

Saddle Up

Western artifacts bring collectors down the trail of history

The love affair with Western art and artifacts dates back centuries and is the stuff of fascinating facts and legend. Given the diversity of items considered Western artifacts, it's easy to understand why this area of interest enjoys continuous popularity among historians, tourists, art aficionados and collectors, to name just a few.

"Whether it's guns, spurs, saddles, decor, furniture or whatever, being able to hold an antique item in your hand brings a certain connection to the past that you can't replicate with any amount of technology (yet)," said Rob Kastner, owner and founder of Wild West Auctions. "The

attention to detail and craftsmanship of most older items are so hard to come by these days. When the item once belonged to a famous figure, whether it be lawmen to outlaw, there's a notoriety and prestige associated, and now they have direct link to a piece of history.

"We all want to be legendary in our own right."

"Wanted" posters with the faces of outlaws — along with offers of mighty rewards for their capture; mining certificates and mineral ore specimens; antique maps of the still-emerging West; newspapers recounting the events of the day such as

the Gold Rush; antique bottles discovered among the ruins of towns that once were alive with prospectors, ranchers, pioneers, law breakers and law enforcers; western-themed books; Wild West show memorabilia; and paintings and sculptures depicting the rugged, yet welcoming character of the West are just some of the many items representing the Old West in today's world.

"We're seeing wonderful material coming to market lately in an unexpected way," said Fred Holabird, founder of Holabird's Western Americana, an auction house with more than 25 years experience dealing in Western and Americana art and artifacts. "Honestly, every year that goes by I'm blown away by something that comes up for auction."

Among the items that have left Holabird and his team speechless over the years is a collection of mineral ore specimens that a man brought in for appraisal, in a Tupperware container. Upon scientific examination and review by the specialists at Holabird, it was determined that the specimens were mined in the West sometime in the mid-to-late 1870s, and essentially do not exist on the planet anymore, Holabird explained. The identification of the mineral specimens, which the owner was once offered \$10,000 for, prompted pure excitement in Holabird, who began his career as a mineral exploration geologist. Ultimately, the collection sold for more than \$300,000.

One aspect of Western art and artifacts that piques the interest of collectors and others fascinated with the rich history of the Old West is ephemera. Oftentimes it's the romanticism associated with the Old West, its timeless characters, like Wyatt Earp and Wild Bill Hickok, and its history of exploration and uncharted development, explained Tom Slater, director of Americana auctions at Heritage Auctions.

As is the case with many other antique



Grouping of late-19th and early 20th century Wild West Show ephemera and photographs, sold for \$717 in 2009 through Heritage Auctions.

Photo courtesy Heritage Auctions

An annual stage coach pass to "The North Western Stage and Omnibus Co.," circa 1884, sold for \$538 in a May 2010 auction. Photo courtesy Heritage Auctions



and collectible interests, the spectrum of prices for classic Western ephemera varies based on a multitude of factors. However, as prices realized at auction reveal, the category does provide opportunity for collectors of all investment levels to accumulate a collection to be proud of.

"There are a lot of neat items available that are not terribly expensive," Slater said. "For example, Wild West Show memorabilia, old newspapers with accounts of significant Old West events and some photographs."

During a March 2014 auction, a lot including 11 pieces of Wells Fargo memorabilia, including shipping stamps, unused checks, Christmas stamps, remitter receipts, advertising stamps, a postcard, and souvenir book commanded \$120 (with buyer's premium). At the same auction, a rather large lot (approximately 35 items) including ephemera from the Stage Coach Line, circa 1824, rounded up \$239 (with buyer's premium).

"There's a misconception that all lower priced items are junk. That's not always accurate," Holabird explained. "As we know, the market dictates what an item will sell for at a given time."

He also pointed out that part of the importance of diversity, not only in the types of items available, but the affordability is that it contributes to the future of

the collecting community. One way that manifesting itself is during Internet-only portions of auctions presented by Holabird's Western Americana.

"If you don't have anything to feed a new collector today, you won't have an advanced collector tomorrow," he said.

However, as the collecting community as a whole remains challenged in some ways by the lack of younger, traditionalist collectors, some of the nostalgia associated with the Old West that was conveyed first through radio programs, western-themed novels and later through television isn't there for people to draw on.

"I grew up watching westerns on television and in movies, like so many people of my generation," said Slater. "I think there is less knowledge and empathy for that now."

Yet, according to both Holabird and Slater, that's what makes provenance, quality and conveying that to bidders so important.

"Our Western and Americana auctions continue to thrive, because as we've seen, the response is strong if you have the right stuff, and not so strong if you don't," Slater explained. "As a friend of mine says, 'Some like the sizzle and some like the steak,' and in many cases Western collectors like the sizzle."

Part of the romanticism and sizzle of Western ephemera has to do the stories behind or within the items themselves. In fact, stories associated with the Old West's charming but rough-and-tumble ways used to have such a following that at one point in the early-to-mid 20th century, the market for Western-based magazines was as robust as a Saturday night at the Bird Cage Theatre in Tombstone during the 1880s. Among the more popular western magazines included Thrilling Western, All Western Magazine, Giant Western, Western Yarns, Texas Rangers, Wild West Weekly and Western Romances, cites Thomas McNulty in an article that appeared in *Antique Trader* in 2012. Ironically, one of the most prolific writers of stories in these magazines was L. Ron Hubbard. Best known for his science fiction work, Hubbard also penned a number of pulp western articles and novels. In the modern market, pulp western magazines like those listed above can be obtained for as little as \$20, and on the high side, they are known to command \$100, according to McNulty's article.

Another draw for collectors of Western ephemera is the personal connection to the geographic region. Early on, the team at Holabird's Western Americana noticed

OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE WESTERN ARTIFACTS, EPHEMERA AND COLLECTIBLES

- A new exhibition "A Grand Adventure: American Art of the West" is on display at the Palm Spring Art Museum, Palm Springs, Calif., until Jan. 4, 2015. The exhibit features 45 classic and traditional Western artworks from 20 private collections. Learn more: <http://bit.ly/ATWestArtPalm101514>
- The McIntosh Western Ephemera Collection, offered by the Donald C. & Elizabeth M. Dickinson Research Center, part of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, features a host of

western-themed books, magazines and more. Examples from the collection can be viewed online at <http://bit.ly/ATWestCowMuseum101514>. The museum itself is located in Oklahoma City, Okla.

- Rich Penn Fall 2014 Auction, featuring a variety of items, including vintage cowboy memorabilia, set for Oct. 31, 2014. View the 650 lots of this upcoming auction: <http://bit.ly/ATWestBrk101514>
- Legends of the West Signature Auction, Nov. 8, 2014, presented by Heritage Auctions. Check www.ha.com for more details.
- Hunting, Western & Tack Consignment Auction, Nov. 15, 2014, presented by Wild West Auctions in Thayne, Wyo. Visit www.wildwestauctionsWYO.com for more information.
- Holabird's Western Americana will host its Winter Auction, sure to include a selection of western artifacts and memorabilia, in early December 2014. (As of press time the date was to be determined.) Check the Holabird site for more details: www.holabirdamericana.com

people collecting ephemera based on specific regions of the West, be it mining certificates, stage coach tickets, journals or maps. Oftentimes, those connections are related to a family legacy or a passionate appreciation for the history of an region, such as areas like Bodie, Calif., and Tonopah, Nev. As one of the most well known ghost towns, ephemera and artifacts from Bodie have a following among collectors, Holabird said.

Over the years, items from Bodie have been “hotter than a firecracker, and then other times, ice cold,” Holabird said. Not to be overshadowed, items from other regions such as mining communities in Colorado and the area of Tonopah, Nev., have garnered additional shares of attention. It’s also part of the cycle of the market and interest, the ebbs and flows, but times like this also provide a great buying opportu-

nity for astute collectors, Holabird added.

Like most of its fellow collecting areas, Western ephemera has its share of issues with fakes and reproductions. However, Kastner offers some sound advice for being wise to Western fakes and reproductions:

“Do your homework in all aspects of the item in question – the Internet is a great place to start, but be careful, because it’s not all trustworthy. Make yourself well-versed in the material and techniques used to create the item, and familiarize yourself with the person who created it and the environment and time in which it was created.

“When you start putting that puzzle together, some pieces may not fit and that should be a big sign that it may not be a genuine piece,” Kastner added. “When in doubt, consult a professional appraiser or historian because you never want to de-

ceive or be deceived. And remember, even the professionals get it wrong sometimes.”

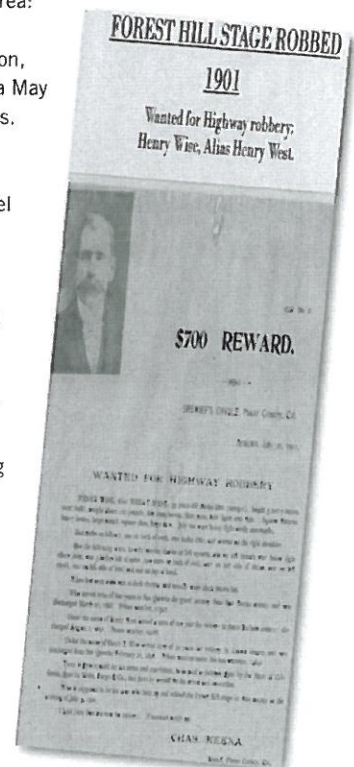
Whether you recall the days of listening or watching Hopalong Cassidy and Butch and Sundance ride the range, are a fan of the captivating work of Western artists like Charles Russell, appreciate learning about the “richness” of mining history or the triumphs and trials of the settlers who made their way West — the world of Western art, artifacts and ephemera is a fulfilling and fascinating topic for discovery.

Editor’s Note: Look for a new feature column, by Steve Evans, about collectible cowboy guitars in the Oct. 29, 2014, issue of Antique Trader. ■

Antoinette Rahn is Online Editor for Antique Trader. In addition to her love of Irish antiques – inspired by her late Irish grandmother– she has a penchant for collecting petroliana and vintage advertising items. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband, Tom.

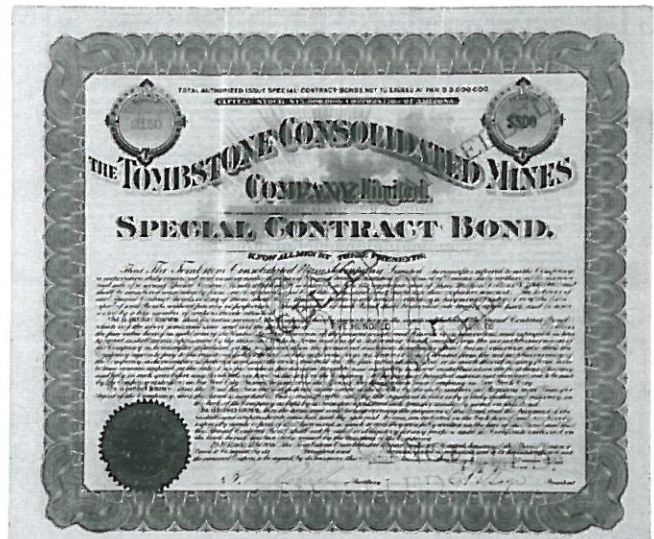
AUCTION PRICES REALIZED

- California and Western Ephemera from the Gold Rush era to about 1910, sold for **\$433** during a June 22, 2014, auction offered by Hewlett’s Auctions (presale was \$100-\$200).
- Various pieces of saddlery from Walter Boyd, Von Norstrand, Waterloo, Des Moines, S W Kanady sold for **\$25** during a March 29, 2014, auction at Holabird’s Western Americana.
- Sacramento California Controller’s Office Warrant and letter discussing the Sibley Tent, Fort Leavenworth, circa 1880; re-survey boundary between Texas and Indian territory, among other items, brought **\$219** during a July 2013 auction at Guernsey’s.
- A lot of two different stock certificates, and two typed letters, including “The Original Rawhide Mining Co.” and “Rawhide Mining Co.” sold for **\$179** during a Sept. 14, 2014, auction at Holabird’s Western Americana.
- Eleven pieces of Wells Fargo memorabilia, including shipping stamps, unused checks, Christmas stamps, remitters receipts, advertising stamps, post card, Uniform Express Receipt, and souvenir book about the Wells Fargo movie, realized **\$120**.
- Grouping of Wild West Show ephemera and photographs, circa late 19th and early 20th century, highlighted by a colorful 64-page 7½-by-9½-inch “Historical Sketches & Programme” for “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World” show, 1893, along with a postcards and advertising cards commanded **\$717** during a 2009 sale at Heritage Auctions.
- Real photo postcards including nine Idaho town stagecoach and horse-drawn scenes, commanded **\$263** during a December 2012 Heritage Auctions event.
- Group of early California books and ephemera, consisting of a 1907 Pacific Telephone Co., Telephone Directory of Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley; California Life Illustrated, along with vintage maps realized **\$976** during Clars Dec. 8, 2013 auction.
- Lot of four vouchers related to the Santa Fe Pacific Railroad, circa 1899, and a copy of the magazine The Smoke Signal, published by the Tucson Corral of the Westerners, #23, circa 1971, hammered at **\$127** during a Dec. 2013, auction at Holabird’s Western Americana.
- A selection of 19 journals, ledgers and day books associated with Wonder Company, Life Minor, Fleischman Co., Kasker Pottery, Humboldt Soda Works, Erguaga and Star Hotel, circa 1910 to 1919, and billheads from Stephenson Drug Company Haviland Chevrolet, Acton Fisher Tobacco, and Humboldt Star, realized **\$239** (w/bp) in a March 29, 2014 auction at Holabird’s Western Americana.
- “The North Western Stage and Omnibus Co.” annual pass, measuring 4-by-2 inches with a central vignette of stage coach, four corners inscribed with names of market area: Colorado, New Mexico, Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Oregon, California” realized **\$538** during a May 2010 auction at Heritage Auctions.
- Wanted Poster and two booklets offering a reward of \$200 for the capture of “Texas cowboy” Samuel Esker, of the Montana Stock Association issues handbill from Miles City on Aug. 26, 1899, fetched **\$150** during a June 2014 auction presented by Heritage Auctions.
- Uncommon stagecoach “Wanted” poster for Henry West, who was wanted for holding up and robbing the Forest Hill stage on July 3, 1901, for which the sheriff of Placer County, California, offers a \$700 reward for the capture of Henry West, also known as Henry Wise, commanded **\$1,912** in a November 2007, auction offered by Heritage Auctions. ▶

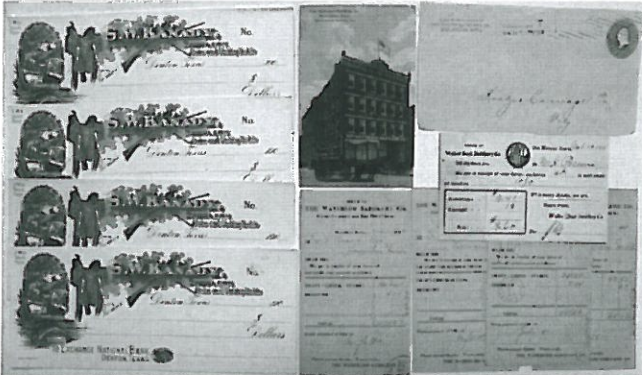




A Sacramento Calif. Controller's Office Warrant regarding survey boundary between Texas and Indian Territory fetched \$219 in July 2013. Photo courtesy Guernsey's



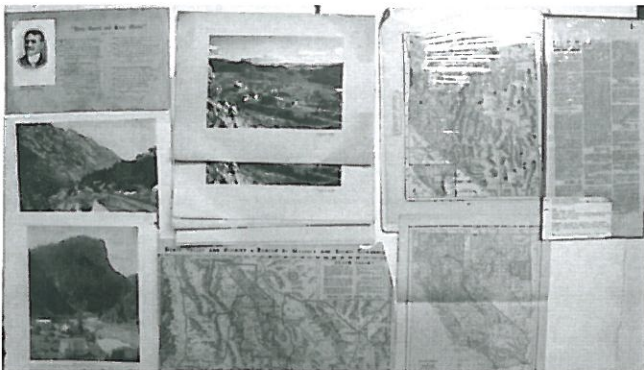
This contract bond from Tombstone Consolidated Mines, late 1800s, is part of a large grouping of checks, documents, letters and related ephemera which sold for \$2,629 in 2010. Photo courtesy Heritage Auctions



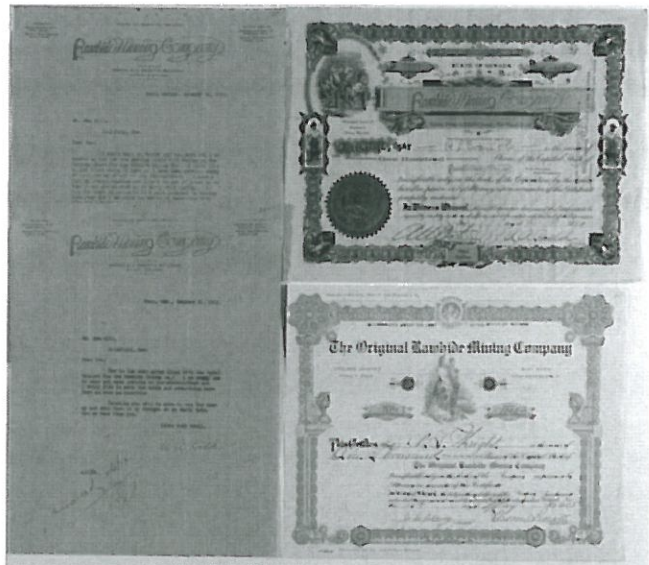
This lot with pieces of saddlery ephemera from Walter Boyd, Von Norstrand, Waterloo, Des Moines realized \$25 in 2014. Photo courtesy Holabird's Western Americana



Rail ticket for The Western & Atlantic Railroad, of Atlanta, Ga., from June 16, 1862, realized \$23.80 in 2014. Photo courtesy Klein James' Seattle Auction Gallery



Lot of Death Valley maps, circa 1880, and related newspaper columns, circa 1969, sold for \$29 in 2014. Photo courtesy Holabird's Western Americana



Two different stock certificates and two typed letters regarding "The Original Rawhide Mining Co." and "Rawhide Mining Co." commanded \$179 during a Sept. 14, 2014, auction offered by Holabird's Western Americana. Photo courtesy Holabird's Western Americana



California and Western ephemera portfolio, dating from the Gold Rush to about 1910, sold for \$433 in 2014. Photo courtesy Hewlett's Auctions