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Posted June 15, 2017 12:02 am - Updated June 15, 2017 05:05 am

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## A houseful of memories: Contents of the Old Mansion Inn go up for auction

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PETER.WILLOTT@STAUGUSTINE.COM The Old Mansion Inn is on Joiner Street in the

It was only when she could no longer carry the trays of the big British breakfast spread she was known for that Vera Kramer decided she might have to put the inn up for sale.

That was two years ago and Kramer, then 90, continued to live in the Victorian bed-and-breakfast at 14 Joiner Street she and her husband ran for nearly three decades. The Old Mansion Inn has since sold — to a couple who will reopen it again as a B&B next year — and Kramer now gets her breakfast served to her at the Allegro assisted living facility in St. Augustine.

“It’s the changes that make you go on,” said Kramer, whose spry personality belies her 92 years.

While the inn itself sold for well over \$1 million through Sotheby’s, the contents of the 16-room historic property — from antique furniture to kewpie dolls, tapestries to jardiniere vases — are expected to fetch somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 at an estate sale and auction today through Saturday.

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That’s in addition to the rest of Kramer’s personal collection, including hundreds of vintage dolls, that’s already been sold off for more than \$1 million.

Many of the pieces were originally part of the Kramers’ British countryside manor they had shipped overseas in 35-foot containers when they moved to Florida in the 1980s. Others were amassed through the buying sprees Vera Kramer went on through the years. The items are as whimsical and eclectic as the couple themselves was known to be.

"It's such a wonderfully unique mix of things," said Jena Baker-Dennis, proprietress of Great Expectations Auction & Estate Services, the firm that is handling the sale. "And they all have a story to them."

### Coming to America

Kramer's husband, Leslie, was a member of the House of Lords in Great Britain. By the 1950s, the couple began making regular visits to his sister in Miami, an area of Florida that Vera Kramer said she "hated." But in trips north by U.S. 1, the two found and fell in love with St. Augustine for its history and charm.

They purchased the old Abbott house, a mansion built in 1872 by female architect and spinster Lucy Abbott in the Uptown neighborhood, restored it and opened it up as a B&B. Vera continued to take in guests and do almost all the work in keeping up with the inn even after her husband's death in 1998.

The three-floor property is a work of art in itself, with iron gates, a carriage house and a sprawling garden that takes up one full city block.

It is also reportedly haunted, according to Baker-Dennis.

Visitors who stayed at the Old Mansion Inn were literally surrounded by the Kramers' many collections, including the floor-to-ceiling curios in which Kramer displayed her dolls, as well as other oddities like bearskin rugs, paper mache framed art, capodimonte statues and macabre items. Also included in the auction are furnishings, from antiques to mid-century, and even conversation pieces like a recessed bar set. Kramer's silver, jewelry and retro clothing are up for sale, as well as garden items such as benches, figurines and a joggling board (a curiosity popular in the 19th century).

### Souvenirs of the past

Liquidation of the estate has already drawn inquiries from in and out of state.

"People have been coming out of the woodwork," Baker-Dennis said.

There's been interest from dealers, individual antique hunters and neighbors who want to buy up a piece of history, a souvenir, of the old inn.

The new owners have also purchased quite a bit of the contents, which they will include in their restoration of the property, including a table cut from the slab of a poplar tree that once stood on the Kramers' British estate where Mrs. Kramer once served her famous

burst-your-seams breakfasts.

“They’re even thinking of making a tribute room to Vera,” Baker-Dennis said.

Kramer herself will not be at the final auction — because it will be too emotional, she said.

“I would probably cry,” said Kramer.

If you go

**When:** Thursday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. (general estate sale);  
Saturday, 11 a.m. auction begins, with a preview at 10 a.m.

**Where:** Old Mansion Inn, 14 Joiner St.

Details: The public is invited to the open estate sale; only registered bidders for the auction. To register, go online to <http://geauction.com/upcoming-events/kramer-estate-auction-6-17-17/>

**Parking:** There is no on-site parking; visitors are encouraged to park in the Downtown municipal garage at 1 Cordova St.



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