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Friday, 11/30/07

## Know Your Stuff: Comfort has come long way since days of bustle bench

By CONNIE SUE DAVENPORT  
For Williamson A.M.

Dear Connie Sue,

I have a Civil War-era bustle bench in my shed and would like an opinion on it.



[enlarge](#)

Bustle benches were commonly seen in well-appointed Victorian homes. They offered ladies of the day a place to sit while chatting, reading or perhaps working on needlepoint. (SUBMITTED)

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My ex-landlady bought it in the early '90s for \$325. The veneer is beginning to separate from the front, right under the seat, but near as I can tell, it is the original upholstery.

I need some advice on whether I should sell it as is or have it restored before selling. I do not have room in my house for it and I know there must be someone out there who would love to have this piece.

— Austin Majors

**Dear Austin,**

A bustle bench was designed so that ladies wearing bulbous, hoop skirts with bustles could sit more comfortably. The wide seat and low back offered space to fluff one's skirt without causing it to fly up in the front.

In a well-appointed Victorian home, guests would be greeted in the entry hall, and then seated in the reception room or front parlor. Tea was served in the front parlor and accompanied by lively conversation.

After dinner, ladies returned to the front parlor while the gentlemen went to the library to smoke and drink.

Truth be told, ladies smoked and drank as well. Maybe they were more particular about the crystal and ashtray styles and wanted to distance themselves from the manly after-dinner manners.

I think your bustle bench is a post Civil War piece, likely circa 1875. It shows evidence of the early mass-produced Victorian pieces with simple incised lines on the back and arms and simply turned legs. This is not the original upholstery. It may have been reupholstered as late as the mid-20th century.

During Victorian times, visitors and conversation were a popular diversion. Small pieces of furniture like this were arranged in various corners of a room to make chitchat more pleasant. Furniture in the lady's front parlor was also arranged around a window for needlework projects and reading. The warmth of the sun was a consideration in room arrangement for all seasons.

I guess comfort is a relative term. This bench would not invite me to sit a spell. Coiled springs weren't added to furniture seats until after 1830. Victorians never experienced an overstuffed recliner or swivel rocker.

They were avid readers, produced intricate needlework and woven human hair framed arrangements. Seated in furniture like this, they must have had impressive posture, as well!



[enlarge](#)  
**This old oak wall phone could be worth \$200 to the right collector.**  
 (SUBMITTED)

Contact Connie Sue Davenport with questions about your antiques and collectibles, and we'll discuss them here. Send to [curios@conniesueinc.com](mailto:curios@conniesueinc.com) or by mail in care of Williamson A.M.

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Bustle benches sell from \$385 to \$500 in restored condition. You implied that the bustle bench was a "throw-in" for buying the property. I would do nothing and sell it for anything over \$295.

**Connie,**

I am attaching a photo of an old telephone that we have. Below are the numbers that are inside the telephone when you open it up.

At the top: 317 – BU

Left side: Rec

Right side: Cond L2 GND-L1

Is there anything you can tell us about it?

— **Nelda and James Johnson**

**Dear Nelda and James,**

Most oak wall phones are in the \$200 value range.

Although there still are a few collectors, the craze to have an oak wall phone in our country kitchen has passed. This may reflect the aging population of fans of the early TV shows *Lassie* and *The Real McCoys*.

Although I was unable to locate any details about the numbers inside, they may be wiring/installation instructions.

There may be other readers who can help. I always welcome input from informed collectors.

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