

Swann Galleries, New York City

Manuscript Book by Furniture Maker, Mormons, and More at Americana Sale

by Jeanne Schinto

Photos courtesy Swann Galleries

A manuscript book of furniture designs and other details by an early 18th-century Philadelphia joiner was sold in New York City at Swann's printed and manuscript Americana sale on September 17. Ledgers, yes. There are numbers of those by furniture makers of the period. A manuscript book like this one is different.

"A ledger gives you the names of customers and dates. It is a practical, chronological guide to what a furniture maker is doing, but it gives you less of an idea of the actual furniture being made," said Rick Stattler, Swann's book department director and Americana specialist. "This manuscript provides that. It's much more descriptive than a ledger." Indeed, there are 68 pages of measurements, prices, recipes for varnishes, stains, coloring ("According to My Owne Experiance"), and three sketches, one each for a spice box, a scrutoire (writing

"A worthy read even if written by Major George Nobody."

desk), and a "chest of wallnutt drawers upon a fraime."

Five phone bidders and one bidder in the room drove the price to \$75,000 (with buyer's premium), three times its high estimate. Stattler would say only that the successful phone bidder was a "resolutely anonymous collector."

The joiner was John Widdifield (1673-1720), a British native and Quaker who emigrated from Thirsk, south of Newcastle, England, to the City of Brotherly Love about 1705. As shown by evidence in this little (approximately 7" x 5") 68-page volume, Widdifield brought William and Mary era designs to the Colonies with him. Stattler wrote in his catalog that Widdifield is already recognized as a Philadelphia furniture-making pioneer, but his career has been poorly documented—until now. Stattler also rightly characterized the book, which was handed down through several generations of the Widdifield family, as "an important new source in early American furniture history."

The sale as a whole totaled \$1,005,743 (est. \$531,950/793,350), with 89% of the 411 lots sold. Mormon material was responsible for a significant chunk of that total, with 23 lots going for \$186,267. Most of it came from Milton R. Slater (1918-2014), a collector who lived in Sleepy Hollow, New York.

Slater did most of his buying of the Mormon items in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. "It was a time when you could buy Mormon books and pamphlets very inexpensively," said Stattler. At this sale, bidders paid \$27,500 for Slater's fourth edition of Mormon founder Joseph Smith's *The Doctrine and Covenants*, published in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846; \$16,250 for a four-item lot of bank notes issued in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1837, each of which "possibly" bears the secretarial signature of Smith; and \$12,500 for *Facts Relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons or Latter Day Saints from the State of Missouri*, published in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1839.

In addition, Slater's copy of *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon* by Alexander Campbell—an anti-Mormon tract published in Boston in 1832—fetched \$6750 (est. \$1000/1500). A first edition of *The Book of Mormon* itself came from another source. Estimated at \$40,000/60,000, it sold to a collector for \$57,500, making it the second-to-top lot of the sale, after the furniture maker's manuscript book.

Asked to comment on the Mormon market in general, Stattler said, "It's a fairly discrete bidding pool. I would say most are LDS [Latter-day Saints] members. There is some institutional interest." The field in general "is growing here at Swann for a variety of reasons," he added. "We've become probably the leading auction house for this kind of material over the last ten years or so because of a few big consignments that came our way. I would say that prices are increasing definitely."

Mormon material was only one interest of Slater, whose collection Swann has been selling off for a while. Described by Stattler as "omnivorous," Slater also collected material pertaining to other "sub-interests" that included Vermont, the American Revolution, and the War of 1812. "Lesser conflicts, such as Shays' Rebellion, the Dorr Rebellion, and the Whiskey Rebellion, seemed to intrigue him, too," Stattler said. Slater items from most of these categories peppered the sale.

The Journal of Major George Washington Sent... to the Commandant of the French Forces on Ohio came from another

consignor. It sold to the William Reese Company, New Haven, Connecticut, for \$45,000 (est. \$40,000/60,000). This account of a very young Washington's journey through the wildernesses of the Alleghenies on the eve of the French and Indian Wars was the second edition, published in London in 1754, and the first to include the folding map of the less common issue. The first edition, published in Williamsburg, Virginia, is, as the catalog stated, "virtually unobtainable."

The book is desirable for several reasons. It was Washington's first publication, it's an important document of the French and Indian War, and it is an interesting travel account in its own right. On this last feature, Stattler wrote in the catalog, "The journal remains a classic frontier account, and would be a worthy read even if written by Major George Nobody." Other copies have sold for much higher prices; this one had library stamps that probably prevented it from going for a great deal more.

Library stamps did not stop bidders from driving up the price of *Speeches on the Jew Bill*, however. The 236-page book is a collection of speeches by legislators in support of an act that allowed Jews to hold public office in Maryland. For the 50 years after independence, they had been denied the right. The volume, published in Philadelphia in 1829, was conservatively estimated at \$5000/7500; it went to a dealer for \$20,000. The so-called Jew Bill calls to mind recent headlines about Ben Carson's statement that he doesn't believe a Muslim should be allowed to be elected U.S. president—the same office he seeks.

Another topical lot, an unrecorded broadside printing of the Law of April 6, 1830, sold to William Reese for \$10,625 (est. \$6000/9000). Published in Tlalpan, Mexico, the decree was intended to prevent Americans from becoming immigrants to the Mexican state of Texas. The law is well known—historians cite it as a cause of the Texas Revolution. It was characterized in the seminal *Handbook of Texas* this way: "The same type of stimulus to the Texas Revolution that the Stamp Act was to the American Revolution." This broadside, however, appears to be a first at auction.

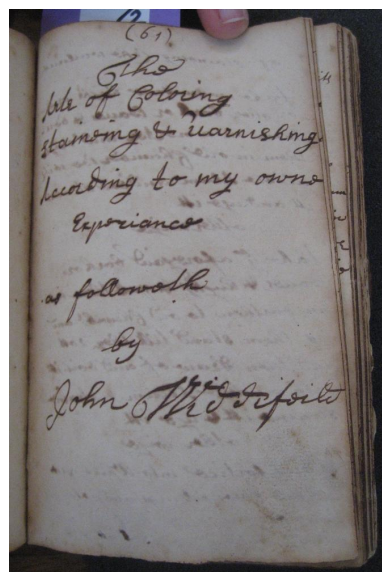
Another rare broadside, with no other copies traced at auction by Swann, had a Thomas Streeter (1883-1965) provenance. Published in Philadelphia on March 24, 1783, it announced the preliminary peace treaty between Great Britain and its former colony, the new United States, with these words: "Great-Britain acknowledges the Sovereignty and Independence of the Thirteen United States of America." The printing had passed through the great Boston bookseller Goodspeed on its way to Streeter. From there it went to noted collector Philip D. Sang, then to the consignor, the Slater estate. The new owner is another collector, unnamed, who paid \$35,000 for it—more than three times the high estimate. "Some of the people I talked to were surprised that it didn't go higher," said Stattler.

Swann has been breaking in a new crop of auctioneers in the past few months. It has freed up Swann president and chief auctioneer Nicholas "Nicho" Lowry for other tasks. The newbies split up the auctioneering of this sale into thirds. They are Jenelle Watler, the auction house's operations director; Alex Clausen, its maps and atlases specialist; and Alexandra Nelson, its communications director. Like all auctioneers, each has a distinctive personal style, and customers complimented them as the sale proceeded.

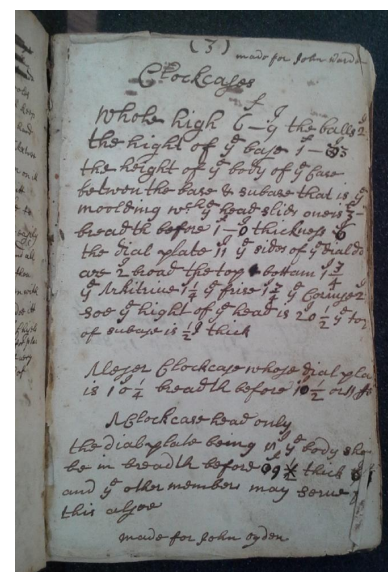
For more information, phone (212) 254-4710 or see the website (www.swann galleries.com).



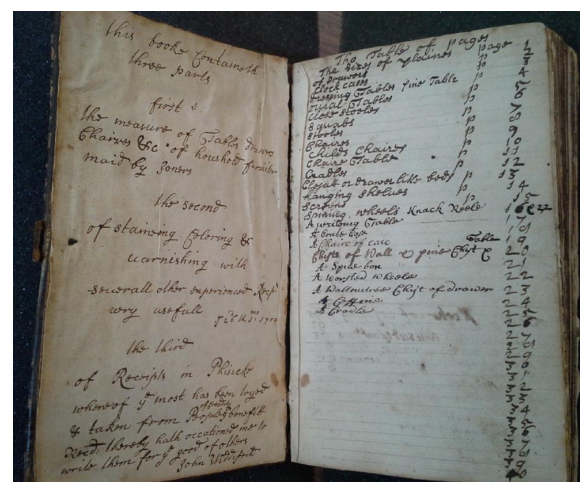
This is a page from a 1700-20 manuscript book of furniture designs and other details of furniture making by early 18th-century Philadelphia joiner John Widdifield, who emigrated from his native England to Philadelphia about 1705. This sketch, one of three in the 68 pages, is titled "A Little Scrutoire [writing desk]," and the intended client is named: "Tho. Syfords." The book sold to a collector for \$75,000 (est. \$15,000/25,000).



Here is John Widdifield's signature on a page that introduces a section called "The Arte of Coloring, Staining, and Varnishing According to My Owne Experiance." Schinto photo.

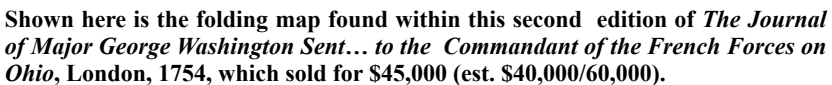
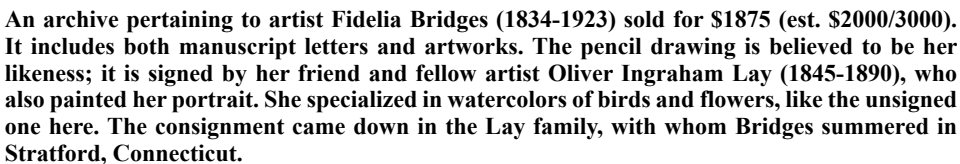
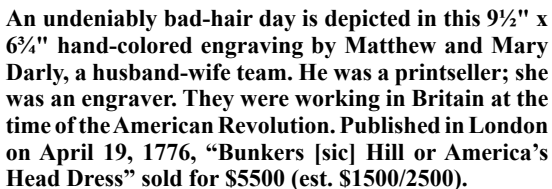
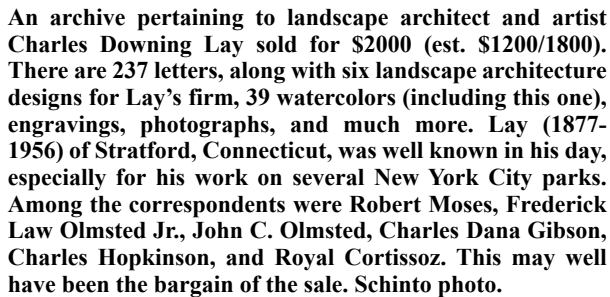
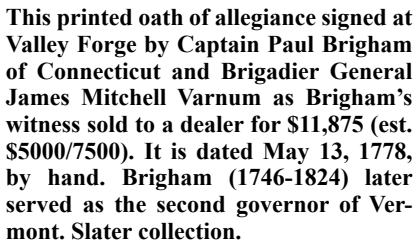
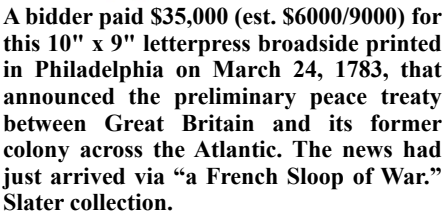
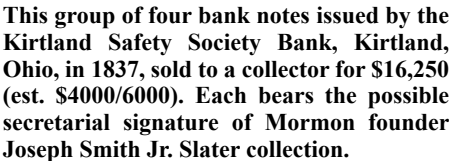
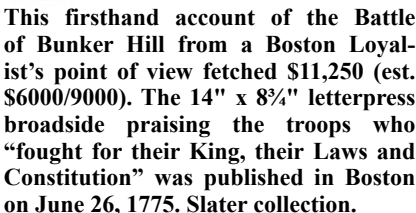
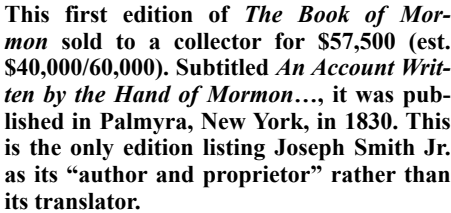


This page by Widdifield describes clock cases, one of which he made for "John Ogdon." Schinto photo.



Widdifield's table of contents lists forms from cradles to coffins. Schinto photo.

- AUCTION -





The *Club Room Gazette*, an illustrated manuscript magazine from the first months of the Civil War, is going to the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The sale's cover lot, it sold for \$7500 (est. \$3000/4000) to a dealer acting as agent for the institution. Created in Boston in 12 issues, from January through December 1861, it is an exceptional example of a 19th-century literary phenomenon. It was produced by the Literary Committee of the Everett Literary Association. Members contributed original essays and illustrations, along with official society reports, that were never published, only left in the society's reading room for members to share. The Civil War is a frequent topic, and that is where the 834-page volume's true worth lies. As the catalog states, this unpublished material is "a significant primary source" on the conflict.



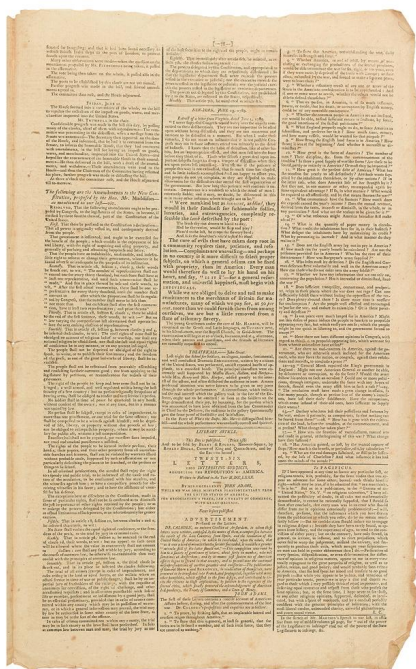
A 19th-century album of Colorado views and Indian portraits—147 albumen photographs and four engravings—sold to William Reese for \$8750 (est. \$6000/9000). None of the images is credited, but at least eight are attributed to William G. Chamberlain, known as Denver's first photographer, and, as the catalog states, "the others are in a similar style."



This archive of diaries, sermons, and other papers relating to a Congregationalist pastor working in Wrentham, Massachusetts, in the mid-18th century sold for \$8125 (est. \$2000/3000). "Sometimes a minister's diaries will be purely theological musings or fragmentary—these are substantial," said Rick Stattler. "He really goes into his emotions, his feelings towards his work, and some of the specifics of the people he's visiting and the problems that he's helping them through. It really does give a good picture of what a minister's life was during that period." The minister was Joseph Bean (1719-1784), who also reflected on his own life and personality in these pages. "I was this morning told by a very near & dear friend that I was a strange man," he wrote on April 17, 1769, "and that I am indeed & in truth. A strange creature indeed."



Swann's Americana sales usually offer a nice selection of New York City material. "We are more oriented to our local history than the other auction houses in town," said Rick Stattler. This is a folding map from *Reports of the Board of Commissioners of Central Park*, one of numerous maps and plates, plus albumen photographs, in 13 volumes. Published in 1857-68, the set sold for \$4500 (est. \$1200/1800).



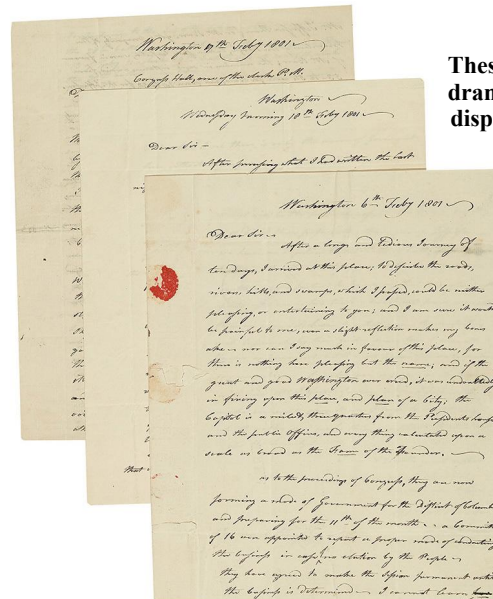
One of the first printings of the Bill of Rights, in the June 13, 1789, edition of the *Gazette of the United States*, sold to a dealer for its low estimate at \$10,000. Swann's catalog said, "We know of only one earlier printing of the Bill of Rights in any form." The four pages, published in New York, measure 17" x 10½". Slater collection.



This albumen cabinet card (6" x 4") of George Armstrong Custer brought \$2250 (est. \$1500/2500). It was a result of his last known portrait sitting, around April 23, 1876, in the studio of William R. Howell of New York. He died at Little Bighorn two months later.



Three volumes of scrapbooks relating to the Roxyettes sold to a dealer for \$1875 (est. \$1200/1800). They were compiled in 1927-34 apparently by the group's manager, Russell Markert (1899-1990), who founded a dance company in St. Louis, Missouri, which he then moved to New York. As the Rockettes, they became known for their synchronized high kicks and other precision dance routines—an icon of Radio City Music Hall and of the city itself. Schinto photos.



These three autographed letters that give a dramatic firsthand account of Thomas Jefferson's disputed election by the House of Representatives sold for \$18,750 (est. \$4000/6000). They were written in February 1801 by Ebenezer Mattoon (1755-1843), at the time a newly elected Massachusetts congressman. He wrote the eight pages to Judge Samuel Henshaw of Northampton. He had been in Washington for only days and was already appalled by doings both in the chambers and in the streets. Complaining of parading and pro-Jefferson mobs, he told the judge: "I long to discharge my pistols among the devils. God protect us from this tempestuous sea of liberty. If this is the beginning, what will be the end?" Slater collection.