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June 25th, 2013

First Newspaper Printing of Declaration of Independence Sells for Record \$632,500

by Jeanne Schinto



A rare first newspaper printing of the Declaration of Independence sold on June 25 at Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, New York City, for \$632,500 (including buyer's premium). The price is the largest sum ever paid at auction for any single issue of a newspaper. Its buyer was David Rubenstein, cofounder of the Washington, D.C.-based Carlyle Group, a global alternative-asset management firm. One of the nation's most active philanthropists, Rubenstein does not consider himself a collector. He lends what he buys to institutions or other public entities. Historical documents are not the typical fare of Siegel, whose specialty is rare stamps and postal history. The sale of the July 6, 1776, issue of the Pennsylvania Evening Post was a collaboration between Siegel and Seth Kaller of White Plains, New York, a noted dealer, appraiser, and authenticator of American historical documents. So far, Kaller and Siegel have partnered for an auction on only one other occasion. On June 26, 2012, the two firms Proclamation signed by Abraham Lincoln for \$2,085,000. (See *M.A.D.*, August 2012, p. 8-D.) That time too, the buyer was



A copy of the first newspaper printing of the Declaration of Independence

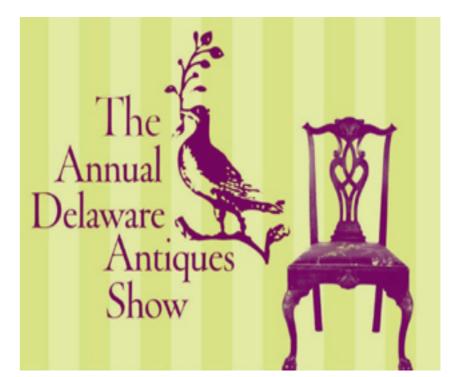


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sold for \$632,500 (est. \$500,000/750,000). This printing by Benjamin Towne on July 6, 1776, was preceded only by the official broadside published by John Dunlap on the day before. The newspaper is four 8" x 10¹/₂" pages. The Declaration takes up all of page one and part of page two. The rest is advertisements and spot news stories of the day. One reported that British troops were in Halifax; another said British vessels had landed a large body of troops to occupy Long Island. One of the ads offered a "two dollars reward" for a stray brown horse. Another was a want ad for a coachman "white or black." It was posted by Towne. A third announced a sale of "rye spirits," and sold a copy of the Emancipation a fourth, posted by Joseph Cartwright, said that he would not pay any debts incurred by his runaway wife. Photo courtesy Seth Kaller, Inc.

Rubenstein. He promptly lent the document to the Lincoln Cottage at the Soldiers' Home in Washington, D.C., where Lincoln drafted his proclamation in 1862. Kaller previously had worked with Rubenstein on the private acquisition of the Malcolm Forbes copy of the Emancipation Proclamation; that example is currently on view at the White House.

The *Pennsylvania Evening Post* was printed in Philadelphia by Benjamin Towne. Charging the sum of "only Two Coppers" per issue, Towne published "every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings." This fourpage Saturday paper, Vol. II, No. 228, was not only the first newspaper printing of the Declaration. It was also its second printing in any form, preceded only by that of Towne's fellow Philadelphian John Dunlap, who published the official Declaration of Independence broadside for the Continental Congress one day earlier.

Copies of Dunlap's single page were distributed to the states, community leaders, commanding officers of the Continental Army, and the like, who were expected to make public proclamations of it. Citizens who did not or could not attend those formal ceremonies would have read the announcement first in the newsprint cranked out by Towne (and others soon after). In Kaller's view, the Towne newspaper is, therefore, "in a way even more 'original'" than the original signed manuscript that is the prized treasure of the National Archives. "That was created for posterity," said Kaller, "rather than as a means of announcing America's independence to the world."

A July 6 issue of the *Post* was apparently read by John Adams, who passed along his copy to his wife. "I have this Moment folded up a Magazine, and an Evening Post, and sent it off, by an Express, who could not wait for me to write a single Line," he wrote to Abigail on July 7. Yet today, according to Kaller's census, there are only 19 known copies, either single issues or in bound volumes, this new record breaker among them. The vast majority of them are in institutions.

The last time this copy sold, it had been offered at Sotheby's on May 21, 1993, bringing \$123,500. It was acquired by the Gilder Lehrman collection, which is on deposit at the New-York Historical Society. Recently, the collection decided to sell it.

James Basker, president of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, responded to our query with a statement on the sale. "Our mission is to support kindergarten through twelfth-grade American history teachers and their students," he said. "We now serve a network of thirty-two hundred affiliate schools, more than a hundred-thousand teachers, and, through them, more than a million students in all fifty states. Our eighteenth- and nineteenth-century holdings are strong, but we've had many requests from teachers and our board of educational advisors for more modern material, especially from the twentieth century. We have other Declaration printings including the only known broadside from South Carolina and the first and best official facsimile printing of 1823. Thus, we were able to sell the newspaper printing of the Declaration to benefit our acquisition fund."

Those who consult the Sotheby's description will note that in 1993 this copy of the Post was sold in a bound volume—part of a run of the

newspaper. "The volume was disbound for conservation, and it seemed to me that the Declaration should be sold on its own, as originally issued," Kaller said.

Besides this one, Kaller has handled two other copies of this issue of the Post. Each of them had been in a bound volume of the newspaper. He had bought the first one at Christie's in London on March 15, 1995. It is now in the Albert H. Small Declaration of Independence Collection at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. He bought the second one at Sotheby's for \$722,500 on December 14, 2012, then sold it within days to a private collector.

The only other single copy on the auction market since 1906 was sold at Christie's on June 19, 2007, for the previous auction record price for a newspaper, \$360,000. It had once been in the collection of Thomas W. Streeter Sr. (1883-1965), an eminent bibliophile whose specialty was Americana. Streeter had bought it at Goodspeed's of Boston in 1951. Streeter's estate sold it at Sotheby Parke Bernet on April 19, 1967. When it went up at Christie's in 2007, the catalog identified its consignor only as "an Eastern Foundation." That copy is now in the private library of real estate developer Harlan Crow of Dallas, Texas.

For more information, contact Seth Kaller at (914) 289-1776. His list of all July 1776 printings of the Declaration can be found on his Web site (www.sethkaller.com).

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