

The Hawaiiana Market: Seafarer's Journal Brings \$52,900 at Swann; Elsewhere, Surfiana's Up

by Jeanne Schinto

A journal kept by a New England seafarer from 1810 to 1816, during a voyage in which he detailed the sandalwood trade in the South Pacific and took up residence in Hawaii, was sold by Swann Galleries on February 2 for \$52,900 (includes buyer's premium). It was bought at this astonishing price, nearly nine times the high estimate, by Jim and Antoinette Mussells of California, collectors of Hawaiiana who traveled to New York City to bid on the journal in person.

The homeport of its author, Manasseh Stow (1788-1844), was the Boston area. Except for what's written in his journal, little else is known about him by the family descendants who made the consignment through an agent, an auctioneer in upstate New York, said Swann's Americana expert Jeremy Markowitz. The lot came up during the Hawaiiana portion of the printed and manuscript Americana sale, even though a good portion of the journal was written in the Marquesa Islands and in Fiji. "The Hawaiian section was its selling point," Markowitz said. "The collectors of Hawaiian material are very strong."

They wait long periods between chances to vie for truly remarkable material. "Most of what comes to market are imprints—pamphlets and books printed in Hawaii during the missionary period," Markowitz said. "Swann has sold the first Hawaiian grammar, the first Hawaiian Bible, a line of one of the earliest English-language newspapers published in Hawaii." As for Hawaiian manuscript material, it typically consists of whaling logs with accounts of only brief stops on the islands.

Stow's residence, by contrast, was lengthy; he lived six months on Atooi (Kauai) and more than a year on Wao-hoo (Oahu). He lived there early for a Westerner as a result of the War of 1812, when numbers of American seamen were, like him, stranded in faraway places. Journals from 1820 to 1840, when the missionaries were active, are "much more common," said Markowitz. "Stow's provides a picture of Hawaii that we don't often see."

Stow's entries are frequent (he filled nearly 230 pages with legible script) and are vivid, said Markowitz, whose auction catalog entry included a lengthy synopsis that reads almost like a screenplay treatment. "His descriptions of the natives, their customs, their languages, are just fabulous," he said. "Stow clearly made an effort to learn about them and recounted what he learned in his journal."

One aspect of the journal, however, gave Markowitz pause: its condition. It had become completely disbound, and the pages are extremely brittle with numerous chips, tears, and losses around the edges of the text. "The condition almost made me question whether I should take it," he said. "It was that bad." He'd turn a page only to have it "literally snap in half." The other problem was that the pages were out of sequence. Just getting it back into chronological order was a bit of a feat.

Fragile being an understatement for this unique journal, previewers were strictly limited. In the end, fewer than half a dozen people handled it, Markowitz said. William Reese of William Reese Company, New Haven, Connecticut, was one. Mark Blackburn of Mauna Kea Galleries, Waimea, Hawaii, was not, although he did join in the early stages of the bidding, by phone. "Look, it's a rare thing," he told us a couple of weeks later. He was on the phone again, this time speaking from Palm Springs, California, on the eve of the Palm Springs Modernism show, February 17-19. "That's why it made that price. It's an aberration."



This is a page from the journal of Manasseh Stow. Besides the description of early 19th-century Hawaiian culture, the journal provides rare information about the sandalwood trade, a short-lived phenomenon that reached its peak in the 1820's. "That's one other reason why this journal is so fantastic," Jeremy Markowitz said. "It gives detailed descriptions not only of how they got the wood and where they got it, but also what they were selling it for."

Markowitz told us a little about why sandalwood as a commodity came and went so quickly. The price of furs had dipped in Asian markets, he said. American and British sea captains were looking for something else to sell. They settled on sandalwood, prized by the Chinese for its medicinal purposes. While it is not a tree native to China, it did grow plentifully in the South Pacific islands. The captains sold the wood for cash, lots of it, until the bubble burst, the result of eventual deforestation and growing discontent by the indigenous people, who were the forced labor.

We asked Markowitz if Stow had mentioned surfing in his journal. "He didn't. But at every island they go to they're met by literally hundreds of canoes. They swarm out to sell them provisions and also to sell them women. Stow talks about these women at length in many entries. At each island the crew members take wives. The women come on board and stay with them, and their husbands or fathers get paid for it. And when they go to the next island, they take new wives. And he often compares women from island to island."

It sounds publishable, we said. "I do think it is," said Markowitz. "And given its condition, it really can't be handled much more. The buyer and I spoke at length about how to digitize the entire book, do a transcription, and then, perhaps, publish it." Photo courtesy Swann Galleries.

Blackburn, whose interest in Hawaiiana began in the 1970's, has lived in Hawaii "off and on" for 20 years. He did buy a related lot of note at a small sale in West Hollywood, California, on February 15. That auction, called "Voyages and Travels, with an Emphasis on Captain Cook," was conducted by Dorothy Sloan - Rare Books Inc., Austin, Texas. Sloan said she usually conducts auctions in California to coincide with the annual California International Antiquarian Book Fair, held alternately in Los Angeles and San Francisco. She knows that many Californian institutions and collectors are particularly interested in Pacific history. Bidding wasn't limited to the live audience. eBay Live Auctions listed all lots, 55 of them related to Cook, who in 1778 became the first European to visit Hawaii, which he named the Sandwich Islands after



Two other Stow journals, approximately 310 pages in all, were sold in a single lot at the same Swann sale on February 2. This is a drawing from one of them. A dealer acting on behalf of a client was their winner at \$20,700 (est. \$3000/4000), Markowitz said. These manuscripts were not Hawaiiana. They were kept by Stow during three voyages he made between 1821 and 1828 to hunt seals off the coasts of Peru and Chile as well as various other South Pacific islands, Australia, New Zealand, and islands in the South Indian Ocean. The trips took him around Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. "Passage around South America could be disastrous," said Markowitz. "Many, many ships were wrecked trying to go around the Horn. That's why, on the second voyage, he took the long way." At one point, Stow found castaways and brought them on board. Markowitz described the journals' new owner as someone who has "a very good collection relating to shipwrecks and castaways and piracy." He described the condition of these journals as much less brittle than the Hawaiian one. Photo courtesy Swann Galleries.

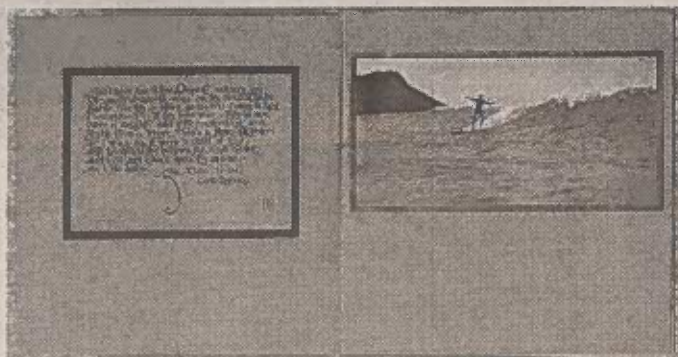
Britain's 4th Earl of Sandwich.

What Sloan characterized as "the finest item in the entire sale" was the Blackburn purchase, a reverse painting on glass depicting the death of Cook at the hands of angry Hawaiians in 1779. "I don't think anybody's totally sure of what the medium was," said Sloan, "but the work has a stunning clarity and rich color, suffused with light. The photo on the Web doesn't capture the beauty of the image with the light going through." The painting was cataloged as based on a print, fortuitously consigned to this sale, so previewers could make comparisons. The print, published by George Carter in partnership with leading London print and map sellers Robert Sayer and George Bennett, made \$7475 (est. \$5000/10,000). The painting fetched \$13,800 (est. \$10,000/20,000).

Sloan said she was pleased with the auction results. The tally available on the Internet showed 43 Cook lots sold, 38 of them within estimates, four above, and only one below. The top lot of the Cook material was a full set of his journals in 11 volumes in contemporary matching calf bindings with plates and maps unfolded and in separate atlases, which sold for \$40,250 (est. \$30,000/60,000).

Hawaiiana collectors use as their primary research tool the award-winning bibliographic work edited by David W. Forbes, *Hawaiian National Bibliography*, a multivolume record of all printed works touching on some aspect of the political, religious, cultural, or social history of the Hawaiian Islands.

Collectors in a smaller niche, surfing material, consult another bibliographic source, the first of its kind, *200 Years of Surfing Literature*, privately published



This is a double-page spread from A.R. Gurrey Jr.'s seminal *The Surf Riders of Hawaii*. The photo is by Gurrey; the text is from Lord Byron. There is more Gurrey material out there waiting to be found. Listed for sale on eBay a few years ago was what its eventual buyer, Allen Kukul of San Diego, termed "a holy grail type of item." It was a 12-page portfolio of newly discovered Gurrey surfing photos, circa 1915. They became Kukul's for a few hundred dollars. Photo courtesy Tim DeLaVega collection.



Here are a full view and a detail of *The Death of Captain James Cook*, a 16 7/8" x 25" reverse painting on glass, circa 1794 or after. It was sold at auction by Dorothy Sloan for \$13,800. Photos courtesy Dorothy Sloan - Rare Books.





This plate is from the second edition of *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* by Captain James Cook and James King, published in London in 1785. At this sale the three-volume set made \$6210 (est. \$6000/8000). It's a somewhat common book," said Markowitz. "That's about what it sells for. It's more desirable colored; this was colored." It's also more desirable when the plates are in a separate atlas volume, he said. "At some point, someone discarded this set's atlas, folded the plates, and inserted them in the text, which is often. Collectors are more interested in having the book as issued, so to speak." The buyer was a dealer in Hawaii, Markowitz said. Photo courtesy Swann Galleries.



Believed to be the first Western depiction of a surfer, this image was published in 1831 in the second edition of *Polynesian Researches* by William Ellis. The book has been reprinted several times, and many editions do not include it, said Tim DeLaVega, who put the retail value of a complete set of the four-volume edition in very fine condition at \$1800. Photo courtesy Tim DeLaVega collection.



Surfing historians put the date of this real-photo postcard image at circa 1895, because after that newly built hotels would be in the background. They also point out the surfer's traditional small-wave board, an *alaia*, used by the Hawaiians, and his *malo*, the traditional cloth bathing suit for men. The retail price for this image has been running \$300 to \$400, DeLaVega said. Photo courtesy Tim DeLaVega collection.



This is the cover of *Hawaii: Our New Possessions* by John R. Musick, published in New York and London in 1897, the year that Hawaii became a possession of the United States. The subtitle is *An account of travels and adventure, with sketches of the scenery, customs and manners, mythology and history of Hawaii to the present, and an appendix containing the Treaty of Annexation to the United States*. At 534 pages, illustrated with 56 full-color plates and over 100 half-tone reproductions, it retails in its first edition for \$150 to \$250, DeLaVega said. Photos courtesy Tim DeLaVega collection.

by Tim DeLaVega. It is based on previous work by Daved Marsh, with contributions from 21 other historians of surfing.

These baby boomers were surfers first, collectors second. They are not in the market for seafarers' journals. They seek material that fosters their goal of documenting surfing history and culture. In their world content is king, not condition. Their purchases are rarely in the four figures, much less five. What they have in common with bigger spenders is the kind of passion that collecting of any level is all about.

Joel T. Smith of Hermosa Beach, California, was one of the contributors to DeLaVega's bibliography. The 57-year-old Brooklyn-born film producer has surfed since

1962 and is considered to have the most significant collection of early (1778-1920) surfing literature in private hands. But complete volumes of Cook don't tempt him. What he wanted, and got for under \$100, was the one Cook volume from a three-volume set that contains both a description of surfing and a picture of somebody on a surfboard. That description is actually the first written one of surfing (*he'e nalu*), as witnessed by Cook at Kealahou Bay in 1779, and the drawing, by the third voyage's official artist, John Webber, is the first Western depiction of a person paddling on a surfboard.

That's paddling, mind you, lying down. To own the first published depiction of someone riding a wave, one must have *Polynesian Researches: During a Residence of Nearly Six Years in the South Sea Islands*, written by missionary William Ellis (1794-1872). The image serves as the frontispiece of the second edition of the four-volume set, published in London in 1831. (The first printing in London was a two-volume set in 1829.) Smith does have a complete Ellis in contemporary calf binding that he acquired for \$325.

Smith owns another broken set, Herman Melville's *Mardi and a Voyage Thither*. It was Melville's third book, published in two volumes in 1849. According to Smith, it is the first work of fiction to mention surfing. He paid

\$150 for half of a first-edition set.

The first book devoted solely to surfing has also been identified by surfing historians. Called *The Surf Riders of Hawaii*, it consists of eight pages self-published by A.R. Gurrey Jr. in Honolulu in 1911-14. Each copy is unique, illustrated with Gurrey's photographic prints, hand mounted one or two to a page. They are believed to be the world's first examples of surfing photography.

Smith has a copy of Gurrey. He paid \$2500 and has been offered \$4000 for it. It's one of only five copies known to him and his colleagues. That includes the copy lost in the international post somewhere between Spain and the mailbox of a private American collector.

The first full-length book about surfing is Tom Blake's *Hawaiian Surfboard*, published in 1935. Smith has two first editions of it. He paid \$45 and \$65 for them in the 1980's ("when nobody cared"). The book today is valued at \$2500 to \$3500, according to Internet bookseller Joe Tabler of San Diego (www.surfbooks.com).

One problem for would-be antiquarians who live in Hawaii is that the warm, moist climate is not conducive to preservation. Good ventilation helps. So does living on the dry side of one's island. Tim DeLaVega lives on the dry southwestern side of Kauai in Hanapepe. He also serves as board



The woman, wearing an early 20th-century wool bathing suit, is posed with a solid-wood plank surfboard in front of a painted studio background. "The man is a tourist, of course," said DeLaVega. "Waikiki Inn" is stenciled on his tank top, and "W.I." is carved into the wood of his board. Retail value is \$250 each, said DeLaVega. Photos courtesy Tim DeLaVega collection.



president of the Kauai Museum. "So I store some of my most valuable stuff there," said the 51-year-old commercial photographer who was born in Connecticut and moved to Hawaii in 1972. Besides surfing books, magazines, magazine articles, posters, cartoons, and artworks, DeLaVega's collection includes vintage glass negatives and slides, for which he has "yet to pay too much," he said. Rare photographic images of "the big names" of surfing—Duke Paoa Kahanamoku (1890-1968) being the biggest—can go for \$1000 in today's market, he said.

Jim and Antoinette Mussells, the California couple who bought the sandalwood journal at Swann, used to live in Hawaii. Antoinette was born there. Their interest in Hawaiian sprang from their family connections in the islands, Jim said, adding that while they return there often, they have found many great items for their collection, which consists mainly of books, paper, and photographs, all over the world. "We obtained twenty-five imprints of early missionary works in the Hawaiian language from a source who got them from Maine," he told us. "The books were in Maine for a hundred years; then they came to us. We were just in Los Angeles at the book show, where we saw a copy of the first Hawaiian constitution printed in Hawaiian, and it had come from Iowa. It had been in a library out there, and they finally deaccessioned it."

This summer *Antiques Roadshow* on PBS will make its first-ever stop in Honolulu. The date of the taping is set for August 26, and the program will air in 2007.

Barnes Riznik of Osterville, Massachusetts, the retired director of Hawaii's first historic home restorations, Grove Farm Homestead and Waioli Mission House on Kauai, said he would expect *Roadshow* guests to bring items from Asia, Europe, and the mainland, as well as



The cover of *200 Years of Surfing Literature: An Annotated Bibliography*, 104 pages, with short quotations from the actual texts. For a copy, send \$19.99 (postpaid) to Tim DeLaVega, PO Box 760, Hanapepe, HI 96716 or see the Web site (www.surflit.com).

Hawaii itself. He mentioned specifically Hawaiian quilts and koa furniture. "I can only imagine it will be as fascinating as any program they've ever done," Riznik said.

The surfing historians said not to expect to see many vintage surfboards. "Back in the old days, all the surfboards were made of wood," said Joel Smith. "They were stored lying on the ground under the house. The termites came and ate them. Somebody could have had this classic surfboard from three hundred years ago worth oodles of dollars, and some termites ate it up."

For more information about the Swann sale, call (212) 254-4710; Web site (www.swann.galleries.com). For more information about Dorothy Sloan's sale, call (512) 477-8442; Web site (www.dsloan.com).

