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Lineberry carts get new lives

Jule Hubbard Jun 27, 2012 0



THREE-WHEEL CARTS made in Wilkes County by Lineberry Foundry and Machine Co. are advertised for sale on eBay and dozens of other websites for residential use as tables. Asking prices range from a few hundred dollars to over \$1,000, depending on condition. A Lineberry cart before restoration is shown.

Photo courtesy of Joseph Signoretti

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For much of the 1900s, Lineberry Foundry and Machine Co. sold three-wheel carts to furniture, textile and other factories across the Southeast about as fast as the company could produce them in North Wilkesboro and later in Wilkesboro.

Most of these factories are closed but the sturdy Lineberry carts used in them to move parts and materials are now in great demand for restoration and use as residential coffee tables. They're also called railroad carts because they were originally used in train depots for transporting baggage.

Lineberry carts, made of oak with cast iron wheels, bolts, and plates, are advertised for sale on eBay and dozens of other websites. Prices range from a few hundred dollars to over \$1,000, depending on condition.

They're among the most popular vintage pieces from the workplace, all part of the "industrial style furniture" movement.

"Everything old is new again" is the way this trend is described by Joseph Signoretti of Holly Springs (near Raleigh), a high-end custom woodworker who buys, restores and sells Lineberry carts and other pieces.

Signotetti said it's partly due to television shows about antiques like "American Picker," while others attribute the trend to increased interest in recycling.

"Lineberry is the flagship brand among factory carts" built by different companies, said Signotetti.

Factory carts and other products originally produced for commercial use, such as restaurant prep counters and locker baskets, are particularly popular in old factories converted into residences.

Interior design professionals cite the uniqueness, versatility and functionality of these pieces.

Websites selling Lineberry carts tout their craftsmanship and durability, as well as the appeal of natural wood finishes and rustic iron castings and hardware.

The redulxineberryfactorycart website says they can be used as coffee tables, side tables, display tables, garden carts "and a fashionable means for storage."

The website continues, "The industrial age has long since passed, but what it left behind is a genuine item of functional art. They fit perfectly in lofts, country farm houses, beach front homes, cabins or hunting lodges and all styles of homes. The timeless appearance of these Antique Factory Carts will lend a bit of history to your home and will also provide a focal point to just about any room in the house. If you've ever wanted to own a piece of history, one of our original vintage Lineberry Factory Carts could be the perfect antique treasure for your home."

It concludes, "For a true turn of the century feel, we also offer a non-restored version of the factory carts. They are each in amazing condition, some still bearing the factory stamp on the sides. Whether choosing one of our refurbished carts, or a non-restored original cart, you will not be disappointed in the quality and craftsmanship that went into producing them more than 100 years ago."

Wayne Walker of Sarasota, Fla., said he established the redulxineberryfactorycart website to sell Lineberry carts used in his woodworking, moulding and furniture manufacturing business, which fell victim to the slumping economy. Walker restored and sold most of his carts and now plans to sell more as he moves ahead with production and sales of high-end storm resistant doors.

Signoretti said he likes to know and share the history of the pieces he restores so he contacted the Wilkes Chamber of Commerce this week for details on Lineberry Foundry and Machine Co.

Charles F. Lineberry started at least the foundry portion of the company in downtown North Wilkesboro, apparently in the first decade of the 20th century.

The business, on Forester Avenue, occupied a city block and was three stories high, according to a short biography of Lineberry by his grandson, William Hamilton Price Jr.

When the western end of the Central Business District Loop replaced Forester Avenue in the 1970s, Lineberry Foundry and Machine Co. was moved to a building constructed for that purpose on N.C. 16-18 in Wilkesboro.

Lineberry, son of Confederate veteran Winfield Scott Lineberry and Hulda Vickery Lineberry, was born in Randolph County in 1878. He married the former Zilphey Holden of Elkin in 1902 and worked for a foundry in Winston-Salem before he started the operation in North Wilkesboro.

Lineberry and his family lived in a large home on Church Street in Elkin, possibly as early as the early 1920s. At the time of his death in 1947, Lineberry owned and operated the Pure Oil Co. in Elkin

"He died of a heart attack while working. The doctor had told him to hire somebody to do the heavy work, and he should do the bookwork. He hired a former football player and he continued to do the heavy work while he put the football player doing the accounting," wrote Price.

Paul Harvel Jr., Albert S. Garwood and James Harvel bought the company in 1947 from two Ogilvie brothers who lived in the Oakwoods community, said Ray Triplett of Wilkesboro, who worked for Lineberry from 1966 until he retired in 1990. About 40 people worked there then.

Triplett wasn't sure, but he said the Ogilvies possibly bought the operation from Lineberry.

Brothers Albert Garwood, Charles Garwood and John Garwood became sole owners several years after it was acquired by the Harvels and Albert Garwood.

Triplett was in charge of the Lineberry foundry operation, which manufactured the carts. He said the company made and sold about 1,000 carts, which he called "trucks," per month in the 1960s through the mid-1970s.

"We had a truck that hauled 75 (carts) at a time to factories in North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee and elsewhere in the Southeast. We were always behind (in filling orders) due to demand," said Triplett.

"We sold them for \$20 when I first went to work there, but the price eventually got up to \$75 each."

The standard cart size was 48 inches long and 27 inches wide, with a 12-inch cast iron wheel on either side and a 6-inch cast iron wheel in the front that swiveled. Triplett said the company also produced 60-inch by 30-inch and 90-inch by 33-inch carts. He said a few carts with 15-inch cast iron or 14-inch rubber side wheels were also produced.

"Lineberry, N. Wilkesboro, N.C." was stamped on lower wooden sides of the carts. Wooden stakes could be put in cast iron pockets in each corner to make side walls for the carts.

In addition to producing cast iron parts for carts, he said, Lineberry foundry workers spent much of their time filling orders for Meadows Mills in North Wilkesboro.

The machine shop mostly produced router bits and wood cutting tools for furniture manufacturers, said Triplett.

Production of carts continued at the factory on N.C. 16-18 for about a decade after Lineberry was sold to Vermont American in 1980, but it ceased when Emerson Electric and Bosch purchased the operation in 1990, he said. The operation was closed down by 2000.

Integrity Design & Displays, which provides custom display fixtures, digital printing on various rigid and flexible materials, other graphic design services and cabinetry, is now in the building on N.C. 16-18.

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