

Fables of the Reconstruction

After posing as appraisers of Civil War artifacts on "Antiques Roadshow," former Bryn Mawr collectibles dealer Russ Pritchard III and his accomplices bilked several individuals—and a Harrisburg museum—of thousands. They didn't exactly get away with it, but neither are their victims satisfied with their punishments. | BY SAMANTHA DRAKE
PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLOS ALEJANDRO

The "watermelon sword" segment was a classic "Antiques Roadshow" moment. It contained all the elements that made the PBS show so watchable—a regular guy, an old sword, a sheepish admission that the weapon was once used to cut open a watermelon and, finally, the revelation that the sword was a prized Civil War relic worth big money.

But the whole thing turned out to be a scam engineered by two "Antiques Roadshow" appraisers—and it was only the tip of the iceberg.

Former appraisers Russ Pritchard III of Bryn Mawr and George Juno, formerly of Allentown, were recently sentenced to time in separate federal confinement centers following an FBI investigation and indictments on a slew of federal charges in Philadelphia.

The close-knit Civil War collectors community may never be the same, in part because the two made off with millions of dollars in artifacts, but also because Pritchard's and Juno's sentences, by all accounts, amounted to little more than slaps on their wrists. One victim notes

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RECONSTRUCTION

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that if Pritchard and Juno had robbed a bank of millions, they would have gone to jail for years.

Pritchard and Juno were the owners of the Bryn Mawr-based American Ordnance Preservation Association when they joined "Antiques Roadshow" as appraisers in 1996, the show's first season. The show goes into its seventh season in January, and the highly successful format remains very simple. The public is invited to present items to be evaluated, and appraisers determine if they are trash or treasure. A select few are chosen for on-camera appraisals.

"Antiques Roadshow" appraisers are unpaid, but they can reap considerable benefits by being seen on the show. After their first appearances, Pritchard and Juno quickly maximized that exposure.

According to federal court documents, Pritchard paid a friend to go to the show's Seattle taping and help stage a phony appraisal of what became

known as the "watermelon sword." On-camera, the sword was valued at \$35,000. A second friend was enlisted to do the same routine in Denver, but with a different item and story.

People began calling Pritchard and Juno soon after seeing the segments, which aired the following year. One of callers was a descendant of Union Major Samuel J. Wilson, who wanted an appraisal on a sword that had belonged to Wilson. Pritchard and Juno estimated the sword was worth \$7,950 and bought it from the family for that amount. They sold it to a collector for \$20,000.

It wasn't until March 2000 that "Antiques Roadshow" officials realized what was happening, says Judy Matthews, the show's senior publicist. The two were booted off the show after the Boston Herald published a story exposing Pritchard and Juno's schemes.

The 1990s were a busy time for Juno and Pritchard, who enlisted the Civil War expertise of his father, Russ Pritchard Jr., when needed.

Their biggest break came when they

heard Harrisburg Mayor Stephen R. Reed was planning to build a Civil War museum. The National Civil War Museum opened in Harrisburg in February 2001, calling itself the only one to portray the national scope of the war from beginning to end.

Court documents indicate that Pritchard and Juno began representing themselves as purchasing agents for the museum, acquiring Civil War memorabilia for a song from unsuspecting owners who didn't realize the artifacts' true value. (Fine art and antiques hold their value, especially in an unstable economy.) The two then offered the items to Reed for the museum. "They curried favor with potential clients by suggesting these objects would end up at the museum," says director George Hicks.

Many people wanted their ancestors' belongings in a museum so their family names would live on. Some planned to sell their heirlooms to finance their retirements. The problem was, Pritchard and Juno were never authorized to speak for the city of Harrisburg or the muse-

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um. But that's not what Pritchard told Elaine Patterson.

Patterson wanted to sell her antiques to finance her retirement years and to have the items preserved for posterity. She initially sold Pritchard 36 artifacts, believing they would be displayed in the Harrisburg museum in memory of her late husband, Don. The couple were

tials as a historian, says Patterson. She didn't realize that there was a Pritchard Jr. She eventually sold Pritchard the 36 artifacts for \$50,000, but found out later from investigators that he sold the lot for \$65,000.

Pritchard also had his eye on the rest of her collection and suggested that he take some of it away to restore, claiming

Patterson was ashamed to tell people that she had been swindled out of her retirement fund.

"That's all gone now," she says. She was recently forced to move into a smaller home.

active Civil War re-enactors and such avid collectors of uniforms, swords, guns, dresses and other memorabilia that they had a small museum in their home. "It was a life's passion," Patterson says.

After Don Patterson died, Pritchard came calling in 1995, wedging his foot in the door by using his father's creden-

some items that were kept in the basement were deteriorating. Patterson agreed, letting him sort through the collection while she was out of the house. By the time she returned, Patterson says, Pritchard was all packed up and whisking her things away without making an inventory. She claims she was

What's It Worth?

Have you ever wondered what some of the old stuff in your attic or basement is worth? Do you have boxes of things, inherited from parents or grandparents, that you haven't even looked through? Getting an appraisal can be problematic—you don't have to have a Civil War hero in your family tree to be targeted by con artists. There are plenty of honest, reputable appraisers and dealers out there. To avoid the bad ones, they offer the following advice:

- Educate yourself. Read up on the artifact in question and research what similar items have sold for. "You can't get cheated if you know what you are buying, you know what it's worth, and you know what to sell it for," says William Synnamon, owner of the Union Drummer Boy Shop in Gettysburg.

- Ask for references. Check with local antiques or collectors associations for referrals to reputable appraisers. A museum may be able to suggest sources, though they don't do appraisals themselves, says collector Earle J. Coates. Talk to other collectors, too.

- Get more than one opinion. Never rely on the estimates of one appraiser, cautions collector Elaine Patterson.

- If you have a large collection to sell, consider going to an auction house.

Putting your collection on the block opens it up to a wide range of collectors and dealers, says George Pickett V. Be aware, however, that you must select an auction house as carefully as you would a single appraiser or dealer.

never paid for those items, some of which were of great sentimental value. After he left, Pritchard suddenly became very difficult to contact.

"I was ashamed to tell people what happened," Patterson says. Her retirement fund is gone—"That's all down the drain"—and she was recently forced to sell her home and move to a smaller one in Fruitland, Maryland.

Now she wants some answers. Patterson has a videotape record of her collection, which she hopes will help recover some of the items, though investigators have warned her that the stolen items could be all over the world by now. "If [Pritchard] sold to people as unscrupulous as he is, they're not going to come forward," she says with resignation.

Again representing himself as an agent of the museum, Pritchard approached descendants of Union Major General George Gordon Meade to buy a gun that had belonged to the general. Pritchard and Juno appraised the firearm at \$180,000 to \$200,000 and paid the family \$184,000 for it. They resold the firearm to a collector for \$385,000 after telling the Harrisburg mayor that the Meade family didn't want to sell, according to court papers.

In another instance, the trio even scammed a distant cousin of the Pritchard family. William Day, a descendant of Confederate Colonel William R. Hunt and owner of the historic but now shuttered Hunt-Phelan House in Memphis, Tennessee, gave Pritchard Jr. one of Hunt's uniforms to authenticate in 1997. Pritchard Jr., also a descendant of Hunt, told Day the outfit was a costume, then claimed that he gave the coat to Goodwill. The following year Pritchard sold the uniform, slightly altered by the addition of ornamentation, to a dealer for \$45,000. It passed through several hands before being sold to the Tennessee State Museum for \$67,000, according to the Civil War News.

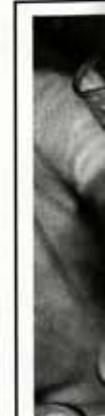
One of the most stunning examples of the lengths Pritchard went to was the case of the Zouave uniform jacket. Included in a larger collection that was sold to the Harrisburg museum for \$1.8 million in 1995, the Zouave jacket was



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part of a unique and ornate uniform modeled after those worn by French Zouave troops and worn only by special regiments in the Civil War. A few years later, Pritchard bought what he thought was another Zouave jacket, but which turned out to be a Belgian uniform worth very little. Pritchard visited the museum and, while looking through its inventory, simply switched the Belgian jacket with the Zouave. He and Juno

The Pritchards and Juno easily could have made a tidy sum cheating the elderly out of family heirlooms. Instead, they opted for a riskier route.

then sold the stolen Zouave jacket to a dealer for \$20,000.

How did the Pritchards and Juno get away with so much in just a few years? They easily could have quietly made a tidy sum cheating elderly marks out of family heirlooms. But instead, they opted for a much riskier route, albeit a more lucrative one.

The three men were ambitious and well organized. Each played a distinct role in the operation, according to their strengths. Pritchard, now 39, was the one who inspired trust in people. Those who have met him describe him as "the boy next door" and "a Boy Scout master." Outgoing, he also was the telegenic one when it came to "Antiques Roadshow" appearances. But most agree that he had little real knowledge of Civil War collectibles. A source who asked not to be named says Juno had to walk Pritchard through his "Antiques Roadshow" appraisals. Though Juno knew Civil War memorabilia far better than Pritchard, it was the elder Pritchard, now 62, who was the



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real expert. Pritchard Jr. is a former head of Philadelphia's Civil War Library and Museum and, at the time, was well respected in the field. Last was Juno, 41. Though the least polished of the three, he was the most driven and was widely considered the brains of the operation.

"If you met them, they'd take you in too. They could talk the talk. They had the character and the background," says

"They made a perfect team. They could have been terrific if they were honest," says one appraiser, the first to tangle with the trio in court. "They could talk."

William Synnamon of Lafayette Hill. "They made the perfect team. These guys could have been terrific if they were honest." Synnamon is a certified appraiser and owner the Union Drummer Boy Shop in Gettysburg, which he opened in 1997 with his son. Synnamon, who introduced Juno to Mayor Reed, ended up being the first to tangle with Juno in court.

According to Synnamon, Pritchard and Juno, on the pretext of writing a book about antiques, would visit owners of Civil War artifacts, evaluate the objects, then go back and offer to buy them. When Synnamon began questioning their methods, he quickly found himself to be the target of accusations. "They advised the mayor that I was extorting them," he says. As a result, Synnamon sued Juno in Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas in 1995. The case was settled in Synnamon's favor out of court for an undisclosed amount. "Reputation is everything in this field," he says.

"I don't know that there's any in-

stance on this scale where people went out and systematically defrauded people," says Earle "Jerry" Coates of Gettysburg, a past president of Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg and an active Civil War buff. According to Coates, Juno and the Pritchards preyed upon the families of war heroes, who generally become involved in the collectors' community when they realize that they may have something of value to sell.

George E. Pickett V was one of those people. Pickett, of Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, is the great-great grandson of Confederate General George E. Pickett, who led the ill-fated Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. Coates says he met Pickett at a dinner with the Friends of the National Parks, where they discussed the value of General Pickett's kepi, a military hat with a bill and gold chain, which Pickett had found stored away in an aluminum suitcase.

During the discussion, Coates estimated that the kepi was worth between \$60,000 and \$80,000. Pickett then said he had sold a collection of items to Pritchard and Juno, including the kepi and the general's letters to his wife, for \$87,000. Records show Pritchard and Juno sold the Pickett collection to the Harrisburg museum for \$870,000.

Pickett sued in 1998 and won \$800,000 in damages the next year. So far, he has not collected a dime from Juno or Pritchard. "I haven't really received any restitution at all," says Pickett. Other than a flag and a sword that were returned to him, Pickett says he has not received any of his artifacts back from the Harrisburg museum. He claims Mayor Reed refuses to return them. (Reed's office did not return calls for this article.) Museum director Hicks maintains that a judge determined that Harrisburg and the museum had no part in Pritchard and Juno's schemes, thus the items in question belong to the museum. It is a dispute that is sure to continue.

Pickett says fighting Pritchard and Juno has consumed his life. His remodeling business has suffered, and he has lost time with his wife, three daughters and son. But he isn't ready to give up.

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"It's not over," he says.

By 2000, things had started to unravel for the scammers. Pritchard and Juno were kicked off "Antiques Roadshow" by PBS affiliate WGBH in Boston, which produces the show. Juno was ordered to pay \$30,000 and apologize to the Civil War News for making defamatory statements in a letter he mailed to the newspaper's advertisers. The Turnbridge, Vermont-based publication believes Juno

The sentences were "shamefully light," says one victim. "The fines could be financed by a home equity loan." Others say they are shocked by the penalties.

sent the letters in retaliation for the paper's coverage of his legal problems. Then the FBI got involved. Pritchard and Juno were indicted in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia in March 2001 for charges related to previous false testimony about "Antiques Roadshow" appraisals, the Pickett collection and the Wilson sword. Additional charges concerned the Meade firearm, the Patterson collection and the Zoave uniform.

Later that year Pritchard Jr. was indicted separately for the theft of the Hunt uniform. In January he was found guilty, and in May he was sentenced to six months in a community confinement center and ordered to pay \$35,000 in restitution. The younger Pritchard pleaded guilty in December. In July he was ordered to pay \$830,000 in restitution and spend a year and a day in a federal halfway house. He could have faced up to 135 years in prison and \$5.25 million in fines, but he received a lighter sentence for testifying against his father. In August 2000 Juno got six

months in a federal halfway house in Florida and was fined \$30,000. He, too, received a lighter sentence for cooperating with investigators, this time giving evidence against Pritchard.

For the Civil War collectors community and those conned by Juno and the Pritchards, the sentences were a travesty. The sentences were "shamefully light," says Hicks. "The fines could be financed by a home equity loan." Pickett says he was amazed at how little time the three men received. "I was shocked at the judge." Says Synnamon, "Everyone knows there's bad apples in every field. There are a lot of people, I'm sure, who are no longer collectors because of them."

For its part, the "Antiques Roadshow" now requires both appraisers and members of the public to sign statements that they will be truthful on the show, says Matthews. Appraisers also must confirm that they do not know the people whose items they are appraising and that they are not familiar with the items being appraised.

Pritchard and Juno's segments were edited out of all re-runs, but the now-infamous "watermelon sword" segment was so popular, it ended up on a compilation of best segments that was already on sale. All such tapes had to be recalled and edited. There have been no problems with appraisers since, Matthews maintains.

But for the victims, there seems to be little sense of closure. Some artifacts have been returned to their owners, some are the subject of disputes over ownership and some have simply vanished. Many victims will never see any restitution. One victim wonders why investigators could track where the stolen pieces were sold and for how much, but still haven't been able to recover the items.

The two Pritchards reportedly no longer have anything to do with the Civil War collectors industry. But Civil War Interactive, an online daily newspaper, reported in June that an ornate sword presented to Union General George Thomas was sold at auction in San Francisco for \$224,000. The buyer was George Juno of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. ♦

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