

Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*

Country Furniture, Primitives, Folk Art, 'Ugly' Fascinate Al



This Gem roller organ was typical of those used by itinerant preachers who could easily carry the model on horseback. At services, the preacher inserted a "cob" and cranked the organ while the crowd sang along.

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SCHAEFFERSTOWN (Lebanon Co.) — For the person who wants a unique coffee table guaranteed to stimulate conversation, Al Flammer has just the piece.

It's an 1870 viewing coffin with original racks, a container for ice to keep the body cool, and hinged doors.

The approximately six-foot pine-crafted box has two doors on the top that open and close to enable the head and arms of the deceased person to be viewed.

The viewing coffin was used as the name entails at viewings for

the deceased. After the viewing the deceased was placed inside a simple pine box for burial.

The viewing coffin was then ready to use for the next funeral.

Al believes this type of casket was used until about 1910 when metal caskets became available.

When asked if a coffin such as this is primarily purchased by museums or for private collections, Al shrugs. "When I suggest that prospective clients use it as a coffee table, the women shudder," he said.

It's unusual pieces such as these that fascinate Al. Pieces such as these capture history in a way that reading about it can

never do. Al enjoys talking about the unique pieces he has collected.

The unversed collector may inquire about the occasional ugly piece that Al bids on at auction and asks, "What are you going to do with that ugly thing?"

"'Ugly' sells. 'Ugly' brings big bucks," Al says of many primitive pieces.

But most of his pieces are not ugly even to the untrained eye. One of these is a Gem roller organ. The hand-cranked tabletop model has numerous "cobs" called that because the wooden rollers look like corn cobs. The rollers are indented with markings that produce wonderful tunes when inserted and cranked inside the roller.

"Most of tunes are Southern and Christian songs," Al said. That's because the roller organs were often used by itinerant preachers who could carry the small tabletop organ on horseback. During church services, the preacher cranked the organ and the crowd sang along.

Al believes the roller organs were popular from 1850-1890. In his 30 years of selling antiques, this is only the second model he has been able to purchase. The roller organ sells for \$795 at Al's Antiques. Formerly called Antiques on the Square, where Routes 897 and 419 meet in Schaefferstown, Al's Antiques deals mostly with country furni-



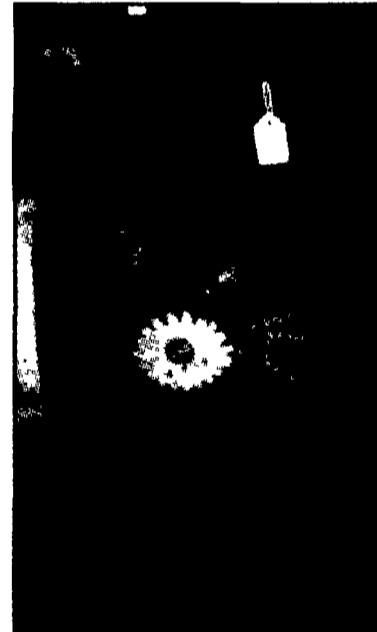
This 1870 viewing coffin includes original racks on which to place the body, below the slated rack is a container for ice used to keep the body cold. The lid was placed on the body and two top doors opened and closed to enable the bereaved to view the face and hands of the deceased.

ture, primitives, pottery, folk art, and 'ugly' things.

He has a selection of redware pottery, most are in their primitive state, but one large urn that he estimates was made in 1880 was later painted and embellished with flowers. Although the floral design is tastefully done, Al said it devalues the piece. He figures the painting was probably done during the 1930s.

Many shelves, old cupboards, and display cabinets enable Al's extensive collection of pottery to be viewed. This includes Polychrome transfer, Adams-style pottery, Gaudy Welsh, Flo-blue, blue transfer, Bennington, Rockingham, and other patterns.

"I like kitchen stuff," Al said of gadgets such as cherry pitters, apple peelers, and utensils. "These pieces help us realize how hard the frontier women had to work. She was in front of her cookstove from morning to night



This redware vessel, about 1880, was embellished with a floral painting, which devalued the piece but is sure to attract a buyer.

using these things," Al said.

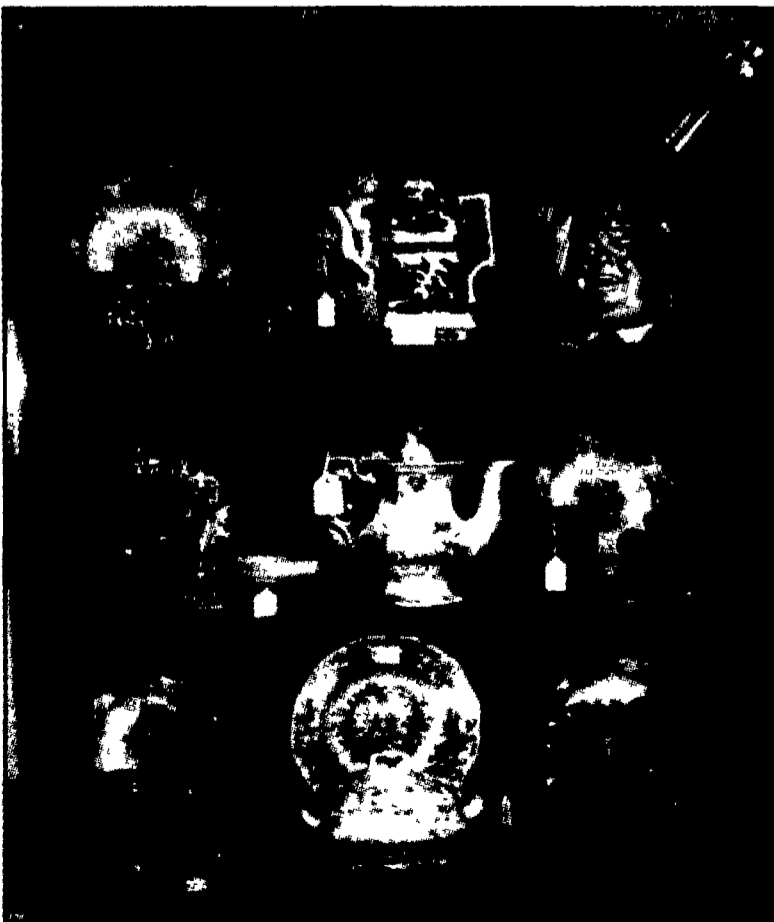
After Sept. 11, Al sold most of his collection intending to retire from the business of selling and buying.

"But it gets in your blood and stays in it," Al said of his and his wife's decision to again set up shop.

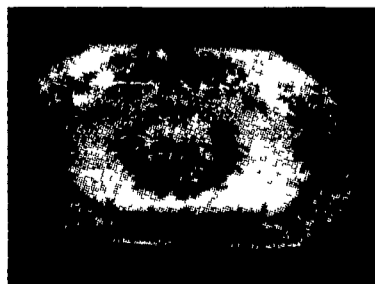
"It spites me that I sold so many of pieces at cost. My inventory is really low compared

to what I had," he said. "I'm from the old school. No credit cards, no computer, and no cell phones. People are amazed, but I'm proving you can run a business without those things."

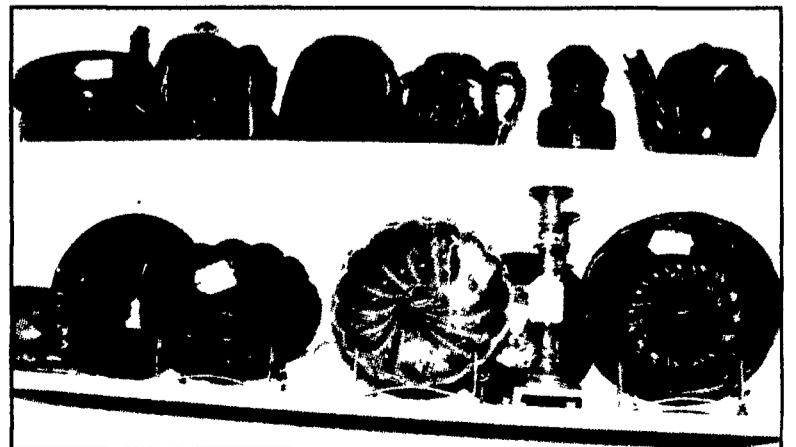
Al's Antiques was formerly known as Antiques on the Square. For more information, call Al at (717) 949-2871.



"This is stuff I enjoy," Al said of the cupboard with a collection of gaudy ironstone, flo-blue, blue transfer, polychrome transfer, and even a wooden tobacco jar.



A platter in the polychrome transfer pattern sells well in the area.



Rockingham and related pottery styles include teapots with Rebecca at the well designs, Turks head molds, bundt molds, and others.