

Old Furnishings But No Records Auctioned Off

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A large and curious audience came to Soquel Auction Studio Friday night to see the remains of the old county courthouse furnishings auctioned off.

If they came to bid on any of the old records, though, they were disappointed. The records didn't go on sale.

The reason was a visit by County Purchasing Agent Harry Burdick and an attorney from

the county counsel's office to auction house owners Vern and Marg Lee earlier that day.

The county officials threatened to get an instant court order to stop the auction. The Lees, faced with this kind of power, gracefully withdrew and promised not to put any records on the block.

"Even though we paid for them, they told us we had no right to buy them," said Mrs. Lee.

As for the rest of the furnish-

ings, most were sold. But the audience sat on its wallets. An old prisoner's dock, complete with iron rings to restrain the accused, went for only \$17. A gavel sold for \$4. A set of 48-star U.S. flags, including one huge emblem, went for \$3. An ancient adding machine cost a bidder \$9. Some file cabinets did bring \$25 and \$27 respectively.

Most buyers could hardly be blamed. Many of the things the county sold to the Lees for \$180 were still crusted with a quart-

er-inch layer of mud from the 1955 flood.

This included the old records which have raised a fuss as a result of the discovery by the Sentinel that they were carelessly left strewn around the basement of the old building.

Some things produced laughter at Friday's auction. An organization chart of the county welfare department was sold "as a perfect ping-pong table. Buy it and bounce some balls

off the heads of your favorite officials," Lee suggested.

After a slow start, the horseshoe-shaped county supervisors' table from the neighboring courthouse annex brought one of the highest prices. The fine wood piece went for \$60—with Lee's promise to deliver the massive furniture.

Presumably, a lot more furniture is being saved by the county. It's supposed to be stored in the old General Hospital

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building, and includes an oak roll-top desk, two other oak desks, judges' chairs with acorn carvings, wooden filing bins, a voters' measuring stand and some safe-type filing cabinets.

Back in July of 1968, the board of supervisors ordered all those items saved until the 1882 Hall of Records building next door to the Cooper Street courthouse was remodelled as a museum.

Supervisors also decided then they were going to have a public sale of the remaining items. These were sold to the Lees who outbid courthouse buyer Max Walden for them. Few people heard of the sale, but it was technically public.

But the records, which no one seemed to want until a week or two ago, weren't legally available for sale, County Counsel Howard Gawthrop told reporters Friday. First of all, they have to be cleared for disposition by the county board of supervisors. And this wasn't done.

Burdick has said he didn't even know some of the records were in the building until the Lees became concerned about them and started asking questions.

Various county department heads, including the district attorney and sheriff, were asked if they wanted any records saved. Since most were already microfilmed by the county clerk's office, they said no.

But both the DA and sheriff have changed their minds since the news of the sloppy cleanup operation came out. Kelly said they asked him to clean them out along with the records he was responsible for.

Now, it seems, county officials are hastily tabulating the old records, and will ask county supervisors what they want to do with them.

Whether the Lees are willing to give up some of the items without a fight remains to be seen. "They told us they wanted them back, but didn't offer to pay for them," Mrs. Lee concluded.