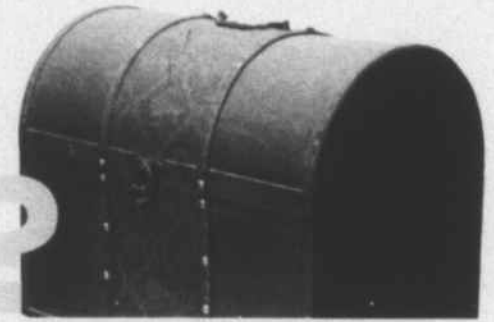




Is Paper Trash or Treasure?



By Bev Hamel

I am a paper hoarder, not ordinary paper, but paper which has the exotic name called **ephemera** and was meant to exist or use for a short period of time. The word ephemera captures a broader meaning but is mainly considered paper products, written or printed upon such as: bills, ticket stubs, calendars, menus, newspapers, photographs, postcards, greeting cards, booklets and letters.

More importantly, paper captures events and moments in our lives and thus, paper is treasure.

I learned the love of ephemera and all things made of paper from an expert, my father, who taught me at an early age the art of collecting and caring for my treasures.

There was a time when paper was indeed a treasure because few people could afford to purchase paper. Printing presses and books were scarce. The mass population could neither read nor write and those who did could barely afford to purchase paper let alone something to write with. Paper would be reused, or be stripped in small pieces as needed.

Sadly, many family heirs sift thru boxes of papers stored in garages, attics or basements, and then relegate these to the trash pile.

For instance, an auction near Cape Fear yielded boxes of books, letters, papers, and old tins which no one wanted because of the grime and musty smell. In fact, the heirs had placed these boxes in a pile scheduled to go to the dump. The smell though was an aphrodisiac to me, and the grime I knew covered something more than ordinary. I asked the auctioneer if he would put them up for sale.

The tins held tiny bits of paper bearing ancient, hard-to-read handwriting, both in ink and pencil. Small pieces of paper exploded from the tins. I knew at once these were not ordinary but extraordinary papers dating to the 1760s and later. One produced a handful of papers which had a name, year and the oath — the oath means the loyalty

oath or Revolutionary War pledge of allegiance — these specifically to the Crown.

One held a booklet sewn together with carefully drawn columns showing householder names, number of people in the household and taxes due to the King. Perhaps the greatest find was a worn but still preserved small book, one of five known to have been printed in the Colonial town of New Bern and consisted of the first laws of the Colonial state of North Carolina.

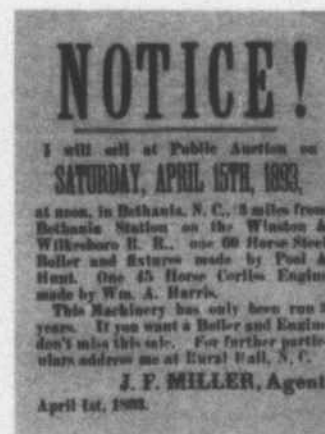
Years later when I opened my antique shop, a man pulled into my drive towing a trailer and asked me if I would be interested in two large steamer trunks. The price was right, I said yes and he hauled them into the back of my shop. Inside the trunks I found a treasure trove of papers, memorabilia, and letters that spanned more than 150 years. This material is being incorporated into a book about our local history.

In both these cases, family members threw out the "baby with the bathwater" because not only did these papers hold important and meaningful events in their families' lives, they captured history and events as they were during the time as it was lived.

Bev Hamel is a recovered corporate exec turned author, freelance writer, antique shop owner, chochkalolic and Yorkshire Terrier collector. She lives above her shop with one husband, one daughter and five Yorkie puppies in training.



1899 U. C. V. ribbon which stands for the United Confederate Veterans from Forsyth County



1893 Auction in Bethania

Picture of Ida Miller 1879



1941 Winston-Salem ticket for Scattergood Baines show.