

Swann Galleries, New York City

Mormons, Mexicana, and Marilyn Monroe—All in a Day's Work at Printed and Manuscript Americana Sale

by Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Swann Galleries

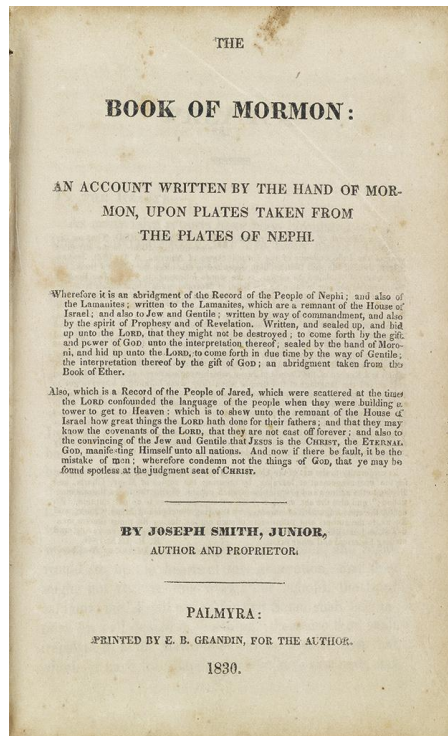
A first edition of *The Book of Mormon* was the top lot of Swann's printed and manuscript Americana sale on April 12 in its New York City gallery—yet again. The auction house has done well with Mormon material for at least a decade. Success can be boring—isn't that one reason why we root for underdogs?—but not this kind. Published in Palmyra, New York, by E.B. Grandin in 1830, just days before the official establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 6 of that same year, the book sold to a collector on the phone for \$77,500 (including buyer's premium).

The most noteworthy 20th-century material was a silver print of the only known photograph of Marilyn Monroe and John F. Kennedy together.

A notable lot from the American Revolution section of the sale—Thomas Paine's essay *The American Crisis Parts I & II*—had a Mormon connection too. It's an educated guess that Swann's reputation in Utah was a reason why its consignors took the item there. Its provenance showed that the two first editions—first state, bound together—had traveled from New Jersey to Utah with a Mormon convert who died in Salt Lake City in 1886. The work's next known owner was Donald Drake (1907-1991) of Mount Pleasant, Utah. He acquired it when he bought a box of the convert's family papers. Upon his death, the papers went to his wife, Marciel Everts Drake (1929-2015). The works were stored in a corner of a garage for the next 25 years. Passed next to Drake's sister Joan Everts Varah and her husband, Lynn, also of Mount Pleasant, they were nearly thrown away. But then the Varahs thought to show them to a friend, David Foster, who enjoys doing genealogical history. It was he who discovered what they had.

Foster admitted to a reporter for the *Sanpete Messenger* in Utah that it crossed his mind to keep the prize himself. For his research and his honesty, the newspaper report said, the couple will split the profits from the sale with him. The price was \$50,000, paid by a dealer bidding on the phone.

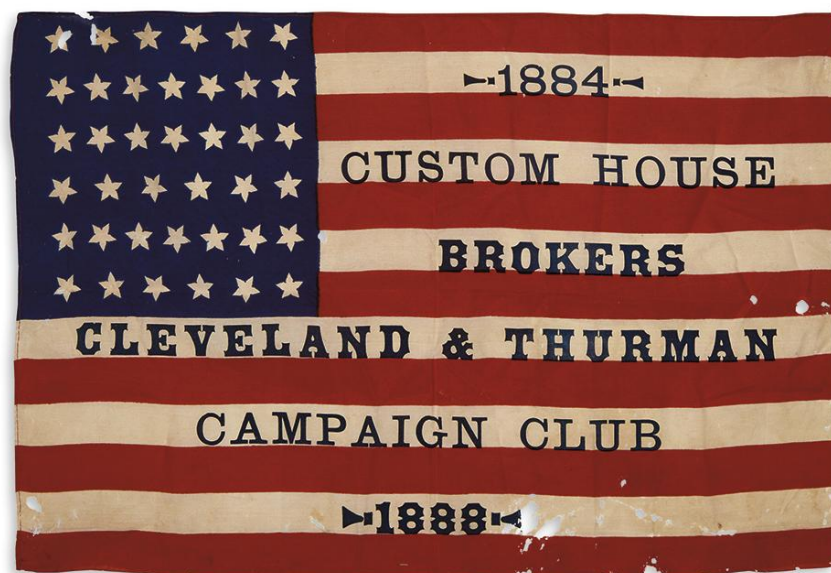
Swann also consistently posts good results for early Mexican imprints and manuscripts. The auction house has been known as a marketplace for this material since at least 1978. Those lots traditionally come up at the end of the sale, as they did this time, when a whole string of rare Latin Americana fetched some more of the top prices of the day. These items included a 1566 treatise explaining the seven sacraments for use in the Mexican church (\$32,500); early (1576-77) records of the silver mine at Taxco (\$30,000); and the first printing of Aristotle or of any Classical author in the New World (\$27,500). The Aristotle was bound together with an introduction to philosophy and logic. The two books were issued in 1554 with the students of the colony's first university in mind. Established in 1551, the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico predated Harvard University by 85 years.



The first edition of *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (title page shown), published in Palmyra, New York, by E.B. Grandin in 1830, just days before the official establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 6 of that same year, sold to a collector on the phone for \$77,500. It was the top lot of the sale.



The only known photograph of Marilyn Monroe and John F. Kennedy together, taken by Cecil W. Stoughton on May 19, 1962, brought \$10,625 (est. \$2500/3500). The 11" x 11" silver print dates from the mid-1970s. At left is Robert F. Kennedy; on the far right, cropped, is historian Arthur Schlesinger.



This 11½" x 17" red, white, and blue silk flag sold to an absentee bidder for \$4750 (est. \$400/600). It was produced by supporters of President Grover Cleveland's 1888 reelection campaign. Allen G. Thurman was his running mate. The campaign was unsuccessful. The flag came to Swann along with a large collection of family papers, most relating to Boston merchant John Andrews (1790-1872) and his son Charles T. Andrews (1830-1905). Not shown, the papers went separately to a phone bidder for \$750 (est. \$500/750).

Several of the Mexicana lots went for well under estimate, including two of the three cited above. Balancing that, some came in well above. A Mexican Inquisition letterpress broadside, for example, forbidding the use of the hallucinogen peyote sold to a dealer bidding in the room for \$25,000. The catalog had set expectations at \$6000/9000. (Estimates do not reflect the buyer's premium.) A catechism and census written in Chinantec, the indigenous language still spoken in Oaxaca, also went to the trade, for \$30,000. The estimate was \$1000/1500.

I asked Rick Stattler, Swann's Americana expert and its book department director, if the market was changing or if these discrepancies reflected something else. He said, "It's always tough to set estimates when the material is unique." For some of the extraordinary prices, he credited the help he got from a graduate student who is a specialist in early Mexican manuscripts. The student

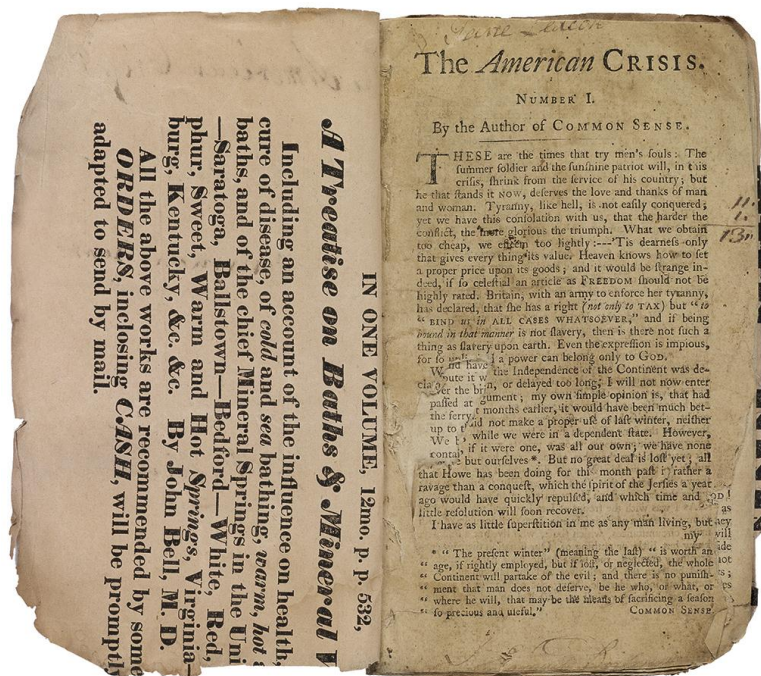
can read Nahuatl, the Uto-Aztec language spoken in Mexico. In one case, he translated a pair of 1650-1750 skits written in Nahuatl, realizing that one of them was actually funny. "He got the humor," said Stattler. The pair sold to a dealer for \$11,875 (est. \$1000/1500).

The most noteworthy 20th-century material was a silver print of the only known photograph of Marilyn Monroe and John F. Kennedy together. The image was made by official White House photographer Cecil W. Stoughton on May 19, 1962, JFK's 45th birthday. Stoughton took the picture at a private party at a New York City residence following Monroe's celebrated singing of "Happy Birthday" to the president at Madison Square Garden. At the party she was still wearing her famed translucent gown. The existence of the image was not generally known to the public until two years after Stoughton's death, when this print, made in the mid-1970s, sold to Swann's consignor for \$9150 at Bonhams on December 9, 2010,

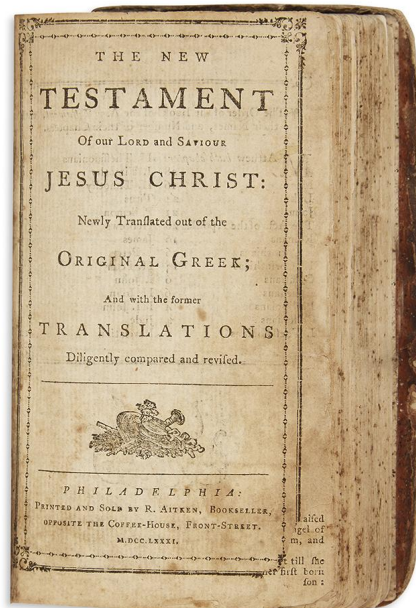
along with 22 other photos of the party. At this sale, the single print went to a dealer for \$10,625.

At that same Bonhams sale, Swann's consignor paid \$151,000 for a lot of approximately 12,000 Stoughton photos from JFK's White House days. At Swann's 2018 sale, approximately 446 of them fetched \$15,000; the buyer was a dealer. The images include some of the key public moments of the Kennedy presidency—his trip to West Berlin, his last trip, to Dallas—as well as the 22 party photos noted above and approximately 50 candid shots from Kennedy family vacations at the compound in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, and elsewhere.

One more fascinating bit of what the consignor bought at Bonhams went up in a separate lot. It was the passenger list for the flight returning from Dallas after the JFK assassination. Stoughton was the one who took the photo of Lyndon B. Johnson taking the oath of office on Air Force One with the newly widowed Jackie



Thomas Paine's *The American Crisis Parts I and II*, first separate editions, first state, bound together, sold for \$50,000 (est. \$50,000/70,000). The parts were published in Philadelphia by Styner & Cist, on December 23, 1776, and January 13, 1777, respectively. Swann sold a second state Parts I, II, and III at its sale on November 25, 2014, for \$125,000. Originally issued as a pamphlet, *The American Crisis* is considered to be among the greatest political essays in the modern English language. Paine's biographer John Keane called it "an ode to fearlessness" and "a literary cannonball on the battlefield of independence." (See *Tom Paine: A Political Life*, published in 1995.) Meant to inspire the men to be courageous rather than a "summer soldier" or "sunshine patriot" in circumstances that looked to be pretty dire, Paine's words were intended to be read aloud to people unaccustomed to reading. Indeed, according to tradition, the essay was read on Christmas 1776 to men who, on the following day, waged the Battle of Trenton after George Washington's crossing of the Delaware River. Paine wrote Part II in an entirely different vein. It was cast in the form of an open letter to a British official, Lord Richard Howe. The letter was a taunt, a threat, and a bold prediction that the British would lose.



The so-called Aitken Bible, published in Philadelphia by R. Aitken in 1782, went to a collector for \$47,500 (est. \$12,000/18,000). The first printing of the complete Bible in English in America, it is often referred to as "The Bible of the Revolution." John Wright, whose 1894 census turned up only 32 copies, called this "the rarest of all early Bibles printed in America."



Alexander Majors of the freight company Russell, Majors and Waddell demanded a sobriety oath of his employees and ordered Bibles to be carried by his teams. When Majors cofounded the Pony Express in 1860, he continued the tradition. They were, one could say, a kind of portable Gideons Bible. Referred to as the Pony Express Bible by collectors, each book bears the presentation date 1858, as does this one. A long inscription at the front of this copy evokes the era of men moving across the Great Plains: "This book was presented to our company and was carried with us across the plains of Nebraska to Fort Laramie during the summer of 1859." The inscription goes on to name the eight team members and says that one was awarded the Bible after drawing lots "at the breaking up of our company." Acquired by the consignar at a country auction in upstate New York, this 29th edition, published by the American Bible Society in New York, went to a collector for \$20,000 (est. \$7000/10,000).



This painted wood sign bears a familiar quotation from John A. Dix (1798-1879), appointed U.S. Treasury secretary immediately before the Civil War by President James Buchanan. Issued as an actual official order and sent to Treasury agents in New Orleans on January 20, 1861, it says: "If any man attempts to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot." There was speculation in Swann's description that it may have hung above the entrance of a Grand Army of the Republic post, since "several G.A.R. posts were named after Dix, including New York's John A. Dix Post #135 in Manhattan." Stattler said it had come to the sale via a picker who had gotten it from an old collection on Long Island. "I initially told him, 'We don't take signs,'" he recalled. "[The picker] pleaded, saying, 'I don't care what estimate you put on it.'" Given that freedom, Stattler estimated it at \$500/750. "It turned out to be the lot that we had the most interest in." By his count, there were 15 phone bidders vying for it. In the end, the 11½" x 32" sign with lettering in red and gold sold for \$7500 to a bidder in the room.

Sixteen albums of approximately 446 photographs by Cecil W. Stoughton (1920-2008), official White House photographer during John F. Kennedy's presidency, fetched \$15,000 (est. \$5000/7500). All of the images date from May 1962 and June through November 1963. About 85% of them are 8" x 10" chromogenic prints believed to have been produced in the 1960s; the rest are later 8" x 10" silver prints.



Kennedy by his side, wearing her blood-stained pink suit. The Swann catalog said it seems likely that Stoughton asked for the list in order to identify the people he had photographed in other shots. The single typescript page, bought by an absentee bidder for \$2500, enumerates 41 names, including those already well known to have been on the flight (LBJ, Mrs. Johnson, and LBJ confidant Jack Valenti) plus ten members of the U.S. Secret Service, two generals, reporters, congressmen, and various wives.

A view made by Andrew J. Russell (1829-1902) for his *The Great West Illustrated in a Series of Photographic Views across the Continent* was one of the sale's most significant 19th-century lots. Published circa 1868, the book documents the stages in the construction of the first transcontinental railroad, begun in 1864. Russell's image of the driving of the "Golden Spike," one of the project's most iconic views, has gone for \$20,000 to \$40,000. Swann sold one on

March 23, 2010, for \$36,000 hammer (\$43,200 with premium). This view, captioned "Construction Train Near Bear River" and very modestly estimated at \$1000/1500, was knocked down to a collector on the phone for \$15,000.

Following the \$174,000 sale of 84 Russell photos in a single lot at Skinner Inc. in Boston in November 2013, I spoke with Susan E. Williams of Oakland, California, former curator of the Oakland Museum's Andrew J. Russell Photography Collection. Now retired and an independent scholar, Williams continues to study Russell. Among other things, she estimated that only about 50 copies of Russell's *The Great West Illustrated* were produced. "Right now they're scattered around archives," she said. "There are fifteen to twenty that I know of, in institutions. Who knows how many there are in private collections?"

Stattler said the Bear River view was consigned by a dealer. Also from a dealer came a cypress branch cut

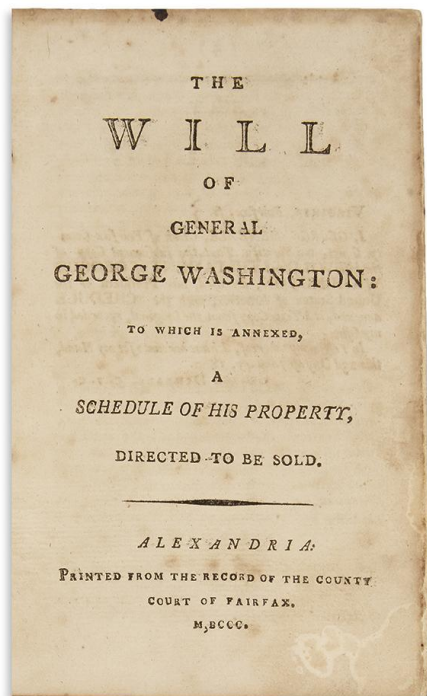
by France's Marquis de Lafayette at the Mount Vernon tomb of George Washington—truly among the best one-of-a-kind offerings of the day. Bought by a collector for \$13,750, the branch was set into a framed watercolor illustration captioned "Branche de Cyprès coupée sur le tombeau de Gn. Washington, 1821." The branch's provenance was detailed in the catalog, beginning with its ownership in 1888 by Edmond Motier de Lafayette (1818-1890), grandson of the famous Continental Army general. Edmond left his Lafayette artifacts to his grand-nephew, the Marquis Paul Marie Rene Gaston de Sahune-Lafayette (1855-1942). He kept the branch on display at a small museum in the general's birthplace, the Château de Chavaniac. On February 29, 1912, the American Art Association auctioned it as part of a "Collection of Relics and Souvenirs of the Marquis de Lafayette." Swann found a recap of the sale in the next day's *New York Times*. The report says its buyer, at \$95, was Mrs. Henry Alloway,

née Mary Louise Tuttle (1858-1929). In the 1914-15 edition of *Woman's Who's Who of America*, she is characterized as a "Collector of Americana," and she was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the National Society of New England Women, the Daughters of the Union, and the Washington Headquarters Association.

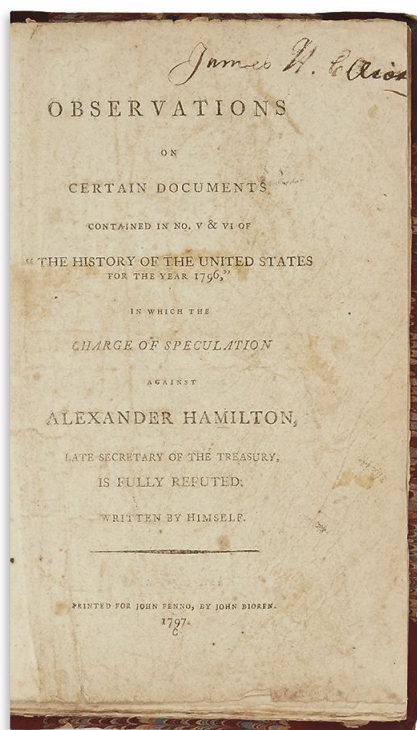
All told, this was Swann's best printed and manuscript Americana auction in four years, achieving \$1,065,842. This report necessarily highlights only a small fraction of its approximately 323 lots, 92% of which sold. The wide range and richness of the rest—from photos of women aviation pioneers to an archive relating to the Old Taylor and Old Overholt brands of whiskey—made me think we need to invent a new cliché to replace "as American as motherhood and apple pie." There is so much more to us than that.

For more information, phone Swann at (212) 254-4720 or see the website (www.swannalleries.com).

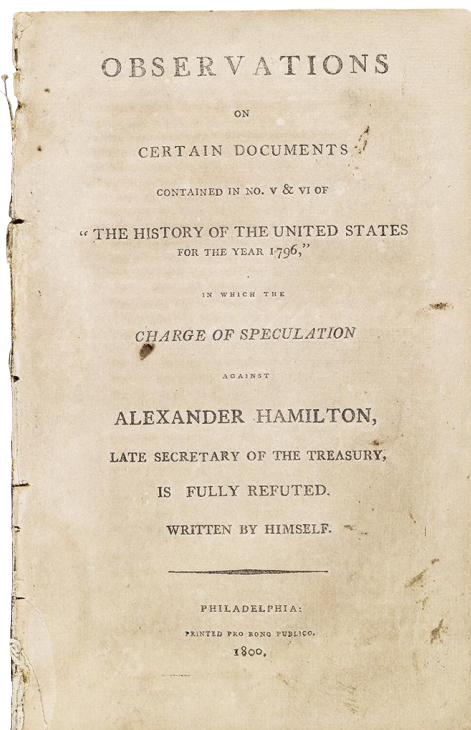
- AUCTION -



About once a year at auction a copy of *The Will of General George Washington* comes up for sale. It includes the famous provision that emancipated the first president's slaves—albeit after the death of his wife, Martha. This first edition, published in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1800, went to a dealer on the phone for \$11,250 (est. \$4000/6000).

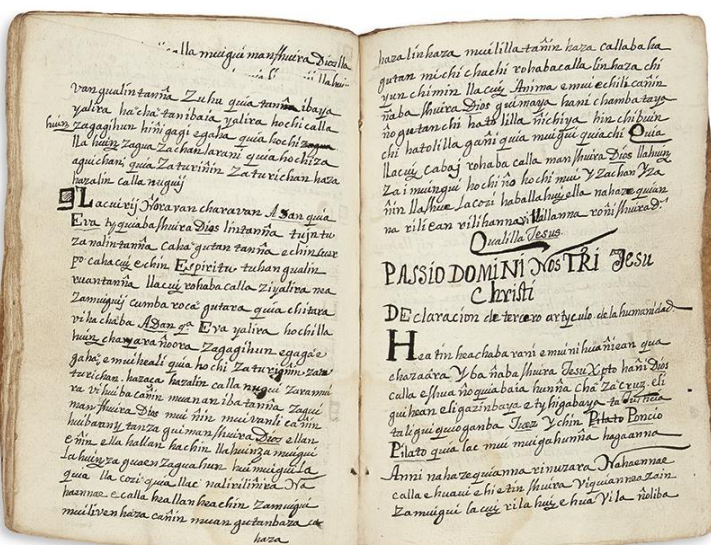
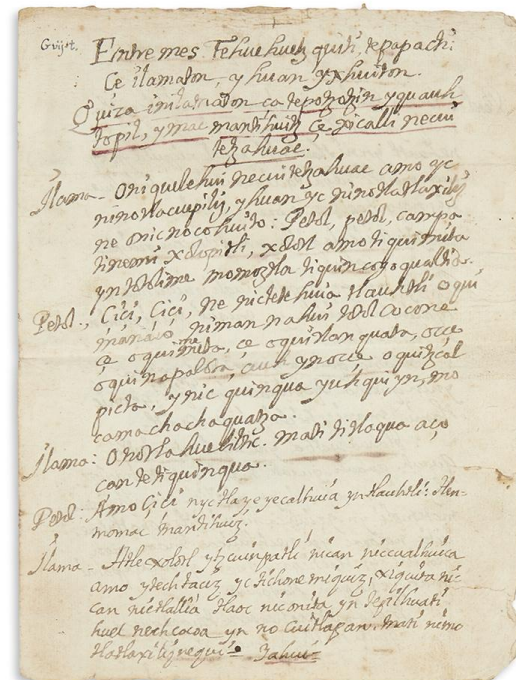
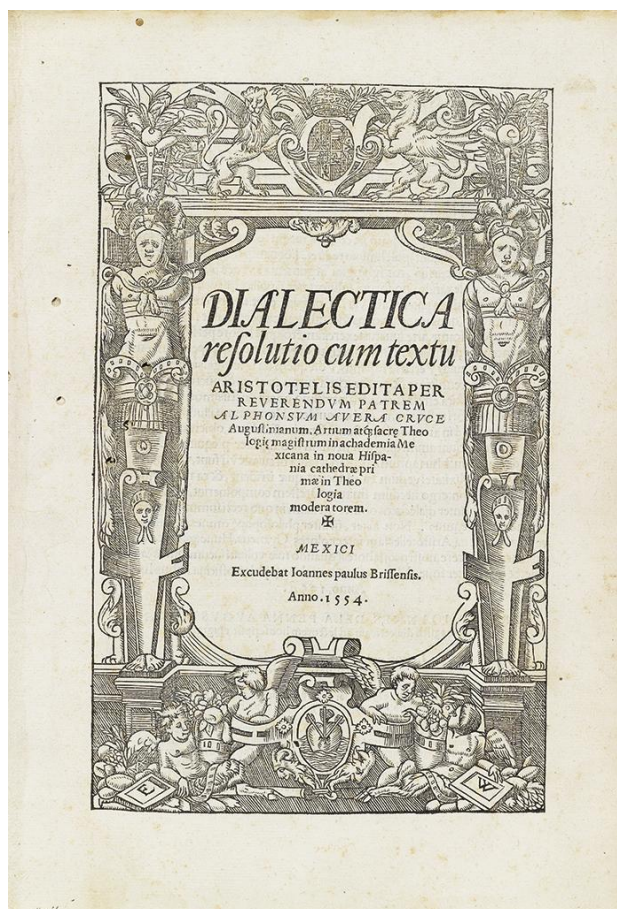


A first edition (left) of *Observations on Certain Documents . . . in which the Charge of Speculation against Alexander Hamilton . . . Is Fully Refuted, Written by Himself* went to collector bidding by phone for \$20,000 (est. \$12,000/18,000). Published in Philadelphia ("Printed for John Fenno, by John Bioren") in 1797, the pamphlet is Hamilton's declaration of his innocence of political corruption. That, however, is balanced by his admission of guilt about his celebrated extramarital affair with Maria Reynolds. (Dramatized in the musical *Hamilton*, that chapter in Hamilton's life is introduced by the song "Say No To This," available to hear on YouTube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sB8ITujc3w].) Hamilton's humiliated wife destroyed as many copies of *Observations* as she could find—that's one way a rarity is born—but a second edition was brought out in 1800 by Hamilton's enemies in an attempt to discredit him and his fellow Federalists. This copy of the later, unauthorized pamphlet (right) went to a bidder in the room for \$10,000 (est. \$10,000/15,000).



"Construction Train Near Bear River," an 8 1/4" x 12 1/4" albumen photograph by Andrew J. Russell, sold for \$15,000. It is one of the views from Russell's *The Great West Illustrated*, published circa 1868.

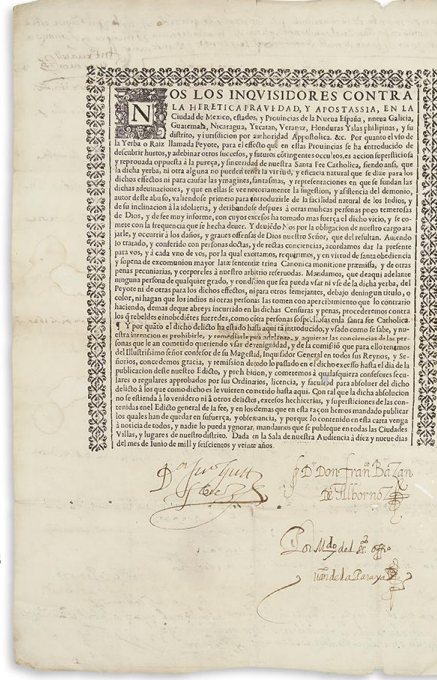
First editions of Alonso de la Veracruz's *Recognitio summularum* and *Dialectica resolutio cum textu Aristotelis* (shown) went to the trade for \$27,500 (est. \$40,000/60,000). Believed to be the first and second books printed in Roman type in the New World, they were published in Mexico in 1554 by Joannes Paulus Brissensis (Juan Pablos of Brescia), the New World's first printer. According to Swann, no copy of either work has appeared at auction since the American Art Association offered a set in 1926.

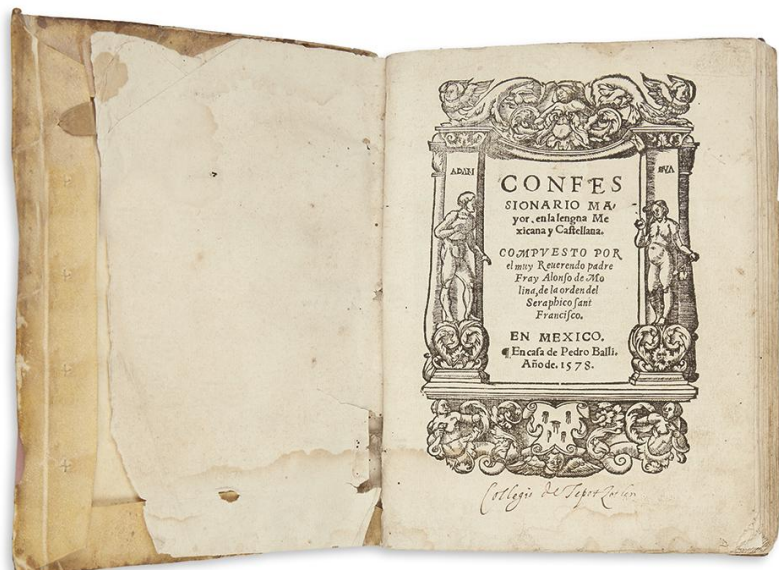


This catechism and census in 63 manuscript pages in Chinantec, the indigenous language still spoken in Oaxaca, sold to a dealer for \$30,000 (est. \$1000/1500). The date is uncertain, possibly the late 17th or early 18th century.

A pair of skits on six manuscript pages in Nahuatl, 1650-1750, sold to a dealer for \$11,875 (est. \$1000/1500). One is a comedic scene between a grandmother and her "idiotic, good-for-nothing glutton" of a grandson; the other has a religious theme.

This 17" x 12 1/4" Mexican Inquisition letterpress broadside, forbidding the use of the hallucinogen peyote, was a dealer purchase at \$25,000 (est. \$6000/9000). Signed by three inquisitors, it was published in Mexico on June 19, 1620, but it was intended to be read aloud in churches rather than distributed to every congregant. Swann found only one copy in OCLC, the Online Computer Library Center, and none at auction.





Alonso de Molina's *Confessionario Mayor, en la lengua Mexicana y Castellana*, bound with *Confessionario breve, en la lengua Mexicana y Castellana*, sold to a dealer in the room for \$22,500 (est. \$20,000/30,000). Published in Mexico by Pedro Balli in 1578 and 1577, respectively, these second editions of works first published in 1565 have parallel texts in Nahuatl and Spanish.



An archive relating to land sales in Tlaxcala, 1683-1823, sold to a dealer in the room for \$18,750 (est. \$1500/2500). The lot comprised three volumes of documents, most of them in Nahuatl, and a detached map (shown).



A 6" long cypress branch, cut by the Marquis de Lafayette at the Mount Vernon tomb of George Washington, was at some point made part of a watercolor on a thick, 15" x 11" (sight size) board and framed. A unique item to be sure, it sold for \$13,750 (est. \$5000/7500).



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