

Pridham's Brings Quebec Furniture, Folk Art and More Under the Hammer

This sale featured furniture from Jean Palardy's book, plus folk art and rare pottery from across the province - along with pieces from the Maritimes and Ontario. **BY SHAUN MARKEY**

Pridham's Auction House in Ottawa has rapidly gained a reputation for attracting and selling early Quebec furniture and folk art. Their sale on May 6, 2023 saw this trend continue with several consignors trusting Pridham's with some extraordinary Quebec furniture and folk art including several pieces of furniture from the seminal book: *The Early Furniture of Quebec* by Jean Palardy.

Other important consignments included impressive examples of Quebec folk art plus a variety of quality Canadiana and folk art from Atlantic Canada and Ontario.

The importance of the auction was set when Pridham's recently received several pieces of furniture from one Quebec consignor including five pieces from Palardy's book published in 1963.

Tops among the five was Lot 83, an early Louis XIII commode which had Internet and phone bidders anxiously vying to be the new owner of this extraordinary piece of furniture. When the dust settled, the successful individual paid \$33,000 (all prices herein include the buyer's premium) for the commode. Refer to Plate 459 in Palardy's book.

Lot 71, a heavily detailed, glazed, flat to the wall cupboard in pine had just about every design feature one would want including a few extra. This was another beauty from Palardy's book in which it occupied Plate 170. It went home with a buyer who paid \$4,200 for the historic gem.

Lot 96, a buffet bas from Quebec, also performed well and crossed the auction block at an impressive \$16,800.

Lot 82, a diamond point armoire from Quebec, entered the fray and collectors drove the price to a respectable \$7,800.

Lot 80 was a Louis XIII Quebec armchair "à la Capucine" style. There's an almost identical example of this chair in Palardy's, Plate 322. In



refinished condition, with a later woven seat, but otherwise in nice condition, the chair was subject to enthusiastic bidding which drove the final price to \$3,600.

Lot 100 continued the Quebec trend. It was my personal favourite in the sale; a diminutive two-piece flat to the wall in old blue overpaint over a red original paint. Bidders endorsed its overall quality with active participation until the successful purchaser ended the competition at a hammer price of \$3,900.

While the furniture was popular, there were several prime examples of Quebec folk art in this sale. An impressively large wood carving of a crow, Lot 97, by legendary artist Wilfrid Richard (1894-1996), had the online and telephone bidders zipping along at a frantic pace. I kept hitting the bid button over and over but every time I was met with the frustrating "Outbid!" signal. I took to the sidelines when the crow sailed past the \$1,000 mark and finally settled on a perch at \$1,560.

An elegant wood carving of a horse, Lot 70, by



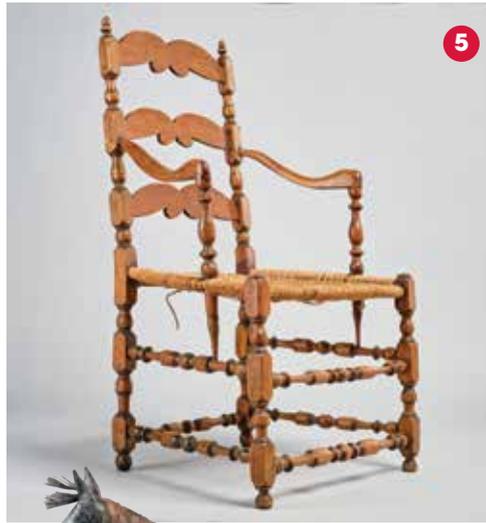
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1 An impressive Louis XIII commode with palmette as featured in Palardy's "The Early Furniture of French Canada", plate 459. Front and sides in pine, top in birch. Refinished. Québec, late 18th century. Measuring, 35" high x 42" wide x 25.75" deep. \$33,000. **2** A very good glazed pine flat to the wall cupboard in an old refinished condition. From Québec with many decorative features. Original cast iron hardware and hand forged nails throughout. Included in Palardy's, plate 170. 6'8" high x 49" wide x 17.25" deep (at waist). \$4,200. **3** An exceptional piece of early French Canadian furniture, this buffet bas in a beautiful dark blue / green original paint shows doors with raised rectangular panel surrounded by raised mouldings. Hinges intact and original. Late 18th century. 31.5" high x 49" wide x 19.5" deep. \$16,800. **4** A small pine diamond point armoire featuring a St. Andrews cross and diamond. Original hand forged hardware and forged nails. Some replacement and old refinish. Québec, late 18th century. 51" wide x 59" high x 21.5" deep. \$7,800. **5** Québec Louis XIII, "à la Capucine" style armchair. Birch with a myriad of turnings and down swept arms. 38.5" high. Seat is 21.5" at widest x 18.25" deep. \$3,600. **6** Diminutive two-piece flat to the wall glazed pine cupboard in old blue overpaint over an old red original paint. Hand-forged and square cut nails. Original hardware including latches and rat tail hinges. 77" high, 37" wide (cornice), 15" wide (base), 13.25" width (top section). \$3,900. **7** Life size crow carved by folk artist Wilfrid Richard. Initialed "WR" to base in pencil. Portneuf County, Québec, circa 1960. 11" high x 16" wide x 5" deep (base). \$1,560. **8** Wooden carving of a black horse by Georges Desmeules (1917-1997). Repair to one ear. Québec, circa 1970. 20.5" high x 13.5" long. \$960. **9** Large carved and painted wooden horse with serious looking handler. Signed and dated Laval, QC, 1983. Came with smaller horse, likely by M. Bergeron and of the same vintage. Larger horse 14.25" high x 17" long. \$3,600.



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10 Two rare watercolours, each depicting a view of The Seigneurie Club at Montebello (Chateau Montebello). The first of the huge main entrance. The other of the Log Chateau. Each signed lower right with the entrance painting being dated 1940. Frames carved by Mitchell. 2.375" x 3.375" each. \$1,440 the pair. **11** This notes two rare examples in Mitchell's stylized birch bark frames. The paintings show a historic Québec bake oven, the other the old stone towers on Sherbrooke street, Montréal. Signed and dated 1945. Each frame measures 3.5" x 4.5". \$780 the pair. **12** Québec handled jug decorated with blue flower and stamped "John Gillespie, St Johns, CE" (for Canada East). 11" high x 7.5" wide. Already at \$1,300 in advance online bidding, it hit \$4,200 on auction day. **13** Nicely shaped burl bowl, birds eye maple. Seldom made commercially so quite scarce. Good condition, no holes, cracks or repairs. Circa 1825. Diameter, 15.75". \$3,900.

Quebec's George Desmeules (1917-1997) also caught the attention of bidders. A repaired ear probably depressed the hammer price somewhat, but the horse still performed well with a final price of \$960.

When it comes to carving horses, there are few, if any, better than Quebec's Gaston Bergeron (1922-2008). Lot 35 was a touching and elegant example of his talent with a carving knife. The large brown work horse is carved with amazing anatomical accuracy. Here was a man who knew his horses and, more to the point, knew how to carve them! Mr. Bergeron obviously has a following among avid collectors because there was enthusiastic bidding on this piece, finally settling at \$3,600.

I want to pay special attention to several small works of art in the sale by the miniaturist painter Willard Morse Mitchell (1879-1955). When I say "miniature", I'm talking works of art that are, including the frame, 2.5" by 3.5"! Of course, I was aware of Mr. Mitchell's work, knew they were rare and had seen a handful of examples sell at auction over the last 25 years. However, in this case, a long time collector had entrusted 12 Mitchell paintings to the Pridham sale.

True to the saying, good things come in small packages, these little Mitchell paintings performed exceedingly well. Mr. Mitchell's touch and talent literally burst out of these tiny frames. Working in watercolour, his paintings, mostly landscapes, are done with care, precision

and imagination.

My favourite was Lot 62, two watercolours, each depicting a view of The Seigneurie Club at Montebello, Quebec (the name later changed to the Chateau Montebello). Built in 1930, it was (and likely still is) the largest log structure in the world. The first one depicts the huge main entrance; the other the complete Chateau. Each is signed lower right, with the entrance painting being dated 1940. This pair of mighty Mitchells brought \$1,440.

I should mention that Mr. Mitchell also carved and painted his own frames. Take Lot 59 for example. These little wonders, one an historic Québec bake oven, the other, the old stone towers on Sherbrooke Street in Montréal, are



14 Staffordshire arctic scene, blue and white transferware plate, with ships, explorers, icebergs and Inuit people on a sled being pulled by dogs. Exotic animals and floral arrangements around circumference. Marked "ARCTIC SCENERY" with the number "9" adjacent to the image. Very good condition. Circa 1835. Diameter, 10.25". \$1,320. **15** Lot of 3 transferware plates: Flow blue plate with small central image of sail / steam ship, 10.5" diameter; Flow blue plate with a central image of Table Rock, Niagara Falls, sea shell border. Flow blue plate marked underside "FALL OF MONTMORENCI NEAR QUEBEC". Diameter 9". \$780 the lot. **16** Very rare writing arm Windsor chair in black overpaint. Arrow back, box stretcher base, ample shaped seat. Pictou, Nova Scotia, circa 1850. 36" high x 37" wide. Ex Ray Clark Collection. \$900. **17** Pine chest of drawers, two drawers over three graduated drawers, cut out across base and sides. Hand forged nails. Painted at some point fairly recently in a dark blue paint. Nova Scotia, early 19th century. 39.5" high x 42.75" wide x 18.25" deep. \$1,140. **18** Kitchen table, two lapped drawers, original knobs, splayed tapered legs / apron in old yellow overpaint, trim around apron and refinished two-board (removable) top. Wilno area, Renfrew County, Ottawa Valley. Mid to late 19th century. Possibly by the late John Koslowski. 70" long x 32" wide x 23". \$2,160. **19** Unusual sulky and rider copper weathervane with original directionals, circa 1900, on later platform. Eastern Canada, likely Prince Edward Island. 28.5" high x 33" wide x 22.5" deep. \$2,700.

encased with stylized birch bark wooden frames made by the artist. Both were signed. These little beauties zipped across the finish line at \$780 for the pair.

For Quebec stoneware collectors there was one rarity in the sale, and it was as doozy. Lot 105, the mint one-gallon handled jug decorated with a cobalt blue flower decoration and stamped "John Gillespie, St Johns, CE" (for Canada East) had already reached \$1,300 in advanced bidding online. On auction day though, that figure proved to be just the beginning. Persistent bidding across all the platforms pushed the piece to a final figure of \$4,200.

Now let me shift your attention to pieces from Ontario, Atlantic Canada and elsewhere of

which there were many fine examples in the sale.

Lot 44, a good-sized bird's eye burl bowl in excellent condition wasted no time in climbing to a hammer price of \$3,900.

Transfer ware plates proved their strength in the collector marketplace. One example, Lot 108, a light blue Arctic scene, caused furious bidding before finally levelling off at \$1,320. A trio of flow blue transfer ware plates, Lot 110, depicting Canadian scenes fetched \$780 for the grouping.

Back in the furniture department, Lot 15, a rare writing arm Windsor chair in black overpaint and excellent condition from Pictou, Nova Scotia reached a respectable \$900. Again from Nova Scotia, Lot 29, an attractive chest of

drawers with a scalloped base and a dark blue overpaint found success at \$1,140.

Many eyes were on an equally rare harvest table, Lot 122, from Wilno (Renfrew County) in the Ottawa Valley. This six-foot, example with two drawers, and a base painted an old, bright yellow, with a refinished two board top, found a new home at \$2,160.

A tin weather vane of a sulky rider driving a trotting standard bred horse, Lot 94, proved a popular item with bidders and reached a final price of \$2,700.

Robin Pridham and his team continue to win the confidence of collectors, both those building collections and those who are downsizing. It's a trend that will no doubt continue in the future.