

Two Country Slickers Looking for Gold

Television has already seen its share of shows about antiques, collectibles and the people who hunt for and sell them, but

“American Pickers,” a new entry on History, brings some welcome spunk to the genre.

TELEVISION REVIEW

NEIL
GENZLINGER

Its two genial hosts are Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz, who have a business called Antique Archaeology in Iowa.

“I’m not just looking for antiques,” Mr. Wolfe explains in the opening installment, which is being repeated Sunday night. “I’m looking for the rusty stuff. I’m looking for the dirty stuff, the

American Pickers

History, Mondays at 9, Eastern and Pacific times; 8, Central time.

Produced for History by Cineflix Productions. Dirk Hoogstra and Susan Werbe, executive producers for History; Charles Tremayne and Mark Poertner, executive producers for Cineflix; Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz, hosts.

sun-baked stuff. I’m looking for the unusual and impossible.”

To find it the two men roam around the Midwest, haggling with an odd assortment of accumulators — “collectors” doesn’t seem quite the right word for people whose belongings are piled waist deep in barns — over odds and ends that often look as if they ought to be in a landfill.

It is these gnarly folks who are the real stars of this program, eccentric and funny and, sometimes, a little sad. There is something uncomfortable about seeing Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Fritz buy a saddle from a frail old fellow of apparently modest means for \$75 and later hear it appraised for as much as \$5,000.

But that, of course, is why their business is a business. They resell the things they buy not just to antiques dealers, but to collectors, designers and others. And they seem to have a genuine appreciation for Americana of all sorts: ancient amusement park rides, rusty signs, tin cans that once held long-forgotten prod-

ucts.

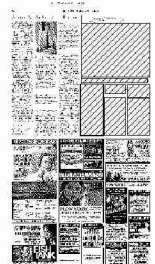
They provide amusing collecting tips and tidbits as they rattle around the back roads. For instance, old boys’ bicycles are worth more than old girls’ bicycles because boys beat their bikes up and thus fewer survived.

It’s fun too to hear them talk about what they call freestyling: bypassing the known sellers of such things and instead cold-calling based on the look of a home, hoping the occupant might have something worth buying in the barn or attic and be willing to part with it.

“We’re looking for people who don’t have a brand-new truck,” Mr. Fritz says, explaining how they choose which doors to knock on. “People who don’t have a satellite dish.”

THESE WERE NEVER JUNK

Old treasures are on display at the Winter Antiques Show and the American Antiques Show. Reviews, Pages 25 and 28.





HISTORY CHANNEL

Mike Wolfe, left, and Frank Fritz, hosts of "American Pickers," with one of their rusted finds.