

Alabama Couple Sell Junk Store Jug To Museum For \$100,000

44 years ago, Robert and Jaice Morris bought a clay jug from a junk store. They paid \$12 for it. Just recently, they made a hefty profit on the jug. They sold it to a museum for \$100,000!



The Morrises have always liked to decorate their rural home with unique items. "We would always look for something out of the ordinary," Robert said. 44-years ago, in a junk store in Fayetteville, Mr. Morris found something that was definitely out of the ordinary. He found a 5-gallon clay jug that was made to look like a man. The jug looks like a man, from head to waist.

Janice remembers that day well. "He picked that jug up and I said, 'Why are you gettin' that? It's creepy.'" Janice recalls. "Because I like it," Robert replied. They paid just \$12 for the large 5-gallon jug, and they took it home. They kept it in the corner of the den. The jug was not treated delicately. It was dropped many times over the years. "We kicked it around for years. I kept change in it; the kids played with it," said Robert. "At first they were afraid of it, so we started dressing him up," said Janice. Normally, the family would place a straw hat on the "head" of the man-shaped jug. On holidays, they would swap the straw hat for themed headgear, such as a Santa Claus hat.

Recently, Robert decided to pass the jug down to his granddaughter. He told her that he had always suspected the pottery was valuable. "It's folk art and it just had the look to me like it might be worth something," Robert told his granddaughter. His granddaughter did some online research and discovered that Robert was right. The ash-glazed jug was from the 1800s. It was one of only three created by John Lehman, a German-born artist who lived in Alabama's Randolph County. The jug was made before the Civil War. It depicts an African American man in formal dress with hoop earrings. The artist's initials, 'J.L.' are stamped on the lapel of the figure.

When she realized the jug's history, Robert's granddaughter gave it back to her grandfather. The Morrises called appraisers to see how much the jug was worth. "They were saying it was valuable," Robert said. "They said it was very valuable. Very rare." People offered to help the Morrises sell the jug to collectors. However, the family decided that it would be better to sell it to a museum. The Birmingham Museum of Art offered Robert \$100,000 for the jug, and he took the offer. Gail Andrews is the director at the museum. According to Andrews, John Lehman "is considered the most important historic potter in Alabama." She added, "When this one came forward, we really couldn't believe it. The artist is so important, and it's a rare piece, and of course, Mr. Morris' story of buying it 40-plus years ago in a junk store was just great. We love that it had survived all those years on the floor of his family room." The museum is now making some repairs to the piece. They plan on putting it on display in a few weeks.

Robert gave a third of the jug money to his granddaughter to help her pay for nursing school. As for Janice, her opinion of the junk store jug has changed. "Well, lemme see, I believe I like it a little bit better," Janice said.