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Eastman Johnson, Duke of Wellington, and Stephen Decatur Bring Crowd to Sale

by Jeanne Schinto



Carl W. Stinson Inc., North Reading, Massachusetts

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Photos courtesy Carl W. Stinson

"There'll be a little bit of chaos, but it'll be fun—this is better than the movies, as far as I can see," Douglas W. Stinson said to open the January 17 sale of Carl W. Stinson Inc. at the Hillview Country Club in North Reading, Massachusetts. The room was packed. People lacking a place to sit lined up along the walls, and others were still trying to preview. The number of lots was enormous—approximately 1000—some of them cataloged, others not, by the auction house's design. That's because it was offering Internet bidding (via Live Auctioneers) for the first time.



The sale's top lot, a 51" x 34" oil on canvas double portrait by Eastman Johnson (1824-1906), sold to a phone bidder for \$74,750. The subjects are William Watson Caswell and John Caswell of Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts. From the estate of William Watson Caswell Jr. (1897-1982), former head of the First National Bank of Havana, it came to the sale via his daughter, Mrs. Sumner Pingree of Charleston, South Carolina. The painting is signed and dated 1878. Because Live Auctioneers requires estimates, the Stinsons posted them on cataloged items such as this one, which was estimated at \$20,000/30,000. Prices that don't show estimates in this report were uncataloged and therefore unestimated. The estimates, generally conservative, did not hint at levels that bidding needed to reach. Carl Stinson told the audience that the sale was "basically" unreserved.

Carl Stinson announced to the crowd that he had been against this step into the 21st century, but Doug told *M.A.D.* that he himself was long ago convinced of its advantages, having conducted sales for others, e.g., Lang's, which have used the Live Auctioneers platform successfully.

In the end, the more than nine-hour event did go smoothly for the most part. While phone and room bidders took the top lots, including a double portrait by Eastman Johnson that sold for \$74,750 (including buyer's premium), Internetters had their moments, underbidding several important lots and even winning a few in certain categories, such as American art pottery.

"Live Auctioneers was very helpful in maximizing value in some cases, but there were certainly some gremlins in the system," Doug Stinson said. He referred to the interruption that occurred shortly after he began to sell the cataloged, Internet-available portion of the sale, more than 500 of the better items.

"There was something down with their [Live Auctioneers] system, not ours," Stinson said by cell phone several days later as he drove back from a house call in Sherburne, Massachusetts. "So I have some advice for catalog auctioneers who use Internet bidding, especially if they are all-catalog. If they want to keep their audience engaged during the down times that can occur, it might not be a bad idea to have a hundred uncataloged items that could be thrown in there, as we did, when we had a break in service."

The Stinsons pride themselves on the fresh estate material they offer. Doug Stinson said he makes it a point, when he's at the podium, to mention provenance every time he can "to let people in on the discovery process that I experienced when finding these items."

One large group of items came from the estate of Frank G. Allen (1874-1950) and family of Boston and Marblehead Neck, Massachusetts. According to Internet sources, Allen had been chairman of Winslow Brothers & Smith, leather and wool manufacturers; a director of banks and insurance firms; a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1918-19; a member of the state senate, 1921-24; lieutenant governor, 1925-29; and finally governor, 1929-31. Lots ranged from two of his Patek Philippe pocket watches to such things as his shaving kit with a custom brass nameplate on the cover featuring his monogram and an image of the Massachusetts Statehouse dome.



A Patek Philippe pocket watch, monogrammed FGA for Frank G. Allen, a minute repeater in an 18k yellow gold case, sold via the Internet for \$15,340 (est. \$1000/2000). Another Patek pocket watch from the Allen estate (not shown), with the same monogram but a crazed dial and no repeating feature, fetched a first Internet bid of \$2950 (est. \$400/800).

One Allen family member—Stinson wasn't sure which—had collected over 300 items relating to soldier and statesman Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852), the 1st Duke of Wellington and Napoleon's vanquisher. They included documents, prints, paintings, sculpture, bronzes, ivories, ceramics, leather-bound books, and even multiple sets of glasses in the Wellington pattern, made by London's Thomas Webb & Co.

The glasses were in the pantry of the heirs' Beacon Hill house. Much of the rest was "literally in the basement, in a tiny little room the size of a closet," said Stinson. "It had obviously fallen out of favor with the next generation of Allens."

Bidders liked the Duke of Wellington tavern sign, and it brought \$1955. They also competed for an oil on board portrait of Wellington that fetched \$747.50 and a white marble Wellington bust by John Francis that made \$1610. Bidding was less spirited on such things as a Wellington snuffbox and Wellington memorial jugs. It was downright tepid on dozens of carefully framed engravings, including *Funeral Car of the Duke of Wellington*, *Wellington's Testimonial Clock Tower London Bridge Southwick*, *The Duke's Room at Walmer*, *Wellington on Horseback*, and many scenes of Waterloo.

From the estate of Alice Decatur Armsden and Douglas J. Armsden of Kittery Point, Maine, came another large cache of items, including furniture, decorative arts, and ephemera. (Much more from that same estate was consigned to James A. Julia's auction in Fairfield, Maine, on February 4 and 5. See report on p. 1-D.)

Some dealers spent hours going through the many uncataloged box lots from the Armsdens, looking for items relating to their famous relatives and associates, including their most celebrated ancestor, Commodore Stephen Decatur Jr. (1779-1820), the American naval officer noted for his heroism in the Barbary Wars and in the War of 1812. The prices they were willing to pay for the family's boxes of "paper" indicated that they hadn't found much there. One box full of textiles, by contrast, went at \$1150 to an absentee bidder who, Stinson told the crowd, had left a bid of \$2300. Two other boxes of Armsden textiles brought \$1035 and \$1380. A fourth lot, consisting of just two clothing accessory items once worn by Armsden antecedents—a mid-18th-century pair of lady's slippers and a pair of white kid gloves—fetched \$2530.

In previous sales the Stinsons have offered items from the estate of Ross and Katharine Hamlin Whittier. A few more Whittier items were in this sale, including a carved mantelpiece attributed to Samuel McIntire. Reportedly, it was removed from an 18th-century house in Beverly, Massachusetts, in the 1940's and installed in the Whittiers' later-period house on Hale Street, Beverly Farms (the same street on which John Updike [1932-2009] lived). It sold to a phone bidder for \$3450 and has now left New England. Doug Stinson said the buyer, a southerner, will install it in a house he's building below the Mason-Dixon Line.

Besides the Johnson painting, a few other special single-lot consignments from various sources rounded out the sale. One was a 19th-century Japanese album of hand-colored photographs. It sold in the salesroom for \$4255. Stinson said, "It was found by a family up in the attic underneath a bunch of junk. They said, 'Just take it and do something with it.' The point is, it's good to show up. You don't know what you're going to find."

Yes, there are more rocks to look under in this world, "no question about it, but sometimes they're very heavy rocks," said Stinson. As he'd told his audience on the day of the sale, remembering all the lifting that had led up to it, "I've personally handled everything in this room at least five times."

The next Stinson sale has not yet been scheduled. "When we run one, we have a good one—that's my mantra," said Stinson.

For more information, phone (781) 259-3200 or see the Web site (www.stinsonauctions.com).



An 18th-century cherry Chippendale tall clock with dial signed "Peregrine White, Woodstock" sold in the room for \$10,350 (est. \$10,000/15,000). A note inside the case, typed on the letterhead of John P. Grosvenor of Pomfret, Connecticut, reproduced the trade label of "David Goodell Cabinet and Chair Maker Pomfret," who, Grosvenor's note said, made the case. Grosvenor also recounted the clock's provenance. "This clock—c. 1790—belonged originally to Captain John Work of Ashford, Connecticut," he began, going on to describe how it was handed down in that family, then sold to a member of his family. Grosvenor said he had been given the clock as a wedding present in 1910. The note states that White (1747-1834), a clockmaker and silversmith based in Woodstock, Connecticut, was the namesake and descendant of the first white child born in New England. It is a widely published piece of information.

According to *American Clockmakers & Watchmakers by Sonya L. and Thomas J. Spittler and Chris H. Bailey: "This is not true." The coauthors did not elaborate in that volume, published in 2000, but Bailey, a genealogist and horologist who is a retired curator of the American Clock & Watch Museum in Bristol, Connecticut, as well as author of other books, wrote this explanation in an e-mail:*

"Though it is true that the clockmaker was related to Peregrine White—the first white child born after the Pilgrims landed in America (born December 19, 1620; lived at Marshfield, Massachusetts; and died at Marshfield on July 20, 1704, age 83)—the clockmaker was not descended from him. The clockmaker was descended from Peregrine White's older brother, Resolved White, son of William White (1591-1621) and Susannah (Fuller) White (circa 1593-1680). Resolved was born in Leiden, Holland in 1615."

Bailey said that the clockmaker's lineage runs thus: Resolved White (1615-1687) md. Judith Vassall; Josiah White (1654-1710) md. Remember Reed; Joseph White (c. 1685-c. 1750) md. Beatrice Holton; Joseph White, Jr. (1713-1794) md. Martha Sawyer; Peregrine White (1747-1834) md. Rebecca Bacon.

"Although the clockmaker may have been named after his great-great-grandfather's younger brother," Bailey's e-mail continued, "he was not descended from the first Peregrine White. It is also interesting to note the clockmaker was the first Peregrine White in his lineal line. Neither his great-great-grandfather (Resolved), great-grandfather (Josiah), nor grandfather (Joseph Sr.) named a child Peregrine."

The source of the misinformation about the clockmaker appears to be Penrose Hoopes's 1930 book, *Connecticut Clockmakers of the Eighteenth Century*. In Bailey's words: "Penrose Hoopes was usually a careful researcher, but in that book, he made this statement on page 122 when speaking of Peregrine White: 'He was a namesake of and a direct descendant of the first child born to the Pilgrims at Cape Cod Harbor in 1620.' Hoopes also incorrectly states in the same book that Peregrine White, the clockmaker, was born on August 13, 1747, at Woodstock, Connecticut, but in fact the clockmaker was born on that date at Sutton, Massachusetts. He died on August 23, 1834, at East Woodstock, Connecticut."

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