something* despite all contrary evidence from the last decade on the *Roadshow*.

And yet, said Linda Dyer of Franklin, Tennessee, who sits at the tribal arts table with Bruce Shackelford, "the people's connection to the material is very intense and needs to be respected deeply."

Listening politely to stories of "Uncle Fred at Okinawa" is definitely part of the job description. "I think the best part-time job of mine that prepared me for the *Roadshow* was bartending," said Kevin Zavian, Berj's son. "You've got to be able to schmooze. You've got to be personable as well as knowledgeable. They can get a little angry at you at times."

"There is no room for rudeness," said Shackelford. "They have stood in line to see people they idolize. Of course, they can be very rude to us. 'Well, what do you know?' You bite your tongue. That's why we're on TV. We know how to handle the crazies. 'How do you know?' Those family stories die slow deaths. You have to say, 'It has tremendous sentimental value. Keep it and enjoy it.' The majority of our job is the letdown. I see tremendous numbers of rocks, just plain rocks. We see a lot of fake scrimshaw. I tell those people at the front desk [who decide which object goes to which table], 'You send me one more of those things, I'll walk out of here.' So they divvy it up. They send some to folk art."

Nor is the work over when the tour ends each summer. Arms and militaria expert William Guthman said (hyperbolically, we hope), "I'm a million e-mails behind." Nick Dawes said of his e-mail in box, "I get an awful lot of junk mail about things that aren't in my area of expertise [which is Lalique]. Some people blanket-mail the entire list [of *Roadshow* appraisers, to be found on the Web site]. I'm questioned about a Toby jug every other day. I reply as politely as possible. Some people are incredibly rude. If someone is nice, and I can help them immediately, I do."

Stephen Fletcher with the owner of the sculptured and salt-glazed stoneware water cooler that he appraised in Louisville, Kentucky, at $30,000/50,000. The woman had bought the jug at a yard sale, along with a butter churn, for $50. Some weeks after the taping, she consigned it to Skinner. On October 24, 1998, it realized $80,600. "A handful of things have come to us for auction from the *Roadshow*," said Fletcher.

Its greater value is as "an image builder for us," said Karen Keane. "So many of the people we deal with are older. They watch the show, and when they see us, that gives us an extra layer of credibility. The antiques business doesn't have a lot of rules and regulations. There are lots of people who come and go. It's good to be able to separate yourself from a group and show how you're special."

Noel Barrett (right) said he has bought only one item as a result of having seen it at the *Roadshow*. It was this 3' tall latex Speedy Alka-Seltzer figure used in the company's advertising campaigns in the 1950's and 1960's. He saw it go past his table and over to collectibles. Independent appraiser Kathleen Guzman gave it up to him, said Barrett, "because she knew that I knew about it"—he collects figural advertising objects. "I told the guy I thought it was worth four thousand to five thousand dollars, without a needed repair. He'd gotten it for nothing," having rescued it from the trash. "He called me at holiday time and asked if I wanted to buy it. He needed to buy presents. I've still got it in my living room."

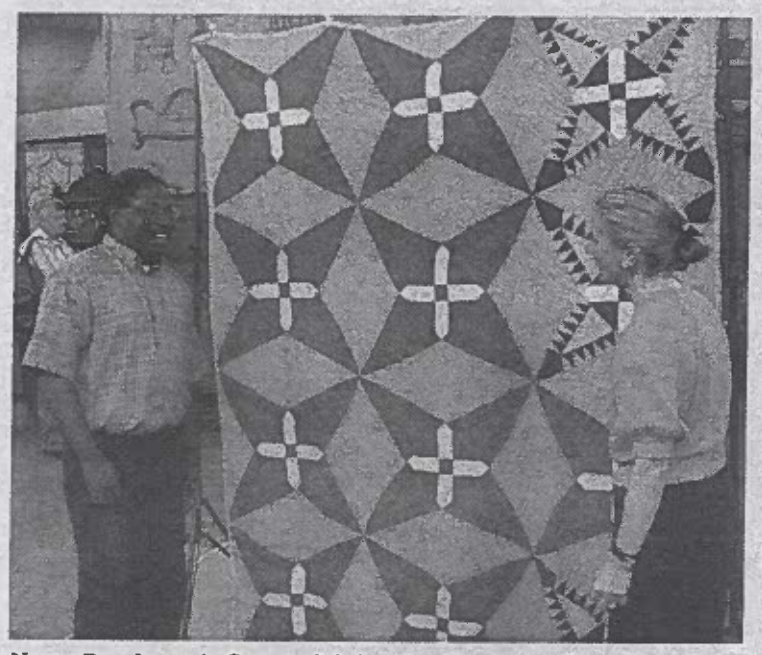
To be sure, the public tries to make contact with the appraisers in other ways besides e-mail. "I have learned to keep my number out of the phonebook and not to publicize my address," said Shackelford. "I had a guy call me five times, drunk as a skunk. Because of the field I'm in, they think they have the Holy Grail, which they have dug up in the backyard."

One appraiser was recognized at an inopportune moment, by the guy at the next urinal. Another got a call from someone who wanted to buy the tie he had worn on the show. A female appraiser is "more careful about going on house calls now." Another woman said, "We've all netted inappropriate fans."

For the large auction houses, fallout has been even more profound and problematic than for those who weren't already known to the public. Lark E. Mason Jr., founding owner of iGavel, wondered aloud of his former employer, "Does Sotheby's really need to be known by a less affluent, broader based demographic? The publicity [from *Roadshow* appearances] generates thousands of communications—letters and e-mail—that have to be answered. Most are from people with objects that have no hope of appearing in those auction rooms." (Mason himself receives up to 350 communications a week, he said.)

Viewers may have noticed, as we have, the presence of Sotheby's and Christie's on the *Roadshow* has diminished over the years. Asked if Christie's would continue to participate, John Hays, its director of American furniture and decorative arts, said, "We analyze it year by year. There's a corporate element here. It will be assessed, as I'm sure the *Roadshow* itself does." Speaking ominously in the past tense, he continued, "We saw very little eighteenth-century furniture. We did get to know some of our competitors, and we hired some." He named Catherine A. Leonhard, formerly with Butterfield & Butterfield. "It provided a venue, almost like a mart. That aspect was frankly more important than the art."

Nancy Druckman, Sotheby's American folk art department director, was asked the same question about her house's decreasing *Roadshow* participation. "In the beginning there was a cast of thousands," she said. "Some have left the gallery. Others, like the old masters expert,

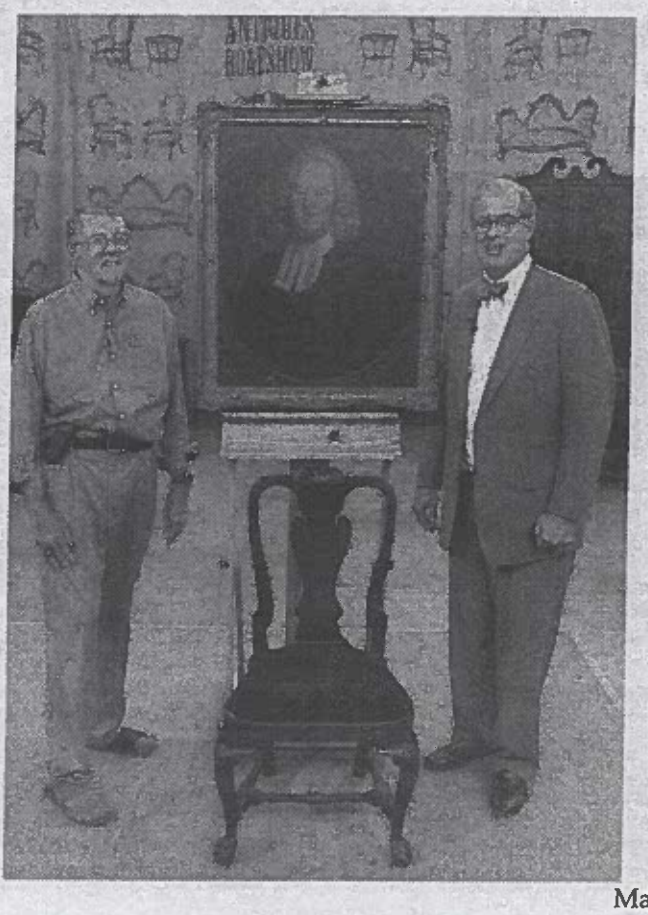


Nancy Druckman in Savannah informing the owner of a quilt made by African-American slaves between 1825 and 1830 that her appraisal was $40,000. Druckman, asked if any experience had prepared her for the TV lights, said, "Zippo. I've often done lecturing and gallery walks, and that for me was good training because I knew how to talk about an object, but TV is very different. I used to think Katie Couric was overpaid. Well, guess what? The X factor is getting makeup slapped on you and realizing that the person you're on camera with is even more terrified than you are." Early on, she said, she found a "fabulous" fabric marine painting, and the owner had a good story. "But do you remember the Jackie Gleason episode [about the] chef of the future? He had a new invention to sell, but the minute he got in front of the camera he froze. That's what happened to her. No words came out. Now I can anticipate—I can read the signs." And like a journalist she has learned not to ask questions whose answers are "yes" or "no."

Jewelry expert Gloria Lieberman (right) in Providence with a guest. Most people don't bring "good" jewelry to the *Roadshow*, she said. "If it has stones, I'm not seeing it. They've already had that appraised. Instead, we get historical material from the regions we go to." It's the stuff that Americans bought, inherited, coveted. It's jewelry brought here by immigrants. "Tourist" jewelry. "I call it 'Americana' jewelry," she said.

Bruce Shackelford (right) in Reno, Nevada, with the owner of a Walker Visalia riding outfit designed for General John Koster of the California State Militia in the late 1890's. Shackelford's value: $25,000. Asked about his recruitment as an appraiser, Shackelford said, "A friend of mine was in on [the show] the first season, before it had aired, and nobody knew what would happen—it was strictly a crap shoot. He did Albuquerque, and when they asked him to do Houston, he said, 'I am done.' They asked him to recommend a replacement. I'll never know if it was in friendship or spite, but he gave them my name, and I said 'yes.'"

Lark Mason with a marble Tang Dynasty Buddhist lion sculpture that he gave an auction estimate of $120,000 to $180,000. For insurance purposes, he put it at $150,000 to $250,000. Ten years ago, those figures would have been $300,000 to $400,000, he told its owner. In Mason's opinion, technology in general has forced the Asian art market to reevaluate itself. "Formerly esoteric items are now accessible to a much larger audience," he said. Some prices have risen, others have dropped. "Imperial Chinese porcelain has dramatically increased in price as demand in Asia has risen, along with a recognition here of that demand," he said. "Chinese tomb ceramics, on the other hand, especially those not of the highest quality, are now easily accessible, and the oversupply and increased information about them has caused those prices to level or fall."



John Hays (right) in Chicago with the owner of a 1749 portrait of Harvard College president Reverend Edward Holyoke, which Hays said lent credence to the theory that the accompanying Newport chair was actually made in Boston. Hays estimated the value of the portrait at $25,000/30,000 and the chair at $60,000/70,000. Hays "didn't jump in and write a book like Leigh and Leslie," he said, but did get asked to do a Sprint commercial that was a *Roadshow* spoof.

didn't find things in their category." Druckman, on the other hand, has found folk art on the tour and worthwhile e-mails in her mailbox. "It's taken a while for this to build up," she said.

"I've begun to see things come in. It's a cumulative effect. Objects from the show itself have come in a bit over time, but after eight years I have started to see good property that Sotheby's would be interested in selling because people have gone to the [*Roadshow*] Web site. These are not people whom I have sat down with on the tour...This is the big payoff for long, arduous weekends."

Considering that payoff, some readers may want to ask Dan Farrell, who is still the "appraiser wrangler" (Rudy Franchi's coinage), if he could use another hand. Or maybe they already have asked. "We do receive unsolicited applications," Farrell said. "But we feel 'we gotta dance with the ones that brung us.' There's always a balance to be struck. It's good to bring in new people, especially if categories get more crowded."

In Providence, we noticed John and Sean Delaney of West Townsend, Massachusetts, at the clocks and watches table. "Both brothers might become the next two young faces," Farrell said. "They meshed well with the others. They got positive reviews."

The producers are, after all, in the TV business, not the antiques business. They need to attend to the needs of their audience. Currently, as a group, the audience "skews older, over fifty, and more female than male," according to the press office. (WGBH can't divulge specific demographics. "We buy them from the Nielsen company and are not permitted to disclose them," the office said.)

The rigorous dictates of TV are, we can guess, one reason why the *Roadshow* will introduce its fourth consecutive host when it begins to air its tenth season on January 9, 2006. Mark L. Walberg (not to be confused with actor Mark "Marky Mark" Wahlberg), former host of several game and reality TV shows, including *Temptation Island*, replaces Lara Spencer. "I think once the people are introduced to Mark, they'll like him," said Bemko. Did viewers not like Spencer? Is that why she was being replaced? Bemko answered obliquely, saying that, while the program saw its ratings rise and was nominated for an Emmy while Spencer was its host, TV research indicates that "people find men more authoritative [than women]."

On the set in Providence, we saw the handsome Walberg, already at work, along with the appraisers. All around us we heard that sound, the din, familiar from the program. "If there's not enough of it at the end of the day, after the crowd has thinned, they add it," one appraiser told us.

A total of 2500 pairs of tickets had been issued, after 9500 requests for pairs were received. Some ticket-holders carried bulky items or wheeled them. A few larger items (vetted via photos) had been delivered in advance, courtesy of WGBH. We noticed that many of those guests had the same expectant look of people we have seen lined up for authors' autographs. (And they do ask for autographs of appraisers, increasingly. Lark Mason said an all-time high, 50 to 75 people, asked for his in L.A.) In bookstore lines, we can attest, they are polite, even solicitous supplicants, but they can also be proprietary, having expended time and effort to make contact.

The table categories were not alphabetical; rather, they were arranged according to the demands and logic of television. Crowd control was one consideration. The categories that have proven likely to see the most action—glass, collectibles, and lately paintings—got bigger spaces, set apart from one another. Also, the producers had carefully checked what was in the background of the taped interviews. On one unfortunate occasion, we were told, the folk art table sign put a pair of "horns" on everyone's head.

At the furniture table this time were Keane, Fletcher, Flanigan, and Garrett. Fletcher had already found two tilt-top tables. He appraised the sun-damaged one, made in New York, circa 1825, at $1000. The other, from Philadelphia, 1760-80, he put at $25,000.

The tilt-tops were a good find and would provide a good lesson for the public. So would what had come to Keane that morning: a repro. Seen in a photograph, the sideboard had looked OK. After delivery to the set, it was immediately apparent: only Georgian-style. The owner had bought it for his office from a friend's antiques shop at $850. It was a good buy at that price, said Keane, who appraised it at $1500/2000. If real, the numbers would have been $15,000 to $20,000.

The appraisers have learned there's no guarantee that early furniture will turn up in a part of the country, like New England, that was settled early. While lots of silver is appraised in the Southwest, and more than the usual number of Native American items in the Northwest, what's been more consistently true is that objects from any category, and great ones, are apt to show up *anywhere*.

In the captions are some of those objects and some "outtakes" from our interviews with the intrepid appraisers.

For more information, see the *Roadshow* Web site (www.wgbh.org).