You may be sitting on a fortune. Or maybe it's propping up books on the shelf, hanging on the wall or hiding under layers of dust in the attic.

Dust off your whatchamacallits, family heirlooms and questionable antiques and let them fall under the scrutinizing eyes of five appraisers from Sotheby Parke Bernet, prestigious art auction house, during the “Heirloom Discovery Day” on October 13 at the Art Center for Southwestern Louisiana.

Folks in Lafayette are encouraged to pack up their trinkets and head to the Art Center between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Saturday, October 13, for an expert's opinion. A fee of $5 per art object will be charged with proceeds going to the Art Center.

During the last three years nearly 150,000 people in over 50 cities in the United States and Canada have had their family heirlooms appraised by the pros from Sotheby Parke Bernet of New York, the leading firm of art auctioneers and appraisers in the world.

Sometimes family heirlooms, thought to be survivors of the Mayflower cruise and worth thousands, are revealed to be dime store specials, but at other times genuine pieces of art are discovered.

For instance, there were the nuns at Elizabeth Seton College in Yonkers who brought to a “Heirloom Discovery Day” what looked like a decorative bowl. They left with a certified and very rare Medici bowl that later was auctioned for $180,000.

Then there was the New York building superintendent who brought in a landscape he had pulled from a trash can several years earlier. It was identified as a William Williams painting worth $6,000.

A woman in Richmond, Va., went to an “Heirloom Discovery Day” sponsored by the Virginia Museum Council carrying with her a prized green Buddha that several people were admiring while she waited. When her turn came, she placed it in front of the appraiser, who picked it up, frowned, looked at the bottom and then looked at her questioning face.

“This thing is made of plastic,” he said.

The appraisers are adept at tactfully telling someone their “object de art” is junk. Robert Wooley of Sotheby Parke Bernet, who originated the idea of “Heirloom Discovery Day,” said the appraisers consider a treasure something worth more than $10,000 which the owner valued at much less.

The team of experts who will be in Lafayette are the same ones who would appraise your object if you carried it to Sotheby Parke Bernet's Madison Avenue office. They verbally appraise items in the following categories:

1) furniture and decorations from the 17th century forward, Oriental rugs and carpets and textiles; 2) porcelain, pottery and glass; 3) Oriental works of art; 4) paintings, prints and drawings; and 5) silver and pewter.

The experts will not appraise books, manuscripts, letters, stamps, coins, works by local artists and craftsmen, or contemporary art.

A maximum of 10 items may be appraised at one time and then you must return to the end of the line. For large pieces of furniture or art, you don't have to rent a U-Haul, but bring a clear, color picture and perhaps a removable drawer or piece of decoration, so the expert can study the wood and construction.

The appraisers emphasize that the appraisals are oral. Nothing is put into writing and the appraisal cannot be used for insurance purposes.

A patron's party will be given Friday, October 12 from 7:30 to 10 p.m. at which time each participant will receive one free appraisal in a more leisurely setting.