Kenneth Gloss

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Books in Beantown

by Jeanne Schinto

Boston, Massachusetts

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The first thing to catch my eye in the first booth I entered at the 34th annual International Boston Antiquarian Book Fair, held at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, November 12-14, 2010, wasn't a book. It was a 10" tall Mark Twain doll, dressed up in a white suit just like Twain himself used to wear. Kevin Mac Donnell of Mac Donnell Rare Books, Austin, Texas, was offering three of these dolls at \$200

apiece. A Twain specialist, Mac Donnell said they were handmade between 1932 and

1952 of papier-mâché by Wilma Eubank Pulliam, who sold them as souvenirs in Twain's hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. Each one slightly different from the other, they were sitting, standing, and lying down on books inside Mac Donnell's glass vitrine, but they were capable of much more elaborate poses, the dealer said. "They have arms and legs flexible enough to do yoga. When I'm not looking, some of my colleague-friends think it's funny to put them into other kinds of positions. Once, somebody wanted to have them kneeling toward Mecca, but couldn't figure out which way it was." Mac Donnell had more

Finn, so-called because its binding is the publisher's original blue cloth. "It's a second issue—an affordable way to obtain the rare blue cloth binding variant," said Mac Donnell, who had it priced at \$2500. A first issue in the blue, he added, would run \$8000 to \$30,000, depending on condition, about triple the cost of a comparable green cloth copy. It was like that all night as I wandered around the book fair shortly after it opened for

serious Twain items, of course

—for example, a "blue" Huck

the weekend activities, which besides the market, included a series of talks and discussions on book collecting. One moment, I was being shown the literary equivalent of an amuse-bouche, the next a specialty of the house. As a reporter, I'm supposed to be on the lookout for sales taking place, ferreting out trends, or discovering breaking news, but at this show, unwittingly, I reverted to a far older rolereader. I was also reduced to gawker, since some of the most amazing things on offer weren't books. They were artifacts. In the booth of John Reznikoff of University Archives, Westport,

had belonged to Lee Harvey Oswald (\$37,500) and the Reznikoff also had a tie signed by Ernest Hemingway (\$6000) that came from the dealer's Westport neighbor, Hemingway biographer A.E.

Connecticut, for example, I

saw two chess sets, one that

different female personae—one a stocking worn by Marilyn Monroe (\$3000), the other a piece of Martha Washington's lacework (\$3500). For once, historical association trumped glamor ever so slightly. The ephemera at this show was mind-boggling. Just one example among

many, New York City dealer James Cummins had a John Fitzgerald

Kennedy item that was poignant and strange. Dated "7-1-44," it was the

it was the hospital's policy for possibly incontinent patients to take on the added expense of bed changing if they chose to do without mattress protection. "I was the nurse who had to get the signature," Janet Travell wrote in her account that accompanies the slip. "He grinned but signed." A rare survival, it was offered by Cummins for \$5000. The show is sponsored by the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of

When I did get around to gathering market reports from them during and after the show, I found that virtually everyone I polled afterward had met with a good measure of success. In 2008, when the fair took place within a couple of months of the beginning of the Great Recession, one dealer said, "You could have heard a pin drop in the Hynes Center, it was so quiet." This time, it was different. Customers were back, having

"The Emperor's Nightingale," was inspired in part by his feelings for her. "Of all the author's many friendships, she was arguably the most inspirational from a creative perspective," Waite said. He added that the provenance was a descendant of Owen D. Young, whose collection of rare books became one of the cornerstones of the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. Waite sold the book to "a consortium of four dealers, so that gives you some idea of its price," he said without revealing it. Afterward he wrote in an e-mail: "The fair ranks as one of the three or four best selling fairs I've

best Boston Book Fair ever, and he has been doing the show since the late 1980's. He elaborated in an e-mail: "We didn't sell a large number of items, but we sold some good ones. Perhaps most important in the long run, and certainly contributing to the overall enjoyment of the weekend and the sense of the value of having book fairs at all, we spent a lot of time talking to people-collectors, librarians, even casual browsers." In the week following the fair Lopez said he quoted a \$75,000 archive to a library as a result of a contact made at the fair. He added, "I suspect I may be handling another sizable archive as a result of yet another conversation at the fair." William S. Reese of New Haven, Connecticut, one of the country's

time. The first goal of any book fair is, of course, to sell books, but the next goal is to meet people, and a lot of people were there. We were seeing old friends, finding out what they're interested in now, but we were also meeting new people. There was a lot of circulation, despite it being one of the prettiest mid-November weekends that Boston has had in many a year." Reese said he also bought well. "And that's the third leg of the tripod in doing any show." He bought not only at this fair but at the one everybody calls The Garage Fair, because it originated in the parking garage across the street from the convention center. It is actually the Boston Book, Print & Ephemera Show, a one-day show managed by David Bornstein, and this time it was at Boston's Park Plaza Castle. Reese

Gregory Gibson of Ten Pound Island Book Company, Gloucester, Massachusetts, wrote to say that he thought the fair "had more energy than in recent years, almost as if we were back to normal after 2008...I'd say about seventy-five percent of my colleagues had fairs that met or exceeded expectations, and attendance was up at least for the critical opening night-always a good sign. Personally, I had good selling and some wonderful buying, including a trove of China trade letters from the first Opium War period."

Gibson's trove is, incidentally, at the center of a harrowing story posted on his blog. It tells how in "the bustle and confusion of packing out," he "left the damned thing under the table" of his booth. He drove through Monday morning rush-hour traffic back to the convention center, where he found nothing but "a litter of rolled up carpet, empty showcases, and union guys hollering instructions at each other in Boston accents." Behind the locked door of the Lost & Found, however, after an initial

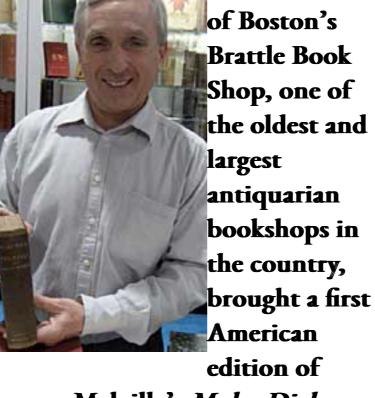
even the gorgeous quarter-plate daguerreotype portrait of the rather porcine China trader." Gibson must have had good karma, as the show itself apparently did. There were even sightings of the elusive young collector, especially in booths where beginners could find some more affordable items.

John S. Kuenzig of Topsfield, Massachusetts, whose specialties include science, technology, early communications history, and early computing, is one who specifically mentioned "many new young people wandering the aisles, some even buying." He and his wife, Sonia, "had a good show, our best in Boston so far," Kuenzig wrote, noting sales made from \$10 to \$3500, as well as several residual sales within three days of the show's closing. "The energy is coming back in the market, something we're happy to see," he said.

Sheryl Jaeger of Eclectibles, Tolland, Connecticut, also made special mention of "the younger set." There were "a number of college students shopping and browsing the show, all with genuine interest in the materials, she said. "Refreshing to all." Jaeger and her partner, Ralph they also have an eye for items of ephemera that verge on fine art. Jaeger was not in the booth on Sunday, but Gallo said he was busy until the final moments of the show, concluding with the sale of a series of

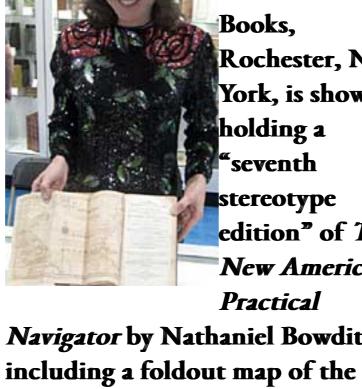
charming 1850's manuscript periodicals, embellished with watercolors and rebus, published by a young boy over a period of five years. For more information about the next show or to contact any of the exhibitors, see (www.bostonbookfair.com). Incidentally, besides the blog

of Gregory Gibson, an author in his own right (Gone Boy, Demon in the Water, Hubert's Freaks), there are (not surprisingly) a number of excellent other blogs, essays, and miscellaneous writings on the Web sites



Herman Melville's Moby-Dick, or, the Whale. Published in 1851, it retains its original binding of brown-gray cloth with gilt. In a

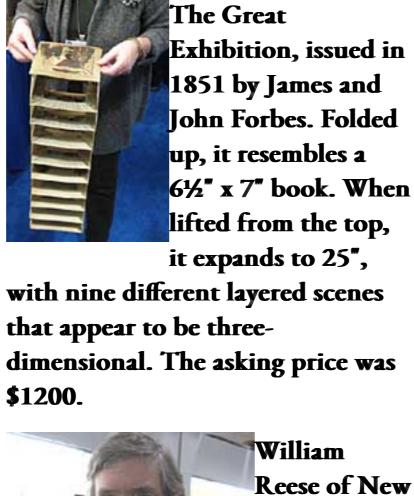
"near-fine" custom box, it was tagged \$50,000. Jennifer Larson of Jeffrey H. Marks Rare



Books, Rochester, New York, is shown holding a seventh stereotype edition" of *The* New American Practical Navigator by Nathaniel Bowditch,

Larson said she bought her circa 1970 colored, sequined dress for \$15 at an antiques store in Georgia. Sheryl Jaeger demonstrated for us a telescopic handcolored peep show of

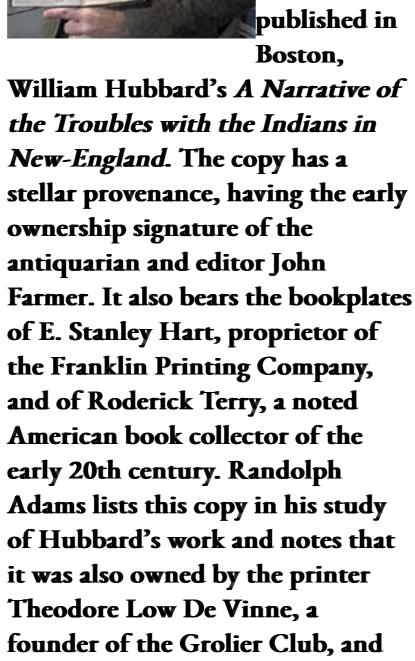
Atlantic Ocean, priced at \$450.



Haven, Connecticut, asked **\$42,500** for this 1677 edition of the

second book

to be



Adams lists this copy in his study of Hubbard's work and notes that it was also owned by the printer Theodore Low De Vinne, a founder of the Grolier Club, and by William W. Cohen, who was believed to be a New York businessman. Adams further states that this copy was probably the one used by Samuel G. Drake in editing his 1865 edition of the book. other to Franklin Delano Roosevelt (\$10,000). Me: "How do you know it was Lee Harvey Oswald's?" He: "I got it from his brother." Me: "And why is Lee Harvey Oswald's worth so much more than F.D.R.'s?" He: "Because everybody knew enough to save F.D.R. material."

Hotchner; a blueprint of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, plus a check signed by the architect (\$20,000); and two items in black from two very

signature of the young naval officer, decorated war hero, and son of a multimillionaire ambassador on a mimeographed, typewritten sheet, which said: "I hereby assume all responsibility of mattress when rubber sheet is removed from my bed." At the time, Kennedy was a patient in Boston's New England Baptist Hospital (room 305) being treated for lower back problems. Apparently,

America and by the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers. A portion of the gate benefits the Boston Public Library and the American Antiquarian Society. The dealers who exhibit there, 117 of them this time, are an international group who travel from England, France, Canada, Netherlands, and Germany, as well as nearly all parts of the United States.

emerged from their bunkers, blinking in the light. More buying took place. John Waite Rare Books, Ascutney, Vermont, said he quickly sold his prize offering of the weekend, a first-edition presentation copy of Hans Christian Andersen's Samlede Digte (collected poems) to Jenny Lind (the Swedish Nightingale). Who knew that Lind was Andersen's major heartthrob? As Waite explained, one of Andersen's most beloved tales,

ever had. Since in any given year the large majority of my sales are to other dealers, I would say the Boston fair showed the top end of the trade is showing signs of vibrant good health once more."

Ken Lopez of Hadley, Massachusetts, who sells first editions, modern

firsts, and signed books, said that "by the dollar count," it was his fourth-

preeminent early Americana dealers, had an equally positive report. "I think it was an excellent book fair," he said. "I heard almost uniformly upbeat reactions from the participants. We ourselves did very well. We did better than we have done at a Boston Book Fair than we have in some

also made purchases at Skinner's fine books and manuscripts auction, which by design fell on the same weekend. (Just a stone's throw from the Park Plaza Castle, the sale featured a Declaration of Independence broadside for which Reese paid \$380,000.)

knock went unanswered, he and the trove were reunited. "Apparently it was the only item that had been lost all weekend. A union guy had found it while breaking the show down and had given it to some security guy who had turned it in... Everything was in the briefcase exactly as I'd left it,

Gallo, carry Americana, costume and fashion items, and children's books;

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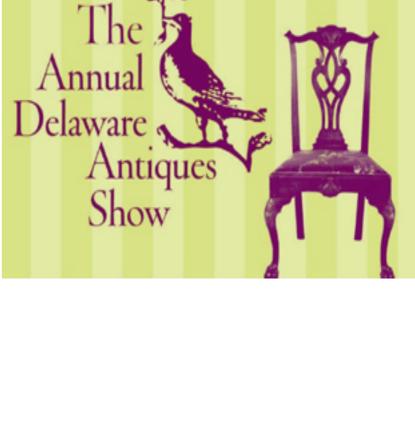
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of these book-loving dealers.









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