

Olathe man collects old hunting and fishing gear

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It's true what they say about one man's trash being another man's treasure, Peter Marsh will tell you.

As proof, he can point to the stern of an old duck boat he found — one that is appropriately named (though misspelled) "Marsh Maddness."

"Someone had put this out in the trash," Marsh said during the recent Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Show he manages. "He had cut it up into sections and put it out for the garbage.

"When I saw that, I just had to have it. With my last name and the double meaning, it was perfect.

"My wife gives me a hard time, going through the trash like that. But something like this didn't belong in the garbage dump."

Spoken like a true antique collector.

For years, Marsh has been digging through bins in antique stores, attending auctions and estate sales, and shopping at garage sales in hopes of finding rare treasure — a reminder of hunting and fishing's past.

Today, he has an impressive collection of everything from weathered wooden decoys to fishing lures made in the Kansas City area. Rare antiques? Not really. He doesn't specialize in the high-dollar items, he will tell you. Rather, he collects the fishing and hunting gear that accurately depicts what the Kansas City area and Missouri as a whole were like years ago.

He has become so enthusiastic about his hobby that he started the Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Show seven years ago. At the 2008 show, held in late February at the KCI Expo Center, he and many other vendors displayed proof that Missouri once was a thriving center for the hunting and fishing trade.

"There wasn't such a thing as Bass Pro or Cabela's back in those days," said Marsh, 39, who lives in Olathe. "There were a lot of mom-and-pop businesses. They would stay in business for a while, then they would fade away. But the fun thing is that the products they made are still out there."

Marsh picked up one of the decoys he was displaying and said: "This one was made by the Gundlefinger Wood Products Co. in Jefferson City in the 1920s. They were spun on a lathe, then hand-painted. A lot of work went into making these decoys."

When the Gundlefinger Co. declared bankruptcy in 1929, Jefferson City businessman Harry Benz bought the production machinery and carried on the tradition of making decoys.

He produced decoys from the basement of his Ford car-rental business and soon earned a national reputation for his work. His business survived the Great Depression but ceased operations in 1945.

Those weren't the only Missouri-made decoys showing up at antique stores and estate sales. Several Kansas City companies — including Air Tight,



Peter Marsh collects decoys and related hunting and fishing items, like this piece of an old duck boat. This and many other items, including Missouri handcrafted fishing lures, were recently on display at the Hunting and Fishing Collectibles Show at the KCI Expo Center.

which made canvas decoys in the 1920s — also attracted the interest of hunters and ducks.

During the 1940s, Kansas City drew attention from the hunting world for its duck calls. E. Stanton Stofer, a physician and duck hunter, began manufacturing duck calls on a farm near Lone Jack and started selling them out of his business on what is now Grand Avenue in downtown Kansas City.

An ad from 1945 lists the selling price of one of the calls as \$2.29. Today, some of the rarer, early calls sell for up to \$500, Marsh said.

But those aren't the only items once manufactured in Missouri that are attracting interest from collectors. Take a look:

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a Missouri watch-maker named W.H. Talbot started hand-making quality reels. An ad in 1903 described the reels as "A thing more perfect was never wrought in metal. In tournaments, always a victor. Among fisherman's treasures, the chief."

The reels, which were first made in Nevada, Mo., and later in Kansas City, weren't mass-produced, so they're now rare finds.

"A collector can expect to pay \$400 up to multiple thousands for a Talbot reel," said Warren Platt of Kansas City, who has a collection of the reels. "They're just not that easy to come by."

Also in the early 1900s, a Springfield fisherman by the name of Clinton Wilt made two top-water lures, the Champion and the Little Wonder, as a sideline to his coal and ice business. The baits were

known as "barber-pole" lures because of their stripes and the way the body would spin as they were pulled through the water.

"Today, both of those lures are very rare," said Jack Looney of Independence, an avid antique lure collector. "In mint conditions, they would sell for as much as \$2,500 apiece."

Think that pork rind is a relatively new development in the fishing industry? Think again. By 1890, the Lutz Co. was manufacturing pork rind to serve as lure trailers in Kansas City. Some believe the company's development was an offshoot of Kansas City's thriving meat-packing business.

Frank Lewis, another avid collector, likes to show fishermen a bobber that was made in the 1940s by the McDonald Co. out of Lee's Summit. The bobber featured a penlight bulb that was supposed to illuminate the bobber when a fish would strike. But because it wasn't waterproof, the idea didn't catch on and only a few of the bobbers were made.

And on and on it went. Dean Murphy's book *Fishing Tackle Made in Missouri* lists hundreds of lures, reels, rods and other equipment once made in Missouri.

For collectors such as Platt, that's a never-ending source of fascination.

"To some people, these are just beat-up old baits," Platt said. "To us, they're like treasures."

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