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'World's oldest hockey stick' heading to auction block

Canwest News Service

A curved piece of wood controversially billed as "the world's oldest hockey stick" — and reputedly appraised at \$4 million — is to be auctioned in Vancouver next month during the Winter Olympics.

The object known as the "Rutherford Stick" has been displayed at the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto and was offered at auction two other times in the past decade.

Said to be at least 150 years old, it was sold for \$1.9 million US in December 2006 to an unidentified collector in British Columbia, according to Ashley MacIntyre, a spokesperson for the upcoming sale. Now, the stick touted as "the single most important piece of hockey memorabilia in existence" will be available for viewing in Vancouver from Feb. 12 to Feb. 28 before being sold by the online auction firm VIPthrills.com.

"(The) proceeds will be going to charity," said MacIntyre.

The hickory-wood relic was originally owned by Cobourg, Ont., resident Gordon Sharpe, who inherited the stick from a great-uncle and claimed it was hand-carved by a family ancestor in the 1850s.

In the past, hockey historians have expressed skepticism about

the stick's significance. At a 2008 "hockey stick summit" in Kingston, Ont., organized by the Society for International Hockey Research, some of the country's top experts on the sport's origins examined more than a dozen old sticks with verifiable origins.

They decried the "much-hyped" marketing of allegedly "ancient" sticks — including the Rutherford and another purported "oldest" stick unveiled in Quebec in March 2008 — and concluded that a 19th-century, maple-root stick owned by Nova Scotia youth worker Mark Presley was the most credible contender for the title.

Presley's prize is known as the "Moffatt Stick" because of its link to a Cape Breton family believed to have played early versions of hockey on Pottle Lake, near North Sydney, N.S.

Led by SIHR founder Bill Fittell, the author of *How Hockey Happened*, the historians said the Moffatt Stick has the composition, design and provenance of an authentic shinny stick from the mid-1800s, when hockey was evolving from a variety of stick-and-ball skating games throughout Eastern Canada.

In a news release announcing the upcoming sale of the Rutherford Stick, VIPthrills.com states that "after a full investigation, it has been determined that this hockey stick was carved between 1852 and 1856."



—Canwest File Photo

**Gordon Sharpe inherited this stick
in 1970 from his great-uncle**