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Friday, 05/19/06

Know Your Stuff: Tapestries probably made between 1891 and 1914

Wrapping items in cotton cloth protects them from acidity in storage

By CONNIE SUE DAVENPORT
For Williamson A.M.

As your column in The Tennessean requests, we would like to know more about our "stuff" and get your advice.

Before she died over 10 years ago, my mother gave us two Chinese tapestries that are absolutely lovely, but we don't know how to care for and display them.

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They measure about 11" x 23", present intricate designs of flowers, bowls and what appear to be lamps, and show a wonderful range of colors including a large amount of gold-colored "thread" which seems to actually be the tiniest of beads. In fact, my mother told us the style of stitching is called "blind stitch" because it ruined the eyesight of the artisan and has been outlawed. I can believe this because the work is very fine, so color gradations are subtle and very effective as artistic pieces.

I do not know the age of these items. My parents traveled to Hong Kong and other sites



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The fineness of the stitches varies considerably in this tapestry. (SUBMITTED PHOTOS)

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in the Orient in the 1960s and '70s and Mom said the pieces were old when they bought them. There are some loose threads and they appear a bit dirty.

Will you please give us direction for how to protect and display these items? And, how can we locate and deal with an appropriate conservator, possibly out of this area?

Williamson A.M. Reader

Franklin

Dear Reader,

Your tapestries were made in the early 1900s. As a general rule, the plain "CHINA" mark

came into use after 1891 when U.S. federal law required all imports to be marked with their country of origin. The addition of "Made in" was required in 1914.

They have some manufactured fabric, especially in the binding and borders, in combination with the colorful needlework called "couching." Couching is where a thread is brought down on the surface of the fabric by another stitch. The fineness of these stitches varies considerably. In some stitches two colors have been twisted together to great effect as you mentioned in your letter. Similar items are for sale from \$150 to \$500.

You can protect your textiles by shielding them from direct sunlight and wrapping them in a cotton fabric when storing. The cotton, like a pillowcase or sheet, will protect them from the acid in the wooden drawers and chests where we normally store our linens.

Professional textile conservators can help you preserve the panels. Anne Ramsey, in the Hillsboro area, for instance, can clean, repair and advise you of proper framing methods. She is a quilt and textile specialist with considerable experience. The American Association of State and Local Histories (the source for reliable information used by museums throughout the United States) offers technical leaflets and books you may order by visiting their site online at www.AASLH.org. Their headquarters is on Church Street in Nashville. Thanks for sharing this beautiful piece with us!

Japanese dinnerware

It is a buyer's market for sets of Japanese export china in today's secondary market. People now in their 70s had brothers, husbands, uncles and boyfriends in World War II and through the occupation of Japan into the 1950s. Many of the sets found in estates are still in their original packing with military postmarks intact. Often the sets have been respectfully set aside in memory of a loved one or simply "saved for good."

Dinnerware marked "Made in Japan" was produced to copy Haviland and Lennox soft floral patterns.



enlarge

As a general rule, the plain "CHINA" mark came into use after 1891, when U.S. law required all imports to be marked with their country of origin. The addition of "Made in" was required in 1914.

Contact me with any questions about your antiques and collectibles, and we'll discuss them here next week. Send to conniesue@conniesueinc.com or by mail in care of Williamson A.M.

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Industrial-made dinnerware with delicate decals in pastel colors, floral design and rich gold edge reminded soldiers of home. Sets were value priced to the military and shipped free to the States. Large sets with service for 12, five-piece place settings and 12 additional serving pieces are common.

Some families are splitting the dinnerware upon inheritance so that everyone can remember grandparents and childhood. If you wish to buy, though, prices are low and choices are plentiful.

Many of my clients have inherited more than one set and wish to part with some or all of the vintage dishes. After discussing value (usually from \$185 to \$500 per set), my first advice is to offer the set to their immediate network of friends and family. Ask who might be interested in owning this piece of your family's history, then negotiate a price or simply give the china to them.

My next suggestion is to donate the set to a charity like BRIDGES of Williamson County (an organization that provides safe transition to domestic violence victims), a church or any nonprofit that might sell the set to raise money for community projects. These donations are usually tax deductible.

You should wash these sets by hand or forfeit the gold detail (it may wash off easily). Or imagine the set without gold and wash in the dishwasher. Never microwave — unless you like fireworks!



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