

Mini Reaper Sold For \$18,000 At Toy Auction

A mower/reaper at the National Farm Toy Auction (NFTA) sold for \$18,500; however, it was no toy. The 3-ft. wide, 1 1/2-ft. long Adriance Buckeye mower and reaper was a working replica used by salesmen for Adriance, Platt and Co. It was unique, according to Tom Cornwell. He should know, having called the NFTA for the past 30 years.

"I don't think I've seen anything like it come through the NFTA," says Cornwell. "It was a pretty rare item, really detailed and such a large piece. It took two people to carry it out."

The size alone may have made the item rare. Buckeye mowers and reapers were anything but rare in the second half of the 19th century. At the age of 20, Lewis Miller began improving on the McCormick reaper. He added a floating cutting bar parallel to the ground that could be raised or lowered. It was the prototype of the modern mower.

Although some patents were sold to John Adriance in 1856, Miller and several partners formed the Buckeye Mower and Reaper Co. in 1863. Miller continued making improvements on the Buckeye and other farm equipment, earning more than 90 patents over his 68 years. Both the Adriance and Miller companies thrived selling the innovative

mower. Nonetheless, the salesman sample sold at the NAFT is the only one known to exist.

It wasn't the only salesman sample sold at the auction, however, nor the only large one. Other salesman samples included a 2 1/2-ft. long stationary hay baler, a barn cupola, a horse-drawn sickle mower with a working sickle and a terrace plow.

"All of them came from a collector who passed away," says Cornwell. "He collected salesman samples of all kinds. I once sold him a salesman sample pitchfork, just a short little thing."

Cornwell has sold a lot of salesman samples over his 42 years in the auction business, 38 of them doing toy auctions. However, he suspects most salesman samples get traded privately.

"I've seen some awfully nice things come through these auctions," he says. "A few years ago, I sold a Gandy Belt display with a John Deere D tractor and a threshing machine. It was displayed at a World's Fair. It was a really neat piece and sold for \$22,000."

Salesman samples aren't the only items selling for high prices at the NFTA. "I sold a cast iron hay tedder for \$27,500," recalls Cornwell. "It was one of four cast iron pieces



Adriance Buckeye mower and reaper salesman's working sample was designed to demonstrate to customers in the late 1800's.

made by the Wilkins Co. Altogether, the four sold for \$41,000."

One of the most expensive toys he sold was a John Deere Top and Block Model A pedal tractor. It brought in \$71,000.

While most toys and even salesman samples he sells are likely to end up in a personal display, Cornwell is curious about the future of the Adriance Buckeye mower and reaper.

"I knew it would bring a lot of money, but not that much," he says. "It will take a special kind of person or museum to display it."

While Cornwell has turned over the 75-year-old business to the third generation,

they are continuing his tradition of toy auctions. He is looking forward to calling the NFTA in 2023 with even higher-priced items likely.

"All the online farm toy collector clubs have helped toys continue to climb in value," says Cornwell. "I don't know if we will have more salesman samples at the 2023 show. Every year, it changes, and there is always something new."

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Klassen renovated a barn to house his 3,000-piece collection of toy tractors and farm equipment.

There's Gold In His Farm Toy Collection

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

The round-roof barn that used to house cattle and later stored farm equipment is now a "golden" place of refuge and a personal toy museum for Dave Klassen.

After a complete renovation in 2018 with foam insulation, new walls and ceiling, in-floor heat and vinyl plank flooring, the 28 by 63-ft. main floor has enough space for his

collection of about 3,000 model tractors and farm equipment. Back-to-back custom-built cherrywood and glass cabinets wind through the area revealing something new around every corner.

Among the models in a rainbow of colors from 10 manufacturers (John Deere, Farmall, Big Bud, etc.), about 300 models glitter in gold or bright red or green chrome.

"I'm known to have a lot of gold toys on Facebook's 'The Farm Toy Addiction' group that has 14,000 members," notes Klassen, who is one of the moderators for the group. During their regular "show-and-tell" events, members discuss the details of models, and often Klassen shares a gold model.

He explains they are called "Chasers." Toy makers made a limited number of the gold or chrome models and slipped them randomly in cases of toys shipped to dealers. Many ended up in the offices of owners or salesmen, but occasionally they were sold. They are rare and not easy to find, but in his quest to add to his collection, the Manitoba farmer says he has made many great friends, including a good friendship through Facebook Messenger with two other collectors who call themselves the Three Amigos.

Klassen says his collection, which includes 70-year-old toys and models in 1/64, 1/32 and 1/16 scales, shows the history of how

tractors evolved over time. He also has farm equipment and trucks reminiscent of the trucking company he owned until recently.

In the mid-1990's he started collecting more seriously to balance hard work with play. For him, "playing with toys" centers around rearranging them when he acquires new pieces and thoughtfully choosing models to photograph and share on Facebook groups.

"The cool part about collecting is meeting people from all over the world, and I've gotten some good friends in the toy hobby," he says. "The size of your collection doesn't matter. Don't compare your collection to other collections. Do what you enjoy."

He encourages collectors to check out and join some of the many groups on Facebook. Klassen also welcomes visitors by appointment to see his collection when he's not farming with his sons.

Collecting is an important part of his life and the friendships he has made.

"When I go to the barn, I think about what I want to do on Facebook for a photo shoot and what to talk about. It's for me and to inspire others to be part of toy collecting."

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"Happy Toys" Teach Kids As They Play

Jerry Sims had no intention of going into business when he built his sons a toy corral big enough to climb into. Nearly 25 years later he and his wife, Patrice, sell the toy corrals, trucks, accessories and animals through their business The Happy Toy Maker out of Happy, Texas.

Not only do they keep kids playing for hours, but the toys also teach, Sims says. His first corral was based on Temple Grandin's less stressful and efficient livestock handling system with curved alleys, a tub and a processing chute.

"The boys were used to the little one so they could understand what we were doing outside. If parents or grandparents play with their kids, they can explain things, so they understand and prevent them from getting hurt on the real thing," Sim says.

He built the corral to the scale of toy

animals that he had at the time, about 1/12 scale. But when those animals were no longer available, Patrice started making them out of resin. She focuses on the animals, while Sims oversees the equipment and corral side.

"We have 73 toys on the website and about 40 are metal," he says. Other than rubber for tires and mud flaps and wood to make round bales, everything is metal.

Everything works like the real thing. Gates open and close. Jacks go up and down. Trucks include semi-trailers, belly dumps, tankers and pickups that have options such as welding rigs or veterinarian beds. A new tub grinder is due out this year.

Sims adds new items every year with the help of more than a dozen full and part-time employees. Many of them are high school students who pick up a range of skills - bending metal, welding, running a

lathe, AutoCAD drawing, painting and shipping.

With a computerized plasma torch, The Happy Toy Maker can personalize toys with names and brands.

The U.S.-made toys are more expensive than other toys, Sims notes, but they will last for generations.

"We've had things go through a fire that we sandblast and redo for customers," Sims says. "Kids need things that develop their minds, and with less than 2 percent of people feeding 98 percent of the population, we have to keep them interested in farming and ranching."

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Happy Toy Maker large-scale toys are made of metal and are built to last.