

SELLER BEWARE

Two 'Antiques Roadshow' appraisers made a killing after visits to Gen. George E. Pickett's great-great-grandson. The indictments came later.

By Jeff Gammage

Among collectors it's become known as the watermelon sword.

And not for its color or texture.

The century-old sword had no nickname when it first appeared on *Antiques Roadshow*, the traveling television yard sale that invites people to have their curios and keepsakes examined by expert appraisers. The show's riches-from-the-basement formula has made it the top-rated public TV series of all time.

That night in 1997, the camera scanned the shimmering length of the sword as it rested on a display table.

At its hilt sits George Juno, dressed in a conservative navy suit and tasteful floral tie. He and his business partner, Russ Pritchard 3d, are among the show's most popular appraisers. Their Bryn Mawr firm, American Ordnance Preservation Association, known as AOPA, earns millions of dollars trading in the lucrative Civil War relics market. Across from Juno, near the tip of the sword, sits a man in a blue sport shirt, who casually explains how he found the piece in an attic.

"For me, pretty much it became a plaything, and then over the last 10 or 15 years it's been stored away," he says.

"Well, Steve," Juno answers. "It's quite an interesting sword."

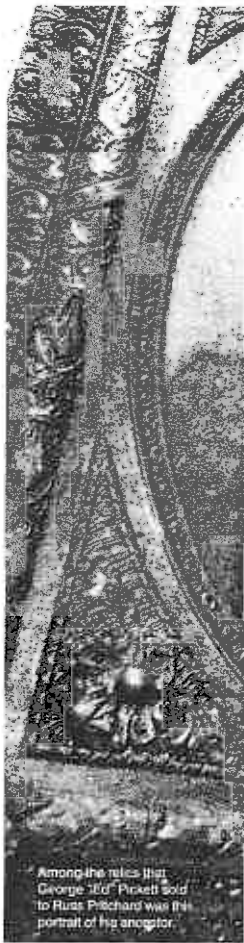
The weapon was made in

New Orleans, by the Thomas Griswold company, Juno explains. He shows how both sides of the blade are engraved C.S., for *Confederate States*. He points out the image of Fort Sumter on the hand guard and the distinctive two-piece design of the pommel cap.

"In the field, this was a very flashy sword," Juno says. "It would have been gold-plated all over the hilt and down the scabbard. The blade would have been frosty-white etched. This is definitely the highest-quality pattern that they produced."

He asks Steve: "Do you have
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Jeff Gammage is a magazine staff writer.



Among the relics that George 'Ed' Pickett sold to Russ Pritchard was the portrait of his ancestor.

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any ideas as to the value of this sword?"

Juno's question signals the arrival of the ultimate *Antiques Roadshow* moment — the climax of the two-person mini-drama, alerting viewers that they're about to discover whether a particular item is rare or reproduction. Steve, in the *Roadshow's* best tradition, tells Juno he has no idea what the sword is worth — he was going to sell it at a garage sale.

"This sword," Juno announces, "is worth about \$35,000 on today's market."

Steve's mouth drops open.

"Most Confederate swords are worth about \$2,000 to \$10,000," Juno continues. "This happens to be one of the great rarities in Confederate swords."

Steve seems to be in shock. "Did you say?" — his voice catches — "\$35,000?"

"\$35,000," Juno says, nodding.

"Whoa!" Steve exclaims. "I had no idea."

Seconds later Steve tags the sword with its nickname: "As a kid," he tells Juno, "I cut a watermelon with this thing."

It was a marvelous TV moment, another treasure-from-nowhere success for *Antiques Roadshow*, for Juno and his firm, for collectors everywhere.

There was just one problem.

According to federal authorities in Philadelphia, the whole thing was staged. The man who sat beside Juno, identified on camera only as "Steve," was no stranger. The man — his name is Stephen C. Sadtler — was a good friend of Juno's business partner, Pritchard. And he didn't just wander in off the street with a rare Confederate sword.

Pritchard paid for Sadtler to fly to Seattle, where the show was being taped, authorities say. The two appraisers met with him to discuss the story he would tell. Then they handed him the sword he would claim was his own.

In March a federal grand jury indicted Juno, 40, and Pritchard, 37, on charges of mail fraud, wire fraud and related offenses. Pritchard was also charged with witness tampering — he allegedly told Sadtler to lie if the FBI came calling, and simultaneously forgave him a \$10,000 loan. Last month, Juno took a big step toward reducing his potential jail time — he pleaded guilty to reduced charges and agreed to



For collectors such as Paul Loana, reading about the past is nothing like holding a piece of it.

testify against his associate.

"It's a tough day," Juno said to a reporter.

Two days later the government unloaded a raft of new charges against Pritchard — and against his father, who once ran Philadelphia's Civil War Library and Museum — including theft and transporting stolen goods.

The younger Pritchard, if convicted at trial, could be sentenced to a maximum of 130 years. Juno's plea reduced his possible prison time from 45 years to 20.

Neither man was willing to be interviewed for this story.

"This investigation continues, and

we'll see where it takes us," says Robert Goldman, assistant U.S. attorney in Philadelphia.

The indictment outlines what the government says was AOPA's typical practice: First, a promise to the owners that their beloved family heirloom would go to a museum. Then a lowball appraisal and an offer to buy at that price. Last, a quick resale to a private collector at the actual value, often tens of thousands of dollars higher.

Faking appraisals on *Antiques Roadshow* was key to the scheme, authorities say, a means for the two men to enhance their reputations and attract new customers.

And, what's more, it worked.

One hundred thirty-six years after the shooting stopped, the Civil War continues to fascinate. Battlefield tourism is flourishing. Thousands of people spend their weekends re-creating skirmishes. Disputes over the use of Confederate symbols on flags and license plates pepper the news.

Unlike the Revolutionary War, so formal and distant, or the Vietnam War, too near and painful, the Civil War was a purely American conflict fought on American soil. It is accessible in a way that other wars are not. The

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That lack of knowledge would bring him untold trouble and heartache.

"Provenance," he later said in court, "was a new word to me."

To Civil War dealers, provenance — a proven chain of ownership to an original illustrious owner — is everything. And the provenance in this case was exquisite.

"On a scale of 1 to 10," autograph expert John Reznikoff testified, "the provenance was an 11."

No one except a handful of the general's descendants had even seen the items. Imagine if an unknown Hemingway novel were discovered at the bottom of a file cabinet owned by his granddaughter, Marjorie. The impact was the same.

Pickett's Charge ranks among the most famous attacks in military annals, the high-water mark of the Southern rebellion. The *Copse of Trees* where the fighting peaked is among the most visited sites at Gettysburg, a psychic fault line in American history, the spot where the Confederacy and destiny collided.

That day in October, Pritchard went through the trunk's contents, appraising the items one by one. He bought the general's kepi, his gold sash, a hand-drawn map of Gettysburg, a lock of hair, and more. He told Pickett he would pay their appraised value, which he put at \$57,000, and would throw in a home computer.

"I said, 'Is this all that these are worth? Is this the best price?'" Pickett said in court. "And he said, 'I can fudge it a little bit, but my reputation is at stake; I'm working for the City of Harrisburg, directly for the mayor.'"

Pritchard offered another \$5,000, pulling stacks of hundred-dollar bills from his briefcase and laying them on a table.

"That's the best I can do," he said.

"OK," Pickett answered. After all, it was going to the museum. Seeing his antiques preserved was one of Pickett's main reasons for selling. Another was to pay for his children's education. The way he looked at it, Pritchard was helping him accomplish both goals.

He never questioned his new friend's honesty. Pritchard even told him what he was being paid for handling the negotiations — \$1,000 a day plus expenses.

"In my mind," Pickett said in a deposition, "\$1,000 a day would keep this guy from even considering being dishonest."



Lawyer Gavin Lantz, who represented Ed Pickett in the suit, received a Union flag as part of his payment.

On Oct. 13, Pritchard wrote and thanked Pickett for his friendship. "There is a unique bond between us," Pritchard said. "Thank you for helping me make a dream come true."

Later that month, Pritchard made his fourth trip to North Carolina, purchasing more letters and documents for \$16,000. He also agreed to fund a monthlong family vacation in Costa Rica, worth \$10,800.

All together, Pritchard paid \$88,800 for the general's belongings. A

few weeks later, he resold them to the City of Harrisburg for ten times that amount, \$880,000.

Pickett would not find out about it for nearly three years.

By then, Pritchard's frequent appearances on *Antiques Roadshow* had established him as an authority in his field. His company stood among the country's best-known dealers in militaria, its ads appearing in magazines and even on the back cover of the *Civil War Collectors Price Guide*. The ads

promised, "Highest prices paid."

George Edward Pickett 5th is no historian. He's no antiques expert. And despite his famous name, he's certainly no celebrity. Nobody comes knocking on his door to shake his hand or debate the causes of the Civil War.

He doesn't even go by the name George E. Pickett 5th. Never has. He goes by Ed. Ed Pickett. A regular name for a regular guy.