

Flea markets: for those who can tell 'junk' from 'junque'

Spare parts, antiques leftovers, loose ends

By **JEFF BRADY**
Staff Writer

Roadside attractions are generally nonexistent at 6 a.m. on Sunday mornings. Most fast-food stores, gas stations and even churches will not open until everyone has eaten breakfast. Any fool who is up driving at this hour thinks nothing of anything except how much of the road he has left to drive. In this case, the driver was slightly hungover, but alert. He never expected to see a long line of traffic outside an entrance to a flea market five miles south of Greensboro on High Point Road.

The Sedgefield Flea Market attracts to its gate nearly 50 trucks, vans and station wagons from all over the Piedmont each Sunday. When the gate opens, the vehicles acquire a \$5-per-day space in a field next to a long white building, unload their "goodies" and set up shop. Around 8 a.m. the first of over 1,000 shoppers will make the rounds.

What goes on is no ordinary retail



This gentleman is one of the many who set up booths during the Flea Market, working from dawn to dusk.

operation. The experienced sales manager sits in a yard chair shaded by a beach umbrella. The sales floor consists of one long table, often just a board set on two saw horses. The merchandise is dumped onto the table and spread thinly, so the customer can see each item. Anything left over is positioned on the ground.

The retailer's pocket is his till. Your receipt, unless you ask for one, is the product in your hand.

A price tag on an item does not necessarily indicate the actual price. The smart buyer not only looks for bargains; he makes his own bargains. He knows the difference between junk and "junque." The price tag on a transparent, coin-filled toilet seat may read \$100. But if a buyer can convince the retailer that he is a coin collector, and that the coins are worthless, he could talk the price down considerably.

Most dealers specialize in one type of item, such as pottery, blue jeans, comic books and 8-track tapes, although they sell anything they can find. One man sold everything from

furniture and glassware to rusted farm implements and hubcaps.

One lady who had an obvious business interest in astrology sold plates and leather pocket books that showed off your sign. But she also sold those little life-size barnyard animals made of cement that some people use to decorate your front yards. I walked away from that one thinking my sign was a rabbit.

John Loftin and R.A. Eaton organized the Sedgefield Flea Market 10 years ago and held their first in May, 1968. The flea market was held once or twice a month on Sundays until it became popular enough to run every week. "As far as I know, we were the first in this area," Loftin said. "All of the others came after us."

Now known as the Sedgefield Dealers' Auction, Loftin and Eaton hold an auction every Wednesday night, operate a wholesale outlet, and have just recently started having flea markets on Saturdays.

The center of action is the white building. A square sign next to the wide, open door reads, "No Hand Bills, No Solisting." Formerly a farmer's market and Rudy's Dance Land, it is now a long slender barn full of the flea market's more collectible "goodies."

Eighty-three booths in the center and along the walls are partitioned by chain-link fences and gates which can be locked. The larger spaces in the middle of the room rent for \$45 per month and the spaces against the wall for \$40 per month. With the fence, a dealer can lock up valuable goods and not have to carry them back and forth from home each weekend.

But most goods, antique furniture, homemade pottery and the like, are not insured. Last April, a fire damaged 40 per cent of the building and destroyed much of its contents, Loftin said. One man reported a loss of \$3,000 worth of uninsured merchandise.

Nancy, a UNC graduate and associate professor in English at Pfeiffer College, has been involved with the flea market for nine years. She and her partner, Lucille Lohr, own an antique store in Lexington called "The What-Not Shop," and specialize in "primitives."

"I guess 'primitive' means everything's homemade, including the nails and pegs," Nancy said. Pointing at a fire bench, she added, "That wood is so old and weathered, it's almost like concrete."

Also among the pieces on sale in their booth were a spoon rack from the 1700s and an old desk from an abandoned post office at Gold Hill.

According to the ladies, they got started like everyone else, rummaging in attics and finding things they no longer needed. Now, with the shop, they go to auctions, private sales and buy from "pickers."

A "picker" is someone who keeps his eyes open for antiques and sells them to antique dealers. Nancy's and Lucille's favorite "picker" is a professional exterminator. "He has access to everywhere!" Nancy said. "While he's spraying the back of your house, he may notice something in a remote corner or in a closet and tell you that he can get rid of it for you."

Nancy seemed to be the right person to ask where the "flea" in flea market originated. "Well, flea markets started in Europe in the 10th-or-11th century. They were open-air markets, and a lot of the stuff was so dirty, it was filled with fleas."

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