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Auction of Pa. man's estate a trip back in time

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Helen Dice of Chambersburg, Pa., looks over a Conestoga wagon and other antique conveyances Thursday at the auction of the estate of Don Berkebile of Mercersburg, Pa. (Credit: By Don Aines /)

CHAMBERSBURG, Pa. — The contents of Don Berkebile's life were being sold off piece by piece Thursday - from a Conestoga wagon to his childhood toys and an 84-year-old bottle of beer - as collectors, museums and the curious attended the second day of an auction of the estate of the curator, who died in July during a fight with a neighbor. Despite some modern clutter, including an August 2008 issue of National Geographic, entering the summer kitchen of Berkebile's home is like stepping back in time. "It's like someone walked out of here 200 years ago and never came back," said auctioneer Matthew S. Hurley, who is auctioning the estate of the author and retired curator at the Smithsonian Institute who died of head and neck injuries in a July 28 confrontation with a neighbor outside of his Blue Spring Road home.



Pennsylvania State Police said Berkebile, 81, and a neighbor got into an altercation that morning, during which the neighbor was wounded by pellets fired from a handgun carried by Berkebile. The 40-year-old neighbor then beat and killed Berkebile, police allege.

The incident is under investigation by police and the Franklin County District Attorney's Office, Assistant District Attorney Chris Schellhorn said earlier this week. No charges have been filed.

An ancient fiddle, a bottle of beer dated 1924 and a cast iron dog figurine are among the thousands of items in the estate of Don Berkebile being auctioned off this week. Berkebile was killed in a dispute with a neighbor in August. (Credit: By Don Aines /)

Berkebile was an expert on carriages, stagecoaches, Conestoga wagons and other 19th-century conveyances. The Conestoga he owned sold for \$15,000 Thursday, Hurley said.

"We've known Don Berkebile for over 30 years," said Art Reist of Lancaster County who, with his father and brother, has a collection of Conestoga wagons. Berkebile's wagon was bought by a neighbor of Reist's, he said.

Dozens of collectors jammed the barn, where there were enough hubs, spokes, rims and other parts to outfit several wagons, tack for the teams to pull them and blacksmith tools.

"How many times do you sell a \$1,000 anvil?" Hurley said.

A more modern means of transportation sat in a garage, a 1916 Autocar truck manufactured in Ardmore, Pa.

Today, the furniture and contents of the house will be sold, Hurley said. A cracked fiddle and a beer bottled in 1924 were just a few of the thousands of items. There also were hand grenades, presumably disarmed.

"We ask people not to pull the pins," Hurley said.

"He saved everything," Hurley said. That lifetime of collecting included Berkebile's toys and furniture from his childhood bedroom.

Berkebile was a widower with no children. Hurley said proceeds from the sale will go to several charities benefiting animals specified in Berkebile's will.

An extensive collection of antique firearms is being handled by another dealer, Hurley said. Still to come are auctions of Berkebile's coin collection in November, his house and land in December, and his books in January, he said.

Today's auction will begin at 9 a.m. and last all day, Hurley said. Representatives from several museums were on hand Thursday and people from as far as Florida, Maine and Texas came to bid, he said.

The Conococheague Institute in Welsh Run, Pa., bought some of Berkebile's books for its library, and cannon molds and tools for its collection, Executive Director Walter Powell said.

"Every time you go to an auction, you think about a person's life spread out on a yard," Powell said.

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From: tristateneews I love the wagon, wish I could afford it. Sad story to get to this end.
Gotta watch those Neighbors.

**Fri 31 Oct 2008 02:43:41
PM EDT**

From: brooke18 (Deleted by Administrator)

**Fri 31 Oct 2008 06:28:55
PM EDT**

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