

End of era as Brayhill Farms Museum prepares for auction

By Mark Pavilons

It's often hard to say goodbye to some precious family heirlooms.

King Township's Alan Bray has the arduous task of bidding farewell to thousands of pieces of precious Canadiana.

Brayhill Farms Museum will come to an end and a massive auction in June will liquidate countless, one-of-kind pieces of memorabilia. The museum, on Bathurst Street north of Davis Drive, is home to more than 30,000 items in its 27,000 square feet. Most of these collectibles are near-perfect, museum quality items. Even owner Bray finds his 50-year collection "mindboggling." "There's nothing like it," he said with pride.

The climate controlled building showcases the collection in pristine condition. There's not so much as a cobweb or speck of dust anywhere.

Bray may shed a tear or two when the entire collection goes on the auction block June 7 to 10 at the farm. The property will transform into a village, with an expected 2,000 visitors coming from around the world. The reason Bray's collection has generated this level of interest is that everything is in near-perfect condition "like the day it was made. Many of his items are simply irreplaceable and likely the only known examples in existence.

The collectibles range from the 1920s to '50s and include some of the best examples from brands like Esso, Texaco, Shell, Supertest, BP, Sunoco, John Deere and more. From large signs to fully functional gas pumps, the auction will undoubtedly generate record sales. It may be one of the largest auctions of its kind in the country. From general store products and finely crafted original countertops, to an array of classic Coke memorabilia, the museum has it all. There are oil cans and tins of all shapes and sizes, perfect for any modern-day man cave. There's a modest, but amazing collection of Original 6 NHL hockey memorabilia. The pride and joy of his collection is an antique Supertest tanker truck in all of its restored glory. You could eat off the vehicle's fenders. Bray is also very fond of his meticulous model Texaco station that took thousands of man hours to create. It is likely the only one in the world.

Of particular interest are fully functional gas pumps, including a couple of 1930s clock-face pumps. A double glass Imperial pump from the early 1960s is quite rare.

Also on the block will be a 1956 two-tone teal Chevy Bel Air. Bray said it's a 1,000-point turn-key car. If that's not your style, how about a 1913 Model T delivery truck or a 1931 Chev pickup?

There is so much eye-candy in the museum, it's almost overwhelming for any casual visitor. And the place has welcomed thousands over the years, from car clubs and historical societies, to enthusiasts from far and wide.

There are so many one-of-a-kind items that simply must go.

Bray said he's approaching his 80th birthday and it's time to liquidate the collection. He's spent more than half his life collecting and preserving the pieces, so it's time to let others enjoy them.

And that they will.

Bray's interest in the transportation business dates back to 1958 when he drove a tanker truck for Supertest, and became an agent in the Holland Marsh. In 1972, BP bought Supertest and that's when he started Bray's Fuels, a multi-generation family business to this day.

The business boomed in the late 1970s and '80s. Bray was "crazy with ambition" and ran the business with his late wife, who joined him in acquiring rare items for his collection. They would venture out to auctions almost every weekend, storing them in one of his many barns.

Bray himself specialized in restoring antique automobiles and he has several in his personal collection. While a few will be up for grabs, a couple are staying in the family, including a 1967 Mustang Coupe with hood-mounted signal lights. His son owns a modern Mustang Cobra with a visor signed by the late Carroll Shelby.

The pride and joy is a two-storey, 27,000-square-foot barn. Mennonite craftsmen finished the interior in solid pine and the building is simply immaculate. Bray admitted it was something to watch the workers go to it every morning during construction. Their workmanship is second to none.

After his daughter's wedding in 2012, the upper floor became the expanded museum with Lou Goddard responsible for meticulously polishing and setting up every single piece. Even the mannequins are dressed in their brand new uniforms.

There's a story behind every piece and Bray has an encyclopaedic memory of each one.

History will be made during the auction in June. And history will live long in the hands of some new owners, eager to have these pieces in their collections.

You still have a chance to see the collection before it vanishes. The museum will be open to the public April 29 from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Admission is free. It's at 19230 Bathurst St., north of Highway 9.



Alan?Bray in the midst of all the collectibles he's accumulated over the years.