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The VanDeBogarts and the Antique tools

Aaron and Jane VanDeBogart have this contest going at Andre Neher's Woodstock Building Supply Corp. at 72 Mill Hill Road. And, if you think you know something about antique tools, then this is for you.

VanDeBogart is showing 17 antique tools on a display board in the building and if you can correctly identify five of them and their use, he will award you an authentic antique wooden plane. It's a fascinating exhibit, even if you're not interested in the contest.

The display is only the tip of the iceberg in the VanDeBogart saga of collecting antiques like bottles, jars and more extensively, antique tools. Over a period of years, the Van DeBogarts collected more than 600 antique items.

Aaron can't exactly pinpoint when he started his hobby. "It's hard to say," he told The Townsman recently. "At first I was involved in the bottle collecting craze. Then came fruit jars-almost 200 different varieties. Then it got to be pretty expensive, some costing up to \$200." Jane, his former wife, now has the bottle collection.

VanDeBogart, a retired Conservation Department worker, gleaned his collection of tools from a variety of sources - fairs, yard sales, flea markets, auctions. Others came from people who knew the VanDeBogarts were involved in collecting, the array of antique tools represents almost every trade and industry dating back to pioneer days, like cooper tools for barrel-making, carriage makers, blacksmith, quarrymen, horsehoers and curriers, the leather horseshoers and curriers the leather tanners.

Some of the oldest tools in the collection date back to the 1700's. "I

have a wooden neck yoke that dates back to 1824," said VanDeBogart. "It was designed for a man to carry heavy buckets of maple sap. They also carried milk that way, if the farm was some distance from the home."

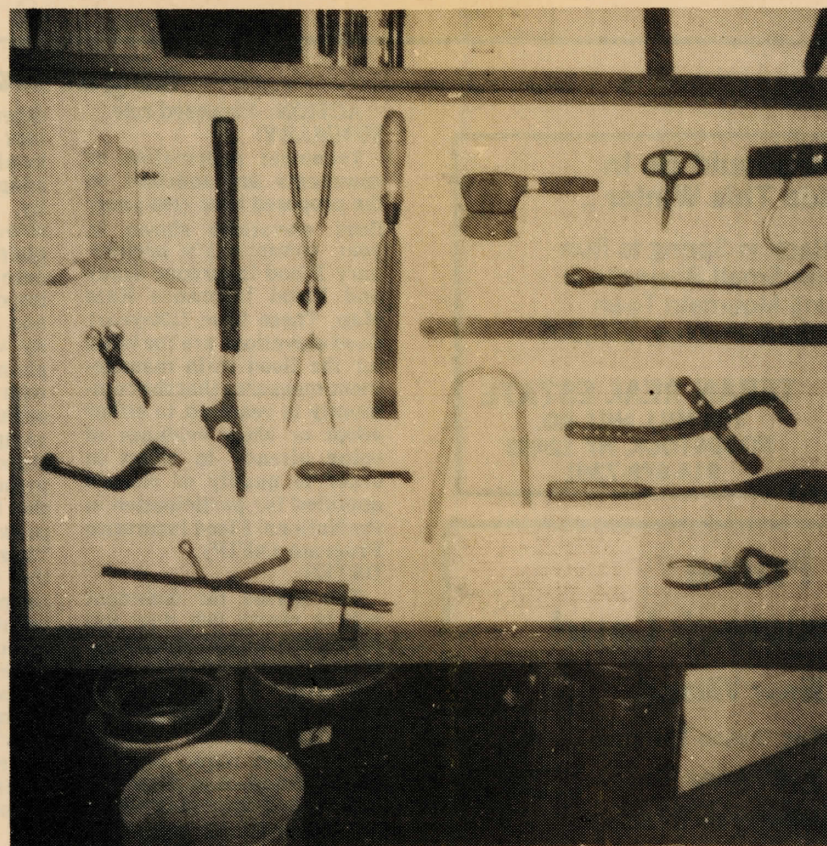
VanDeBogart is especially proud of an unusual antique single ox yoke. Normally, the oxen worked in pairs. "This yoke was for a special black ox named Tyler. The ox was named in honor of President Tyler," he says.

The powerful black ox was used at the Cooper Homestead at Cooper Hill by what is now known as Cooper Lake. "The Coopers ran a saw mill there and it was also a stop-over place for changing horses for the stage coach that travelled between Kingston and points in Delaware County."

VanDeBogart's father identified the yoke. His mother - Aaron's grandmother, was a Cooper. They would tell how the huge black ox was hitched to a long pole which pumped water from a well shaft that had been drilled in the ground. Not unlike the method used in primitive lands and still in use in some parts of the world to this day.

Although the VanDeBogart collection of antiques is worth a substantial sum, Aaron is proud that he never has sold any. "It was just a hobby for Jane and me," he says. "Once in a while I would pick up duplicate tools for trading purposes with some people, but no cash was ever involved."

Andre Neher says the VanDeBogart mystery board is creating a lot of interest. So far, nobody has been able to correctly identify at least five of the 17 antiques. Why not give it a try!



RARE DISPLAY: The collection of antique tools collected by Aaron VanDeBogart now on display at Woodstock Building Supply Corp. Identify five of them and you win a prize.

AARON ELTING VAN DE BOGART, JR.
1912-1994

Born December 28, 1912 in Lake Hill, NY (Ulster County) to Aaron E. and Mabel Crane VanDeBogart. He had an older half-sister, Beatrice Leonard, and a younger brother David C. and is survived by a younger sister Charlotte Rhoton.

The family moved to a dairy farm in the beautiful valley of Wittenberg, NY where Aaron grew up, attended a one-room school, and later boarded in Kingston for high school. Aaron's lifelong love of the outdoors began early in life. His father was not a hunter or trapper or fisherman; these skills were taught to him by respected elders in the community like Ira Angevine who banked all Aaron's earnings and sent away to Sears for his first rifle while Aaron was still in grade school. Aaron hunted on the way to and from school as a means to put food on the table.

He was an exceedingly keen observer of wildlife and I believe he "read" the landscape as observantly as the Indians. He knew animals' patterns of behavior, weather patterns, the behavior of fire, medicinal and food plants and the history of the area in depth, and saw ever so much more in the woods than anyone I ever knew. He would quietly share his knowledge and teach anyone who wanted to learn, but had little patience for those who would blunder unthinkingly through the woods. Later in life, it was his knowledge of the outdoors that saved a number of lives of others.

His beloved uncle Dave encouraged him to continue his education and paid for Aaron's tuition at the New York State Ranger School (a branch of Syracuse University) in Wanakena, NY, graduating in 1932. Aaron's career with the State began in 1941 as a surveyor, then a part-time ranger, becoming the State's first full time Forest Ranger in the Conservation Department, now the Dept. of Environmental Conservation. He fought forest fires, marked and patrolled State land, and was part of the first search and rescue team of Rangers. Aaron retired from the Rangers in 1972.

Aaron married Helen Hill; they had five children, Aaron III, Joan, Donna, Linda and Laurel. After Helen's religious beliefs prevented their seeking medical help when Donna contracted polio, Aaron separated that relationship. He later lived with Jeanne Nield from about 1953 to 1962 and became her black daughter Lani's effective father during the McCarthy period, a daring act in a conservative community then. Aaron later fathered a daughter for a woman who wanted a baby; this baby was a private agreement between them and never publicly acknowledged. I met her once but have forgotten her name. She was multiply handicapped and died at

about age 12 or 14.

Aaron and Jane Wittman met in 1963 when both worked at a progressive interracial children's camp, Camp Woodland in Phoenicia, NY. Parting at the end of the summer, they began courting two years later, marrying in 1967. This marriage lasted until a separation in 1979, but they remained good friends until Aaron died, and continued their joint hobby of recording local history through collecting the hand tools used by early Catskill settlers. Aaron's collection of old tools was cataloged by Jane and Aaron in 1983, and it numbers about 900 items. Aaron always hoped it would be donated to a local museum.

Aaron had a close, supportive friendship in his later years with Josephine Tornello, to whom he left his house.

Aaron kept a number of wild animals, permitted to Rangers at that time, both to nurse wounded or young ones to health, and as a teaching tool for school and scout groups. Among them were a baby bear Tedra (who grew to 250 pounds), a fawn Muffin, numerous raccoons (he bred a strawberry blond "sport" and got 16 blond pups), a lynx, a fisher, a goshawk, a red hawk, foxes, and the two poisonous snakes of the Catskills, the timber rattler and the copperhead.

Aaron was never rich in wealth, but rich in spirit. He respected every living thing, a seeming contradiction for one who hunts and traps, but he never harvested more animals than he needed, and always did so in the context of the animal population trends. He never ever wasted anything and taught that to his family; food for his family, hides tanned, bones for the dogs, entrails for bait. It was a life he would gladly have lived over again, he once said. He chortled that someone would pay him to do what he would have done for no pay. It was a life full of integrity.

Aaron died at home with his family around him on January 10, 1994 at age 81 of degenerative kidney failure caused by cysts on the kidneys.

At Aaron's wake, an unusual thing happened: a Cooper hawk slammed into the glass window at the funeral home and died there. It seemed symbolic in so many ways besides the timing. Aaron's great grandmother's name was Elmira Cooper. Aaron kept, trained and loved hawks. And no one in town had ever heard of such a large bird coming so close into civilization to die crashing into a window.

Jane VanDeBogart
March 25, 1995