



Turn of the 19th century Tavern Coffee can sold for \$1,375 at a recent upstate New York auction.



A buyer bought this Turkey brand roasted coffee can for \$975.

## Old Coffee Cans Selling For Big Bucks

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many towns of any size had their own roaster and coffee brand. The graphics on the cans were important for promotion, and today that antique advertising can bring big bucks. For example, recently a Tavern Coffee can sold for \$1,375 at an upstate New York auction.

But if you have old coffee cans filled with nails and screws in the workshop, don't get too excited, says Bill Morford, owner of the New York absentee auction.

"The ones that bring money have to be in excellent condition," he says. "We've had multiple cans in the thousands of dollars range."

Though the Tavern Coffee can had some rust spots, the lithographed image of taverns on the front and back caught the eye of a collector. Other cans in the same auction started at \$253 for an Abbey Garden Coffee can. A Golden Days Coffee can with a hook on top sold for \$605.

As always with collectables, condition and rarity set the value. At a later Morford auction, a stained Boston Special Coffee can sold for just \$50, while a rare Mamma's Favorite Brand Coffee can earned a top bid

of \$2,100.

People purchase the cans to decorate with as well as to add to collections, Morford says. Most of the 4 to 6 auctions he has each year have some coffee cans. Morford Auction consigns items and puts them in a catalog sent to subscribers or available on the company's website. Bidders can bid through the internet or by phone. After the auction, Morford reports the prices paid on the website.

Besides coffee cans, he deals with all types of vintage antique advertising items and related collectables. Tobacco cans are also popular with collectors.

"Some plug tobacco tins bring over \$10,000," he says.

Farmers may also have antique oil and grease cans that may be valuable, he adds. FARM SHOW readers who think they have items suitable for Morford's auction can send him photos. He generally lists items that will sell for \$300 or more and takes a 10 to 25 percent commission depending on the item's value.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Morford Auction, Rt. 2, Cazenovia, N.Y. 13035 (ph 315 662-7625; www.morfauction.com).

## Corn Picker Collecting Catches On Fast

"Nothing's prettier than a wagon load of ear corn," says Kevin Larkey, a Walnut, Ill., crop farmer who harvests 2,000 acres of crops each year.

He is among a growing group of corn picker collectors who are interested in preserving their history. The last couple of years he check-planted a portion of his land with a modern planter to make it easier to harvest with corn pickers. That required adjusting planting equipment, lowering seed count/acre and reduced profits.

But it was worth it, Larkey says, referring to a photo of 23 pickers lined up in his field at a corn-picking event he sponsored. Including his collection there were 36 pickers altogether. The crew picked 90 acres of corn on a weekend in October.

"Corn pickers were the most important mechanical farm invention after threshing machines," Larkey says. The generation that remembers threshing machines is shrinking while there are still many who once used corn pickers from the 1950's to the mid 1970's. Because of that, corn picker collectors — and corn picking events — are on the rise.

"People want to be active with their toys," he jokes.

Larkey has used corn pickers all his life. He used them when farming with his grandfather and then again when he raised hogs, because he didn't have mold and fungus problems with ear corn. Some farmers still prefer ear corn, he notes. Others sell it for squirrel corn. And he has used corn pickers to harvest Indian corn.

Three years ago, a mix of insomnia and browsing on the internet led him into the world of collecting. He now has 16 Oliver pickers including three yellow ones that Oliver made for Minneapolis Moline. His most prized piece is a one-row picker/sheller with a bagging unit that Oliver reportedly made only a few of for Wisconsin researchers.

Larkey likes to collect both mounted and pull versions of the same Oliver models, and he has both shellers and huskers. At his corn-picking event, Larkey had mounted and pull-type pickers (including left-hand models), as well as two-row combines.

With a recent surge in scrap metal prices, many old pickers have been sold for scrap, and it can be difficult to find very old pickers in good working condition.

Prices for corn pickers Larkey has purchased vary from \$200 to \$1,700. They can be found on eBay and through collectible magazines and internet sites. Larkey notes that often wagons are more valuable than the pickers, anywhere from \$100 to \$3,000 if they're in good condition. One of his wagons has a wood box with original paint that he uses in parades.

As for holding a corn-picking event, he says to line up plenty of helpers and start planning early. He brought in an old wire corncrib to fill for display and had a 400-bushel wagon with sides. Besides corn pickers, some collectors brought commercial corn shellers, and Larkey lined up an elevator to take the corn after it was shelled and loaded in four semi trailers. A livestock feeder took



John Bodenhamer bought a junked antique hay wagon that once belonged to his grandfather and rebuilt it. He uses it for family or community hayrides.

## Rebuilt Antique Hay Wagon

John Bodenhamer turned a junked antique hay wagon into a parade worthy attention-getter. When he bought the wagon that once belonged to his grandfather at an estate auction, it was buried under a collapsed barn roof.

"The folks bidding against me just wanted it for the wheels," recalls Bodenhamer. "My wife Jane talked me into buying it. It was pretty dilapidated. The wheels and axles were the only things worth having."

Bodenhamer brought the wagon home and went to work rebuilding it. He had some home-sawn oak that had been drying in the barn for a few years.

"I had to build a new frame, bed and sides," he says. "I went with picket sides instead of the original horizontal boards and added a double latched rear gate that hinges at the bottom. When you drop it, people can use it like steps to get on or off."

With large wheels in the back, Bodenhamer had to build modified wheel wells under the rear bed. He also had to reinforce the original tapered wood axle ends that fit into the front

wheel hubs. However, the rear axle was in good shape.

"The turning mechanism was still in good shape, as was the pole that I figure my grandfather modified for pulling with a tractor," says Bodenhamer. "All I had to do with the wheels was pull them off and go over them with a steel brush before greasing and putting them back together."

Bodenhamer also reinforced the axle/bed connections with steel braces. What didn't change was the old wagon's suspension. It has none.

The Bodenhamers use it largely for family or community hayrides or other events. There is only one change he would like to make.

"I may try to figure out a way to put some rubber on the old steel wheels," he says. "I don't want to drill holes in them, but it would be easier on the road and on the riders if it had rubber wheels."

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A growing number of corn picker collectors want to preserve their history. Kevin Larkey recently held a corn-picking event on his farm at which 23 pickers participated.

care of the cobs and husks. The local Rotary organized the food and recruited vendors.

Bringing people to Walnut was important to Larkey, and with the success of his first two events, he plans to hold them every other year with the next in October 2012.

"Make sure you plant plenty of acres," he

advises. Pickers had to pace themselves and work short days to stretch picking 90 acres over two days.

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