

Swann Galleries, New York City

Family Archive of Pioneer Missionary Correspondence Tops Star-Spangled Printed and Manuscript Americana Sale

by Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Swann Galleries

A private collector, bidding by phone, paid \$112,500 (including buyer's premium) for a family archive of 19th-century letters by early missionaries ministering to Native Americans in Minnesota. The sale was made at Swann's auction of printed and manuscript Americana in its New York City gallery on September 28. The lot of 245 pieces of correspondence, most of them written by a pair of Connecticut brothers to their various relatives, exceeded its \$30,000/40,000 estimate. The price also broke the auction house's record for any archive of any kind ever sold at Swann.

"This was great frontier stuff from the first wave of white settlement," said specialist Rick Stattler, who is also Swann's book department director. The Pond brothers, Samuel and Gideon, each of whom had experienced a religious conversion, made their way in the early 1830s to what is now present-day Minneapolis and environs. They preached the gospel and lived among the Dakota Sioux for decades, all the while recording their impressions, experiences, and opinions in letters sent back home. Their handwritten pages are filled

"Buyers seemed confident, and we even noted a few impulse purchases by disciplined collectors on the sale floor."

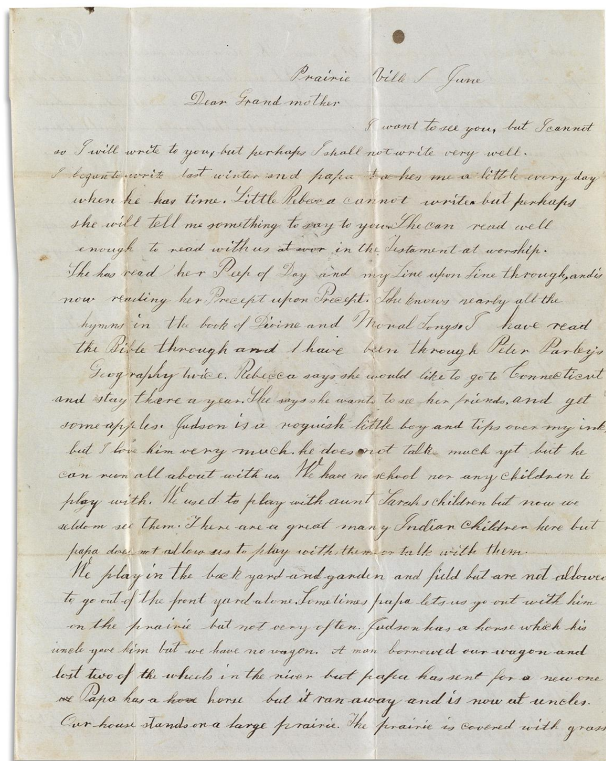
with rich detail, drama, and observations. One letter by Gideon Pond (1810-1878) recounts an ongoing conflict between the Sioux and their Chippewa neighbors. "The Chippeways [*sic*] were driven across the Mississippi," Gideon wrote to his sister. "Missing their canoes they were obliged to swim, five were killed while crossing. But they generally hunt their enemies as they do beaver or otter, except it is conducted with much religious ceremony."

A letter that Samuel Pond (1808-1891), author of the majority of missives in this archive, wrote to his mother assessed the general condition of the native people in 1850 as white settlers continued to move westward. "The Indians here live much more comfortably than they did when we first came into the country," he told her, "but most of them lead miserable lives at best. At present the influenza prevails among them and they are continually calling for medicine. Indians are never so healthy as white people." Five years later, as more and more white people arrived ("Every steamboat from below is crowded with passengers"), he observed, "...there is considerable cholera on the river."

Institutions bid actively throughout the auction, particularly on items with research potential, such as the Pond family archive. That a private collector now owns something more suited to a library is frustrating to contemplate, but it should be kept in mind that collectors often intend such purchases to be donations, sometimes quickly, other times eventually.

Among institutions that were both successful and willing to be identified as buyers was the Society of the Cincinnati. The hereditary organization, founded in 1783 by officers of the Continental Army and their French counterparts, paid a within-estimate price of \$27,500 for a Revolutionary War-era medical journal kept by a series of surgeons aboard the Continental frigate *Deane* and other vessels during the Revolutionary War. The 84 manuscript pages list the names of sailors, their ailments, and treatments. Such records of the everyday practices of 18th-century shipboard medical doctors are extremely rare. As Stattler noted in his catalog, these documents were invariably lost if the ship went down or thrown overboard if it were in danger of capture. What makes the journal a particularly apt purchase by the Society of the Cincinnati is that among the several surgeons who wrote reports was a Frenchman who, through the happenstances of war and fate, became an American patriot.

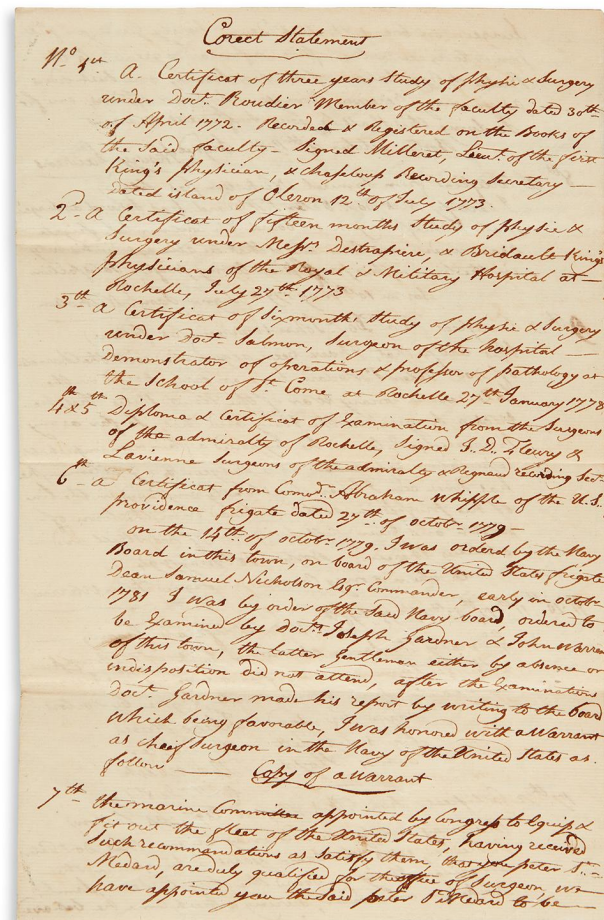
Pierre St. Medard (1755-1822), later known as Peter St. Medard, began his career as a sea surgeon at age



The Pond family archive of 19th-century correspondence sold for \$112,500 (est. \$30,000/40,000). Connecticut history, Minnesota history, and Native American history coalesced in this cache, a full inventory of which, with abstracts of each letter, was available to previewers on request.

18. For the next five years, employed by ship owners involved with trading slaves and sugar, he sailed on long-haul voyages from France primarily to the French West Indies. According to a biography by J. Worth Estes, *Naval Surgeon: Life and Death at Sea in the Age of Sail*, published in 1998, St. Medard treated crew and slaves. At age 23, St. Medard was captured by the British and sent as a prisoner to Boston, where he was handed over to the Americans. The following year, he joined the Continental Navy and was assigned to the *Deane*. As the journal shows, he was engaged in treating the men for the usual sailor-type ills of diarrhea, dysentery, various fevers, syphilis, and gonorrhea by employing the usual remedies such as bleeding, blistering, emetics, and cathartics. But he also treated more serious ailments, including an epidemic of smallpox. As Estes wrote in his biography, "For the rest of his life [St. Medard] would regard his role in helping establish the new country as his proudest accomplishment."

A second St. Medard lot, a 230-item archive of papers that covers a later period in the surgeon's life, came to the sale, as did the first one, after having been bought from the estate of a St. Medard descendant, Elizabeth B. Andrews (1911-2004). In her lifetime, Andrews donated other St. Medard materials to the Samuel Eliot Morison Memorial Library of the USS Constitution Museum in Boston. Her gift was well placed, since after the War for Independence, St. Medard joined the U.S. Navy and served as a surgeon aboard Old Ironsides on her first major assignment, during the Quasi-War with France in 1798-1800. He returned to sea aboard the frigate *New-York* during the First Barbary War in 1802-03. In a diary he kept during that war against piracy—one of the highlights of this lot—he recorded details of what were perhaps his greatest medical challenges. An explosion in the gunner storeroom ignited quantities of gunpowder. Nine men, including officers, were hurt; three died. St. Medard also faced the results of several armed engagements with the enemy. St. Medard's correspondence with several cabinet members was included in this lot, which went to an unnamed institution for \$15,000 (est. \$6000/9000).



The papers of early U.S. Navy surgeon Pierre (later Peter) St. Menard sold to an unnamed institution for \$15,000 (est. \$6000/9000).

This sale offered many more fresh-to-the-market items that were unique or at least extremely unusual. Even after years of covering these sales, while reading many of the catalog descriptions I found the only proper response to be, "Who knew?"

Discovered during a home cleanout was a 1904-05 run of an obscure turn-of-the-20th-century magazine, *Gleanings in Bee Culture*, with a Wright brothers connection. The lot sold to a phone bidder for \$5000, above the high estimate. The biweekly, published in Medina, Ohio, was devoted to beekeeping, but its founder, editor, and publisher, Amos Ives Root (1839-1923), had befriended the Wrights and developed a fascination with their early attempts at flight. He was with the brothers the first time they flew at Huffman Prairie near Dayton in May 1904. Invited by them to be present at Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, on September 20, 1904, Root wrote what is acknowledged to be the first published firsthand account of that momentous, historic success of a roundtrip flight that lasted one minute and 36 seconds and covered just over three-quarters of a mile. Submitted to *Scientific American*, the article with its folksy tone was rejected, so Root published it in his own magazine. There, flanked by ads for beekeeping equipment and advice about honey making, appeared his story about "an airship, without a balloon to sustain it" that was able to "turn the corners and come back to the starting point."

"Root was not a technology writer; he was an enthusiast with a great brain," Stattler said at a preview. He was also an "early adopter of the bicycle," perhaps getting to know the Wrights through their bicycle shop. "He owned a car and drove across the state in it" to see the Wrights in Dayton, a distance of approximately 185 miles. Never mind that he also thought aviation would make roads and bridges obsolete or that he was a big temperance advocate. The successful niche publisher established a specialized magazine that still exists—perhaps his most amazing feat. Now known as *Bee Culture: The Magazine of American Beekeeping*, it continues to be published in Medina. (For more information, see the website [www.beeculture.com]).



A rarity from Hawaii, a bound volume of the 1855 run of a newspaper, the *Friend*, sold to a dealer for \$3000 (est. \$800/1200). It was published in Honolulu by the Polynesian Press, Stories in these issues cover local news, including the death and funeral of King Kamehameha III, happenings in other Pacific Islands, and reports on whaling and missionary work. Bound with the *Friend*, which was subtitled “A Semi-Monthly Journal, Devoted to Temperance, Marine, and General Intelligence,” and no doubt adding to the lot’s value was the first and only issue of another Hawaiian newspaper, a supplement to the *Friend* called the *Folio*. A 1985 article in *Hawaiian Journal of History*, cited in Stattler’s catalog, characterized it as Hawaii’s first women’s periodical and the first feminist periodical west of the Rockies.

The editor of the *Folio* wasn’t named, but a letter to the editor is addressed to its “editriss.” That woman may have been Julia Damon (1817-1890), wife of Samuel Chenery Damon, founder, publisher, editor, and distributor of the *Friend*. The letter implored the editriss to become “the defender, supporter, aye, creator of Women’s Rights in Hawaii!” Perhaps she did in other ways but not through the vehicle of that short-lived newspaper.

One of the most curious lots in this sale was likewise Hawaiian. A first edition of *The Honolulu Merchants’ Looking-Glass*, published in San Francisco in 1862, achieved a big price of \$10,625, paid by a dealer. The small innocent-looking volume of 18 pages in a 5½" x 4" binding was essentially a smear campaign, targeting 31 leading Honolulu merchants. Issued and distributed anonymously, it purported to allow its subjects to “see themselves as others see them.” Hence, its title. The men are variously described as being “mean,” “parsimonious,” “eccentric and full of tricks,” “vindictive,” possessed of “a weakness for...native feasts and...native dancing girls,” etc. Stattler said no copy had been known at auction and none is listed in OCLC (Online Computer Library Center). The only other copy he could locate is in the collection of the Hawaiian Mission Children’s Society Library, part of the Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archives, an institution in the same city where these merchants once did business. In that copy, there is a clue about the publication’s origins; it was one of their own. An inserted 1913 note says the booklet was published by merchant P.S. Wilcox of Wilcox & Richards, which, as Stattler points out in his catalog description, is spared any scathe in his write-up. P.S. Wilcox, in the *Looking-Glass*’s estimation, has “no particularly visible weakness.”

Several lots in the photography section did extremely well, none better than an item that came from an estate. The album of 351 cyanotypes (photographic blueprints) documents the entire process of the construction of the Williamsburg Bridge from site selection to completion, from 1897 through 1903. This remarkable record was compiled by civil engineer Western Radford Bascome (1867-1940), who was likely the photographer too. One of the major crossings of the East River, the bridge links the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn with Manhattan. It was once the longest suspension bridge in the world, originally designed to carry rail, trolley cars, horse-and-carriages, and pedestrians. The photos, most of them 4½" x 6", feature many excellent views of period Brooklyn and Manhattan; they also show the construction workers high up on the cables and towers, looking tiny and only barely death defying.

Why these photos were so well composed can be surmised. The Sturgis Library in Barnstable, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, has an album of more than 100 cyanotypes that are certifiably by Bascome, lending credence to the idea that he was the Williamsburg Bridge photographer. The Sturgis Library photos show local scenes. Apparently, Bascome was a hobby photographer early in life. The Cape Cod cyanotypes date from 1888 and 1890, when Bascome, a graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, his hometown, was in his early 20s. According to the Sturgis Library, Bascome, whose cousin lived on Cape Cod, worked on the design of a number of New York bridges and highways.

Swann traditionally does extremely well with New York City material, but the Williamsburg Bridge lot transcended that narrow collecting category, crossing into other fields, including the history of photography and of engineering. Collectors of bridge construction photography must have been positively panting at the sight of these. As a result, there was a battle, ending with a dealer taking the album for \$30,000 (est. \$4000/6000).

A newspaper printing of “Defence [*sic*] of Fort McHenry,” the early title of Francis Scott Key’s “Star-Spangled Banner,” sold to a dealer for a crazy price of \$21,250 (est. \$3000/4000). Does anyone seriously believe the bidding wasn’t driven by certain recent player actions at the start of National Football League games and the national discussion that these actions have inspired? The

song’s words are printed on a page from the October 12, 1814, edition of the *National Aegis*, published in Worcester, Massachusetts. An introduction to it, under the headline “POETRY,” says the “beautiful and animating effusion” is “destined long to outlast the occasion and outlive the impulse which produced it.” It became our national anthem 117 years later in 1931.

Another topical lot, the 239-page diary of a young Syrian-American woman from a prominent family who visited her ancestors’ homeland in 1908-09 when she was in her early 20s, sold to a dealer for \$3000 (est. \$1000/1500). The forebears of the diary’s author, Mary Arbeely (1886-1971), were Orthodox Christians and ethnic Arabs from Beirut who fled the oppression of the Turks in the 1870s. The refugees settled in New York and did well. Mary’s father, Abraham Arbeely, a physician, founded the first Arabic newspaper in America. When Mary returned to Beirut with family members, the political situation was still dire. “Everyone is still frightened that Beyrout [*sic*] may be the next to be visited by a massacre, for Adana, Tarsus, Mersine have been scenes of awful butchering,” she wrote on April 16, 1909. In the midst of the troubles, she manages to enjoy Arabic culture and engage in social activities. She is even courted by men who want to marry her. She isn’t interested, though, being homesick for America and having a boyfriend back home to boot. “I would rather marry for love and get a very poor man than this way,” she tells her diary. “Give me CB every time.” Clifton B. Shoemaker was her eventual husband.

The Latin-American section of the sale achieved stellar results, a usual outcome at these Swann sales. A large compilation of mid-19th-century Cuban pamphlets and manuscripts on slavery and other subjects went to a dealer for \$8125. Two separate lots of 17th-century manuscripts by Baja California missionaries brought \$27,500 and \$11,250, respectively, going also to dealers. Fernando de Cepeda’s 1637 book on Mexican engineering made \$12,500, again going to a dealer. An early, possibly circa 1800, Mexican manuscript cookbook went to an institution for \$7500 (est. \$5000/7500). And a legal document, one of the earliest examples of printing in the Americas, achieved \$2000. The single 12½" x 8½" leaf, a *carta de poder* or power of attorney agreement, dated May 2, 1572, was printed in Mexico 68 years before the Bay Psalm Book was produced in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

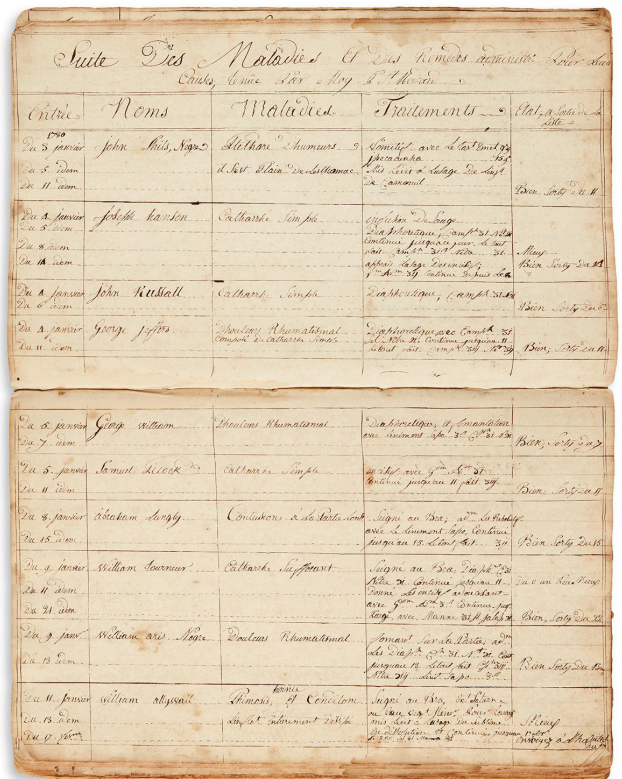
Swann’s president, Nicholas D. “Nicho” Lowry, and Alexandra Nelson, its communications director, called the auction and knocked down lots at nearly 100 lots an hour. Yet it didn’t seem rushed. And there was still time for humor. Selling *The New-England Primer Improved*, a children’s book published by John Carter in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1785, Lowry said, “A primer—that’s like a coat of paint for kids. Here’s an auction primer for you—bid aggressively.” The book sold for \$2000 (est. \$1000/1500).

At 325 lots, the sale was “one of the smallest sales we’ve ever done,” said Stattler, “but the total hammer was the best of our past four Americana sales, and it finished above the top of its estimate range.” All told, it brought \$777,252 with a sell-through rate of 86%. “Buyers seemed confident, and we even noted a few impulse purchases by disciplined collectors on the sale floor.” He was not naming names, however.

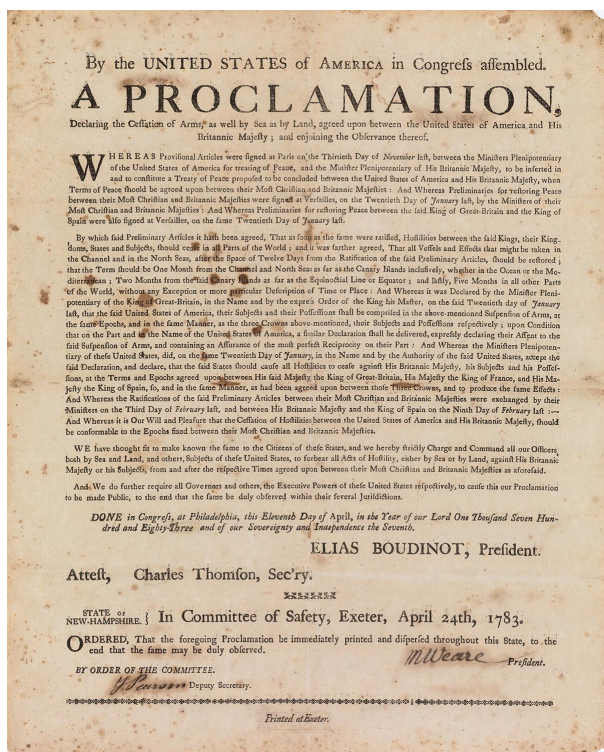
For more information, contact Swann through its website (www.swanngalleries.inc.) or call (212) 254-4710.



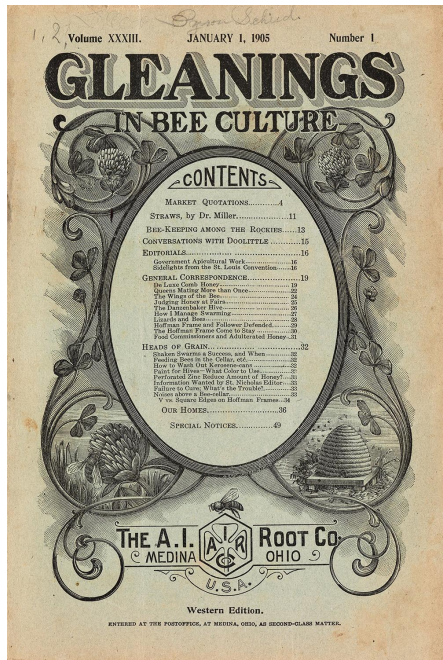
This 9½" x 7½" hand-colored platinum print of a Chiricahua Apache woman named Hattie Tom sold to an absentee bidder for \$2500 (est. \$1500/2500). The photograph, copyrighted in 1899 by Frank A. Rinehart (1861-1928) and made at the 1898 Omaha Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Nebraska, is captioned, numbered 1400, and signed in the negative.



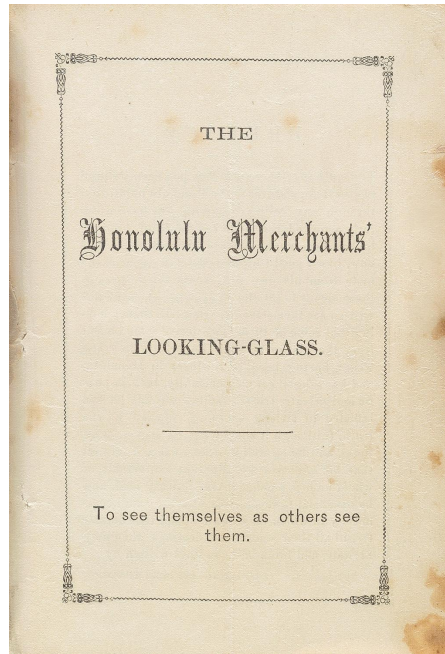
The Society of the Cincinnati paid \$27,500 (est. \$20,000/30,000) for an 84-page medical journal kept by surgeons from 1777 to 1788 aboard the Continental frigate *Deane* and other vessels.



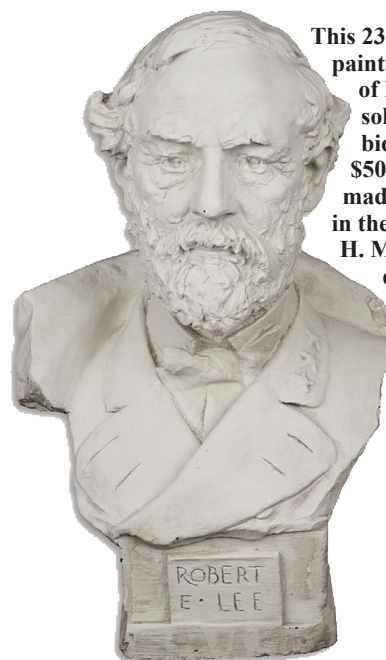
This New Hampshire letterpress broadside proclaiming the end of the War for Independence sold to a collector bidding as an absentee for \$22,500 (est. \$20,000/30,000). The 16¼" x 13" broadside was printed in Exeter on April 24, 1783, and among the signers was Meshech Weare (1713-1786), president of the so-called Committee of Safety, which put him in charge of raising recruits and supplies, regulating the state militia, supervising the entrance and clearance of vessels from Portsmouth, surveilling Loyalists, and more. According to Swann, only one other copy has been known at auction since 1924.



A 1904 into 1905 run of *Gleanings in Bee Culture*, including the issue that contains the first published firsthand account of the Wright brothers' first complete roundtrip in their "airship," sold for \$5000 (est. \$1500/2500).

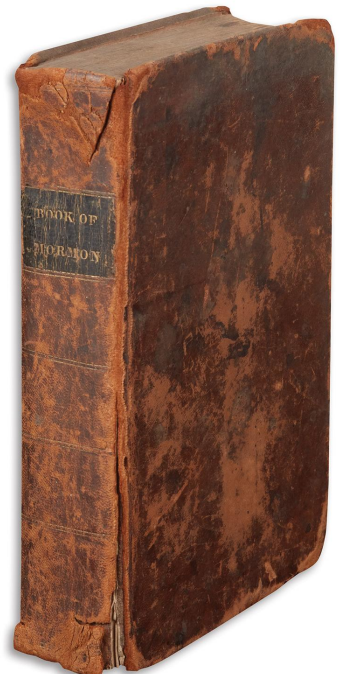


The Honolulu Merchants' Looking-Glass, an 18-page 5½" x 4" booklet published anonymously in San Francisco in 1862 and distributed stealthily throughout Honolulu, sold for \$10,625 (est. \$6000/9000). The compilation of dastardly characterizations of 31 local merchants is a true rarity, maybe because the merchants destroyed as many as they could. One of the merchants was described as having "probably a better capacity for pulling wool over shipmasters' eyes than any other man in the community.... Is generally disliked, and by many considered a dangerous man to confide in."

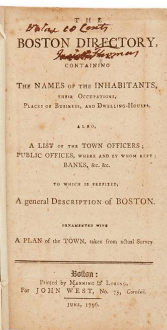


This 23" x 16" x 10" painted plaster bust of Robert E. Lee sold to an absentee bidder for \$5000 (est. \$5000/7500). It was made in New York City in the 1920s by Philip H. Martiny (1858-1927) during the period when many of the Confederate memorials still standing today were being commissioned.

This first edition of *The Book of Mormon*, published by E.B. Grandin in Palmyra, New York, in 1830 sold to a collector on the phone for \$37,500 (est. \$10,000/15,000). A defective copy, it was missing its title page, but considering the price it brought, bidders thought that its original binding made up for that lack.

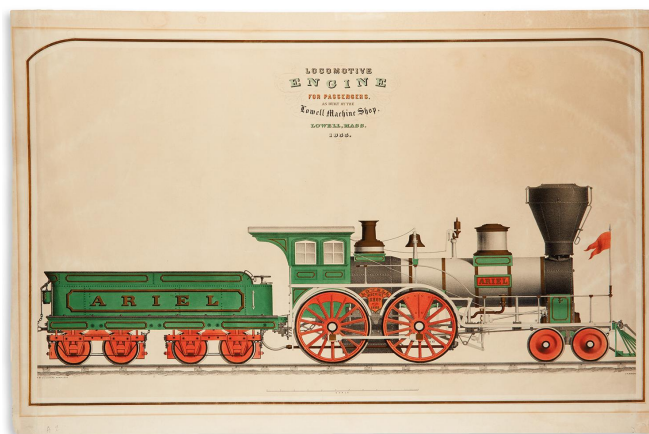


The Boston Directory, published in 1796 by Manning & Loring, includes entries for Governor Samuel Adams and Paul Revere ("bell and cannon foundrey [sic], Lynn street, house North Square"). With its folding map intact, the volume sold for \$3250 (est. \$800/1200). According to Swann, no copies of either this title or the first directory, published in 1789, have been at auction for close to a century.



A circa 1870 mammoth photo of the U.S. Capitol sold to a dealer for \$8125 (est. \$3000/4000). The photographer is uncredited but, according to the catalog, the 15¼" x 21" albumen print resembles one at the U.S. Library of Congress credited to Francis Hacker (1827-1904).

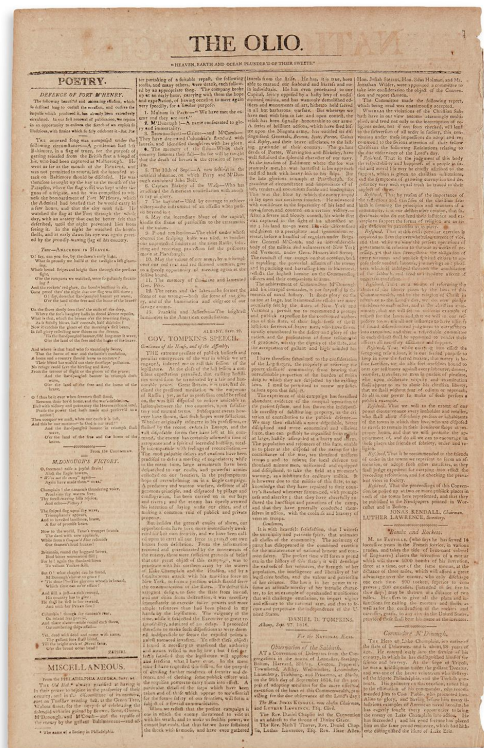
Locomotive Engine for Passengers as Built by the Lowell Machine Shop, a 24" x 32" chromolithograph published in Boston by L.H. Bradford in 1855, sold for \$2470 (est. \$1000/1500). The artist was Oliver Edwards Cushing (1829-1890), who worked for the Lowell Machine Shop, Lowell, Massachusetts, as a mechanical draughtsman.



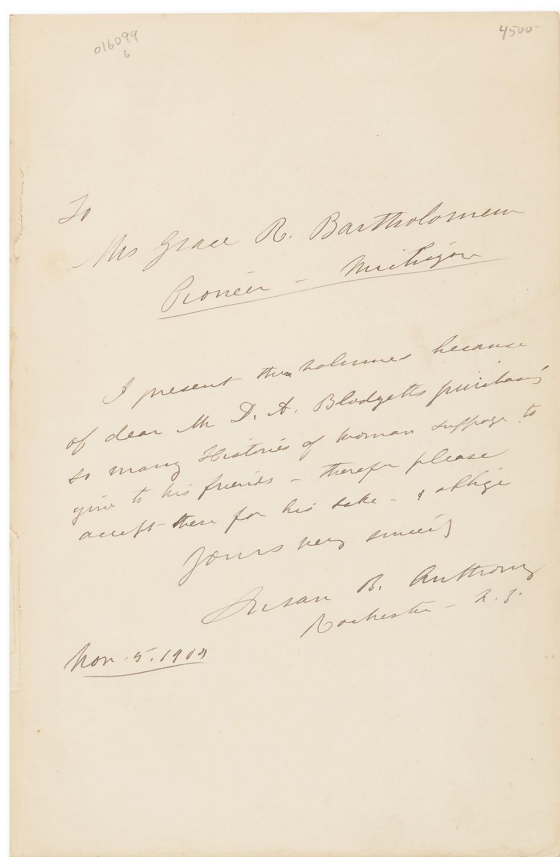
An album of 351 cyanotypes depicting the building of the Williamsburg Bridge from start to finish sold to a dealer for \$30,000 (est. \$4000/6000). The album was compiled by civil engineer Western Radford Bascome (1867-1940), who was also likely the photographer. The photos date from 1897 through 1903.



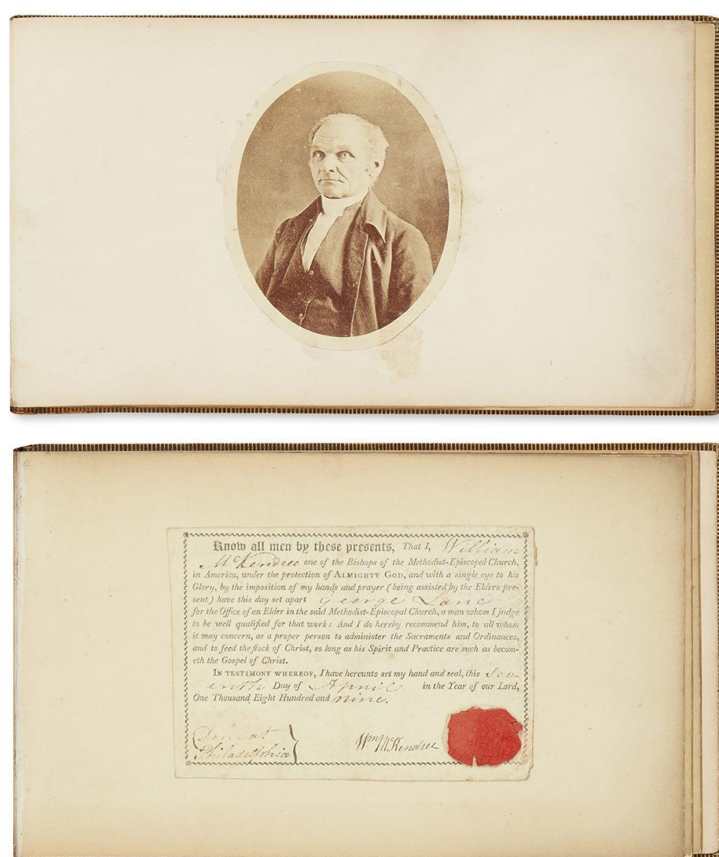
The sale's cover lot was fabric, not paper—a 24" x 23" bandana featuring an engraving of President Theodore Roosevelt and Vice President Charles W. Fairbanks on the occasion of their reelection campaign in 1904. Distributed by the Lyon Brothers of Madison, Maine, the item was cataloged as "bright with minimal wear" and sold for \$2000 (est. \$1000/1500).



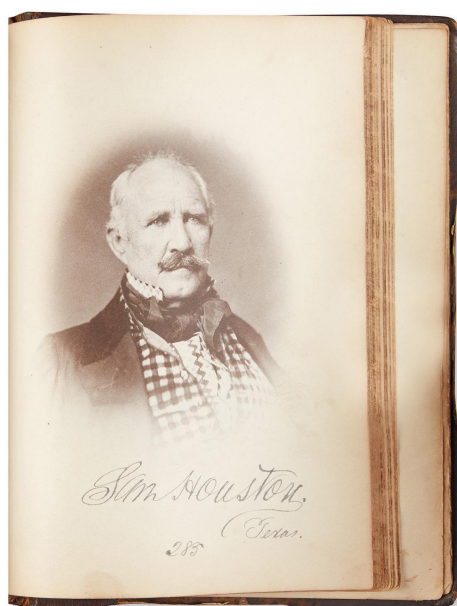
This 1814 newspaper printing of Francis Scott Key's "Defence [sic] of Fort McHenry," later known as "The Star-Spangled Banner," sold for a fluky \$21,250 (est. \$3000/4000).



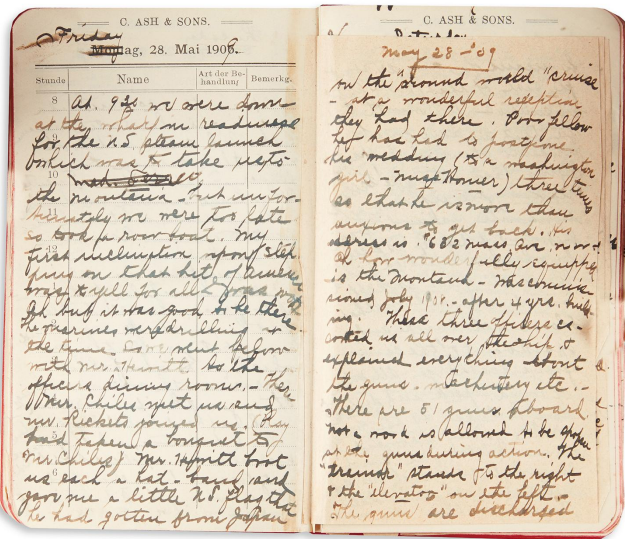
A copy of Ida Husted Harper's *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* sold for \$4000 (est. \$800/1200). The biography was published in Indianapolis in three volumes, in 1898, 1899, and 1908, respectively. This copy was missing volume three but had a bonus—a 1904 presentation inscription by its subject in volume one. Anthony addressed Grace Bartholomew, a Michigan farmer, and thanked D.A. Blodgett, also of Michigan, who bought "so many Histories of Woman Suffrage to give to his friends." It is a reference to *History of Woman Suffrage*, the first three volumes of which were written and edited by Harper, Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Matilda Joselyn Gage between 1881 and 1887.



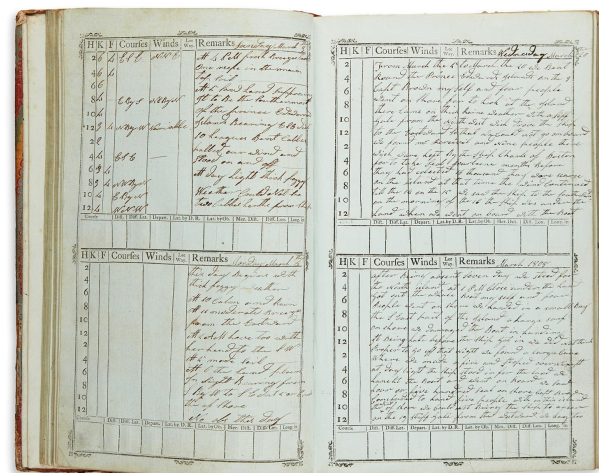
A scrapbook of itinerant Methodist preacher George Lane (1784-1859), which includes an albumen photograph of him that was previously unknown, sold to a collector for \$11,250 (est. \$2000/3000). But the interest here wasn't in Methodism; it was in Mormonism and demonstrates the depths to which Mormon collecting goes. Lane is believed to have been an early inspiration to Joseph Smith.



This copy of McClees' *Gallery of Photographic Portraits of the Senators, Representatives & Delegates of the Thirty-Fifth Congress* sold to a dealer for \$11,250 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Published in Washington, D.C., in 1859, when the medium of photography was just 20 years old, it is one of the earliest photographically illustrated books. Each of the 292 photographic portraits is a salt paper print. They are printed directly on the leaves and bound, not tipped in. Each is captioned with a facsimile manuscript signature. Subjects include a pantheon of Civil War-era figures, including Jefferson Davis, Stephen Douglas, Hannibal Hamlin, Sam Houston, Andrew Johnson, William Seward, and Charles Sumner. The photographers were the book's publisher, James Earle McClees (1821-1887), and his assistant Julian Vannerson (b. 1827).



The diary that Mary Arbeely, a young Syrian-American, kept on a November 1908 to September 1909 visit to Beirut, her ancestors' homeland, sold for \$3000.



This 262-page logbook kept by seaman John Larnard sold for \$6760 to an unnamed institution bidding online. Larnard recorded the details of three voyages he made to the South Seas during the period 1804 through most of 1816. Two were arduous trips to the Prince Edward Islands, not in Canada but newly discovered seal grounds between South Africa and Antarctica; the third was to Canton and Indonesia. "We have ben [sic] here 52 days since we made the land and not on shore yet," he wrote of one of the seal hunts. "The people are getting sick."



Mail to:
Maine Antique Digest
P O Box 1429
Waldoboro ME 04572-1429
or call 1-800-752-8521

☐ New OR ☐ Renewal

Your name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: _____

- ☐ One year \$43 (\$45.37 including sales tax for Maine addresses)
☐ Two years \$79 — Save \$7 (\$83.35 including sales tax for Maine addresses)
☐ Non-U.S. subscribers \$75 per year. Please pay in U.S. funds.
☐ Digital-only - one year \$30
 If digital subscription, please supply e-mail address and password.

E-mail: _____ Password: _____

Please charge my:

☐ M/C ☐ DISCOVER ☐ VISA ☐ AMEX

Total enclosed \$: _____

Acct. #: _____

Exp. date: _____ Sec. code: _____

Mail or go to www.MaineAntiqueDigest.com & click on Subscribe or call 1-800-752-8521