

'A Pleasant Day at Lake George'



Adirondack Attic
Andy Flynn

Thousands of people travel to Lake George for fun and excitement in the summertime, and adrenaline junkies will dart over to the Six Flags Great Escape to begin their vacation. Some, looking for a spiritual awakening on the waterfront north of the village, away from the crowds, will find plenty of water and serenity in the sunshine. And others, equipped with a minimal amount of travel plans and expectations, will simply relax and spend a pleasant day at Lake George.

In the summer of 1883, a 24-year-old New York City artist, William Bliss Baker, found a handful of boaters enjoying such a day on the lake, and he captured the scene in a painting titled, "A Pleasant Day at Lake George."

This oil painting on canvas is artifact No. 1966.114.2 in the Adirondack Museum's collection (currently in storage). The museum purchased it in 1961 from the Vose Galleries in Boston. The painting measures 20 inches tall by 36 inches wide. Baker signed it in the lower right-hand corner.

Baker was born in New York City in 1859 and spent his childhood in the Saratoga County village of Ballston Spa, where he nurtured a love for nature. This passion influenced his vocation as a painter. Inspired by the Hudson River School and the American realism movement, he painted landscapes from the Upstate New York countryside.

Baker's Adirondack Museum profile describes his style:

"His brilliant landscapes and woodland interiors suggest a tranquil and majestic

nature. His masterful sense of color as well as his execution of light and atmosphere earned him the accolades of his peers and the art-buying public."

Baker studied at the National Academy of Design in New York City and operated a studio in the Knickerbocker Building at Fifth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. He won the Elliott Prize for Drawing in 1879 and the Hallgarten Prize in 1885. In 1884, Harper's Weekly reported that Baker was "in the foremost rank of the landscape painters of the day." In 1886, the New York Post called him one of the "most promising of young American artists." Later that year, in November, Baker died prematurely at the age of 27 at the Hoosick Falls home of his father, Col. B.F. Baker, suffering spinal injuries from a fall while ice skating.

The New York Times reported on March 18, 1887 that the sale of 130 Baker paintings at Ortgie's art gallery, 847 Broadway, totaled about \$15,000. His early death, the Times stated, "deprived America of one of its most promising artists." A large oil painting on canvas, "The Morning After the Snow," sold for \$5,000. It was considered Baker's masterpiece. The sale was a resounding success:

"Considering the youth of the artist, and the fact that his training was entirely American, the result was regarded by everyone present as highly gratifying."

The New York Times printed the titles of 36 paintings that sold for more than \$150. "A Pleasant Day at Lake George" was not on the list, and it is uncertain whether it was part of the 130 paintings sold that day. All we know is that by 1961, it was purchased from the Vose Galleries and has remained in the Adirondack Museum's collection ever since.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ADIRONDACK MUSEUM
New York City artist William Bliss Baker created this oil painting, "A Pleasant Day at Lake George," in 1883.

In 2005, "A Pleasant Day at Lake George" was included in the "Painting Lake George: 1774-1900" exhibit in the Charles R. Wood Gallery of The Hyde Collection in Glens Falls. The show celebrated the "Queen of American Lakes" and its relationship with painters in four categories: "Nostalgia for a Brave Beginning," covering early views of the lake that celebrate its role in American history; "A Sublime Beauty," with landscapes by artists who envisioned the lake as an unspoiled wilderness; "Landscapes in a Pastoral Paradise," depicting Lake George as the embodiment of the picturesque landscape, a domesticated wilderness; and "Life Along the Lake," examining close-up views and genre scenes such as picnics and boating parties. Baker's painting was included in the "Life Along the Lake" section.

The 1774 oil painting, "View of the Lines at Lake George, 1759," by Capt. Thomas Davies, and Thomas Cole's 1827 painting, "Landscape Scene from the Last of the Mohicans (The Death of Cora)," were placed in the "Nostalgia for a Brave Beginning" category. Beginning with Thomas Cole, every Hudson River School artist visited and painted Lake George," stated The Hyde Collection's description of the exhibit. "Yet the lake has received little attention, leaving a considerable gap in the art historical record."

There's a wrinkle in the recent history of Baker's "A Pleasant Day at Lake George." When the painting was purchased in 1961, the Vose Galleries staff told Adirondack Museum curators that the title was "Lake Luzerne, N.Y." So, when the

image was reproduced for sale in the museum's gift shop in the 1960s, "Lake Luzerne" was printed on the poster.

That became a point of confusion for one Staten Island couple vacationing at Lake Luzerne in the late 1980s. They purchased the "Lake Luzerne" reproduction in the 1960s and had it "framed and lovingly displayed" because Lake Luzerne was their perennial Adirondack vacation spot. While visiting the Adirondack Museum in the spring of 1987, they saw Baker's original painting on display; however, the credit plaque named it "Lake George" not "Lake Luzerne." Perplexed, they wrote to the museum's director for an explanation.

A curator responded and explained that a "knowledgeable curator familiar with Baker's work" corrected the

Adirondack Museum and said that Baker mainly worked at Lake George when he was in the region. That knowledgeable curator was James Kettlewell, curator of The Hyde Collection, who questioned the "Lake Luzerne" attribution when he saw the painting in 1975. Therefore, "Lake Luzerne, N.Y." was a short-lived title, and the painting finally became "A Pleasant Day at Lake George" again.

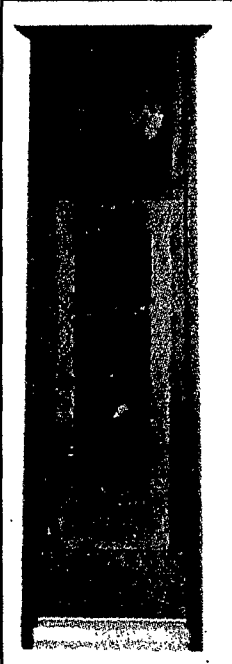
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KOVELS: ANTIQUES AND COLLECTING

BY RALPH AND TERRY KOVEL

Don't refinish your furniture. Original finish adds to the value. This warning is given over and over on TV shows about antiques. But is it always true? No. An original finish on a superior example of an 18th, 19th or even 20th-century piece of furniture should add value. But because well-to-do Victorian housewives had their furniture touched up and polished every few years, many pieces now have finishes that, while not original, are more than 100 years old. If you have a piece with such a bad finish it would look out of place in a home, it could be refinished and gain in value. Sometimes a refinished piece sells for a high price because it is so rare or decorative. At a Rago Craftsman auction in New Jersey, a Gustav Stickley trapezoidal tall-case clock just sold for \$32,500. The catalog description said it had a "skinned finish." That's a slang term that means the original finish was scraped off and a new finish was added. Oak Arts and Crafts furniture was out of fashion from about 1920 to the 1980s. When collectors started buying it again, they wanted attractive furniture with a perfect finish. A few dealers sanded off the original scarred and darkened finish -- "skinned" the piece -- then applied a new finish that very closely resembled the old one. These skinned pieces can be spotted by an expert, but few novices will notice the difference. The clock was so rare that even with the announced new finish, it sold for a high price. But it was below the pre-sale estimate.



The "skinned finish" did not stop a bidder from paying \$32,000 for this rare Gustav Stickley tall-case clock. It is 71 inches high and sold at a Rago Craftsman auction in Lambertville, N.J.

Q: I have a green glass vase 6 inches high by 4 inches in diameter. It's marked "Hoosier Glass" on the bottom. Have you ever heard of this maker?

A: Glass flower vases marked "Hoosier Glass" were first made in 1979 by Syndicate Sales Inc. of Kokomo, Ind. Hoosier Glass was a utility line sold to commercial florists. The vases sell today for \$5 to \$15 each. Lately, we have seen more interest in this glass among collectors. Syndicate Sales is still in business, still makes commercial glass for florists and still lists Hoosier Glass among its trademarks and product lines.

Q: My mother left me a 30-piece set of "winter scene" figures. She marked the box they are in "valuable." The small figures, most under

2 inches tall, are flat, lead and painted. Many of the figures are skiers, skaters and sleigh riders, and they're all wearing winter clothing. There are also trees and streetlamps. The word "Germany" is embossed on the base of the larger pieces. We would appreciate any information you can give us about the figures.

A: Collectors call "2-dimensional" lead figures like yours "flat backs." The first of these were toy soldiers and saints made by 16th-century German tinmiths. The molds used to make the figures were simple -- two slabs of slate, one engraved with the figure's right side or front and the other with its left side or back. Lead was eventually added to the tin to lower the cost of the figures and to make a smoother liquid metal. By the middle of the 19th century, flat German tin soldiers were being exported to the United States. Standing sets yours on a mirror or sheet of cotton created a winter scene. They became popular during the 20th century, and German manufacturers still dominated the market. A set of 30 figures made right before World War II sold a few years ago for \$175. That set was marketed in the United States by a Norwalk, Conn., company named Art Craft Products. Sets continued to be imported from West Germany into the 1980s, but the newer figures are lighter in weight and the painted clothing and features are less detailed.

Q: My niece inherited a dining-room table from her grandmother. It has a label that says

"Alliance Furniture Co., Jamestown, N.Y." Could you give me some information on the company? The tabletop needs some work. Would refinishing hurt the value?

A: Alliance Furniture Co. was founded in 1905 by a group of eight partners of Swedish heritage. The company manufactured high-quality dining-room furniture until at least the 1950s. Your niece should feel comfortable having the tabletop refinished. The table is a good one, but it isn't so valuable that it shouldn't be touched. Just be sure she finds a qualified craftsman to do the refinishing.

Q: I bought some art deco ceramics online that are signed "Dorothy Ann." But now I can't find any indication that such an artist ever existed.

A: An artist who signed her work "Dorothy Ann" painted art deco pottery for S. Fielding & Co. of Staffordshire, England, during the middle decades of the 20th century. Fielding, which was in business from 1870 to 1982, was better known by its trade name, Crown Devon. Most pieces signed Dorothy Ann are brightly painted with abstract designs. They're similar to ceramics by Clarice Cliff, a famous British designer. But beware. Fake Dorothy Ann pieces have been showing up in online auctions in the past couple of years.

Tip: Coverlets made before the 1830s were done on a loom that was no more than 40 inches wide. Old coverlets are made of two panels joined at the center seam.

The Kovels answer as many questions as possible through the column. By sending a letter with a question, you give full permission for use in the column or any other Kovel forum. Names and addresses will not be published. We cannot guarantee the return of any photograph, but if a stamped envelope is included, we will try. The volume of mail makes personal answers or appraisals impossible. Write to Kovels, (name of your newspaper), King Features Syndicate, 300 W. 57th St., New York, NY 10019.

CURRENT PRICES

Current prices are recorded from antiques shows, flea markets, sales and auctions through-

out the United States. Prices vary in different locations because of local economic conditions.

Stanley screwdriver No. 2703, Phillips head No. 3, \$25.

Pressed glass spooner, Bull's-Eye with Diamond Point pattern, gold trim, flared rim, round foot, 5 1/2 in., \$80.

Bob Hope & Lucille Ball sheet music, "Havin' A Wonderful Wish, Time You Were Here," 1949, signed, 4 pages, \$210.

Advertising lunch box, Japanned sheet tin, hinged lid, stenciled "Wildman's One Price Clothing House, Danville, Va.," c. 1885, 7 x 4 x 6 3/4 in., \$255.

Art deco desk, wood & metal, rectangular top with padded writing surface, 1 long & 2 short drawers, rectangular metal pulls, c. 1930, 30 x 54 in., \$485.

Mattel Ken doll, Prince, green cape, fake diamond buttons, tights, original box, 1964, \$510.

Grenfell hooked mat, figure of man with 3 dogs, houses & mountains in background, browns, blacks & gray, 1930s, 14 x 17 in., \$605.

Joe Louis ashtray, figurial, Brown Bomber, chalkware, 1940s, \$620.

Fishing creel, wood, slat sides, 2 painted trout on front, E. Robicheau, canvas strap, 1977, 8 x 15 in., \$855.

Martin Brothers stoneware jug, 4-sided, tan, polychrome design on each side of costumed musicians, inscribed mark, c. 1900, 9 1/4 in., \$2,125.

"Kovels' New Dictionary of Marks: Pottery and Porcelain, 1850 to the Present" pictures more than 3,500 marks found on 19th and 20th-century American, European and Asian pottery and porcelain. It includes factory dates, locations and other information. Marks are sorted by shape. Special section on date-letter codes and factory "family trees." Available at your bookstore; online at Kovels.com; by phone at 800-571-1555; or send \$19 plus \$4.95 postage to Kovels, Box 22900, Beachwood, OH 44122.

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