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# Naylor's Photographica Goes on the Block

by Jeanne Schinto



*Guernsey's, New York City*

by Jeanne Schinto

A portion of Thurman F. "Jack" Naylor's History of Photography—images, cameras, and related items initially offered for sale over the last couple of years as a single entity for \$20 million—was auctioned piecemeal over four days by Guernsey's, October 18-21. This part of the collection, approximately 2000 lots, including virtually all of Naylor's most valuable pieces, brought a gross that was about \$2 million, according to Guernsey's. Still to come are many more items, whose number Naylor's database puts at 20,000 to 25,000.

As expected by those who follow the photography market, very strong prices were achieved at this sale by large images of good subjects by our most revered early American daguerreotypists. A whole-plate daguerreotype of an unidentified family of four by Boston's Albert Sands Southworth (1811-1894) and Josiah Johnson Hawes (1808-1901) brought \$25,620 (including buyer's premium). A rare mammoth-plate daguerreotype—at 11" x 13", a little smaller than this page of *M.A.D.*—by another early Boston daguerreotypist and inventor, John Adams Whipple (1822-1891), sold to New York City dealer Daniel Wolf for \$51,850. Its subject was Boston merchant Stephen Tilton, his wife, Priscilla, and their 12 children, and it could be dated to about 1846.

An overseas phone bidder paid \$51,850 for a very rare photographic apparatus, called a Megaletoscopio. Patented by Venetian photographer and inventor Carlo Ponti in 1859, it is a type of megaletoscope, designed to produce an illusion of a color photograph many decades before color processing was invented. Made of ebonized teakwood covered with hundreds of inlaid ivory designs, Naylor's example came with its original similarly decorated table and 29 Ponti images.

"Naylor's megaletoscope was definitely the grandest of all megas," James V. Weber of Minnesota wrote in an e-mail. "I have located over eighty around the world, and none comes close," Weber, who maintains a Web site ([www.c-ponti-venezia.com](#)) and is a collector of all Carlo Ponti items, including alethoscopes, Pontioscopes, letters, photos, and catalogs, said that the price paid for Naylor's Megaletoscopio is a record, clearing the previous hurdle by a little over \$20,000.

Bidders also paid top prices for a London-made triple-lens magic lantern slide projector (\$33,550), an erotic image of a white-skinned woman and a dark-skinned man (\$35,380), and 47 glass plates by Edward S. Curtis made in 1926, 1928, and 1930 and reproduced in *The North American Indian* (\$1464 to \$19,520). Bringing a total of \$187,331, the Curtis images could be considered the top lot of the auction.

Dozens of Kodaks, Leicas, and other cameras were sold. Many on-line bidders with names such as "kodakcollector" and "pinholgr" bought them. Some of the cameras were designed for early street photography. Others were used to take motion pictures on safaris. One was cataloged as having made mug shots in the New Hampshire state prison system in the 1970's.

Besides the cameras, there were tripods, lenses, posing chairs, headrests, and bottles of Daguerreian-era chemicals, Stanhopes, books, ephemera, and images upon images. They ranged from a quarter-plate daguerreotype by an anonymous maker of an unnamed mill girl in a striped dress to a Philippe Halsman photo montage of Marilyn Monroe in the buff.

There were also a young women's baseball club and women in a bordello; Joe Louis knocking out Billy Conn in 1946; golfers at The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts, circa 1905; groups of firemen, circus performers, Harvard Medical School graduates; people who were famous, infamous, beautiful, ugly, young, old, disfigured, dead; and more.

The lot that was anticipated to be one of the sale's high points—and the only lot with a reserve—was Naylor's 116-item "espionage" collection, featured on the cover of the magazine *Smithsonian* 20 years ago. Described as a compilation that spanned the history of spying (from the American Civil War through our Cold War with the former USSR), the collection included an East German handbag spy camera, a buttonhole camera in the lapel of a Russian man's suit, a matchbox camera, a pen camera, a ring camera, and various other hidden or miniature cameras employed by both male and female agents. It also included such non-photographic KGB items as a telephone, a suicide cigarette, a flask, and some other items, photographic and otherwise, more suited to Sam Spade than either James Bond or his nemeses.

Bidding for the spy lot opened from the order book at \$300,000, but the only other bid was another absentee's raise to \$400,000. The reserve was unmet. In a conversation after the sale, Naylor said his starting price was \$1.3 million or \$1.4 million. "The material could never be put together again," the collector added. "So the question is, who has that kind of money? It will be sold eventually, there's no question about that."

What may have hurt the spy collection's chances this time around was its incomplete catalog description. Only a small sampling of the whole was depicted in 15 illustrations without captions. Interested bidders were asked to request from Guernsey's a detailed list, but the list offered at the preview was not nearly as specific as camera collectors prefer.

The catalog was widely and repeatedly criticized, especially by camera collectors, who by nature are as precise and exacting as the objects they collect. Aside from ordinary typos, which were rampant ("discription," "catalogue," "Poloroid"), there were so many other more serious errors that no fewer than eight people from the various photographica collecting specialties offered Guernsey's multiple pages of corrections, only part of which were typed up and disseminated.

Bidders and would-be bidders also complained about mislabeled items, about items listed in the catalog that weren't in the sale, and about items in the sale that weren't in the catalog.

Eaton Lothrop of Miller Place, New York, who has collected cameras for 47 years, spoke for many when he cited the further confusion caused by more mix-ups that came to light at the preview. For example, an original manufacturer's box, as advertised, had the wrong camera inside it, and the right camera had been left behind at Naylor's house in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. Asked if he thought the errors hurt sales, Lothrop said, "Yes, I do."

Others who know camera prices unhesitatingly agreed, but those who track image prices thought those didn't suffer in quite the same way. "Photography fiends, being who they are, overcame all of the obstacles and managed to pay hefty prices," one said.

Arlan Ettinger, founder and president of Guernsey's, cited the fact that even experts disagree on their opinions about objects.

In any event, the sale will be considered a landmark, talked about for many years to come, not so much because of the quality of the material but because of the Jack Naylor mystique and his stature in the photographica collecting community. In 1994 he sold a previous collection, mostly cameras, to the city of Yokohama, Japan, for a reported \$9 million. For 25 years he was a board member of the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. For the same length of time, he was a major force in the Photographic Historical Society of New England (PHSNE, pronounced "fizz knee"). Born in 1919 and still suave at 88, he has charmed virtually anyone who has ever met him and continues to do so, despite failing health. (For more biographical information about Naylor, see "Buyer with Spare \$20 Million Sought for the Complete History of Photography," *M.A.D.*, January 2007, p. 44-B.)

The auction took place in an elegant spot, the Americas Society's mansion on Park Avenue and 68th Street in Manhattan. It drew photographica devotees and dealers from all parts of the United States, especially the Northeast, including a contingent from PHSNE.

Matthew R. Isenberg of Hadlyme, Connecticut, cofounder and president of the Daguerreian Society and possessor of, arguably, the world's finest private 19th-century photography collection, was there for all four days of the auction and the previous day's preview. Leonard Walle of Novi, Michigan, a collector, dealer, and Daguerreian Society board member, was on hand for most of that time. Bryan and Page Ginnis of Antique Photographica, Valatie, New York, came for stereoviewers, optical toys, and other "photographic hardware."

On hand for their own specialties were Jim McKeown of Grantsburg, Wisconsin, author of *McKeown's Price Guide to Antique & Classic Cameras*; Larry Gottheim of Yonkers, New York, on-line photographica auctioneer for his company Be-Hold; Julian Wolff of Wantagh, New York, and his wife, Sylvia; Michael Lehr of Rockaway, New Jersey; David Chow of Providence, Rhode Island; and Greg French of Early Photography, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

Among the institutional representatives was Anthony Bannon, director of George Eastman House. Peter Coeln, executive director of WestLicht Photographica Auction in Vienna, Austria, the auction house that sold the world's oldest and most expensive camera in May 2007, was one of those who came from Europe. (See sidebar.)

Also there were bidders who came from right around the corner, notably "the Big Three," as one observer dubbed prominent New York City photographica dealers Daniel Wolf, Hans P. Kraus Jr., and Keith de Lellis.

When Naylor arrived at the auction on the second morning of the sale, his entry was applauded. As he prepared to leave on Saturday, a line of people queued up to speak to him, not only because he is a legend, but also because of his heroic effort to get to the sale. He was in a wheelchair.

The auction may not have offered many daguerreotypes like those collected by the late, legendary David Feigenbaum, whose cache of 70 full-plate Southworth & Hawes daguerreotypes, along with 42 lots of smaller half- and quarter-plate images, was sold by Sotheby's in New York City on April 27, 1999. Yet, in terms of quantity, it was the biggest sale of daguerreotypes that anyone could recall. Over 700 lots, some of them multiples, were featured.

At the preview Sylvia Wolff said she thought such an influx would "re-energize the market," which has been sluggish in the middle range. After the sale, Greg French said, "I think Sylvia got it right. A lot of us had our doubts about the collection being offered in a four-day auction in a soft market. We were worried about the market being flooded and prices being depressed. Well, I saw people from every spectrum of the photography field—modest collectors, high-end, and even blood-all wanting a piece of the Naylor collection. The bidding was lively, and the prices were strong."

Michael Lehr, more cautiously optimistic, said, "I hope that it brought fresh interest to collecting daguerreotypes. I was looking at the bidders on line and didn't recognize some of the names, but that doesn't mean they'll enter the market. It's hard to say." He felt it would be easier to make a judgment about a resurgence after the 2007 Daguerreian Society Symposium, which most auction participants planned to attend in November at the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

"They have daguerreotypes on the mart tables," said Lehr. "Will there be more interest? Less interest? Of course, the Hallmark collection is being shown there," he added, referring to the Hallmark Photographic Collection, acquired by the Nelson-Atkins in 2006. "So there's a lot of new interest already being generated about daguerreotypes by that."

As of this writing, it was undecided how the rest of the collection would be sold. Arlan Ettinger had announced last July that the remaining items would be sold on line. At the close of this auction, however, he said they would "possibly" be sold instead in "an elegant, handsomely presented sale over three or four or five days in an appropriate setting," most likely either in New York City or the Boston area. "Our idea would be for experts to work with us in each category, labeling and pricing items," he added, putting the date of the sale at some point in "late winter."

Jack Naylor said by phone from home, where many of the objects had once been displayed in his private museum, "There's way more to come. People who have been to see me after the auction have said, 'My God! What did you sell?' That's because so many displays are still so full. And much of the material that was stored is still stored, both here and off site, and some of those things are absolutely magical."

For more information, contact Guernsey's at (212) 794-2280; Web site ([www.guernseys.com](#)).

World's Oldest Camera, an Attic Find, Breaks Price Record

On May 26, 2007, WestLicht Photographica Auction in Vienna, Austria, sold the earliest commercially produced daguerrian camera for €576,600 (including buyer's premium) or approximately \$775,661. The winning bid was by an Internet bidder requesting anonymity, the auction house said. It is a record price paid for any camera at auction.

For most of photography's history, the oldest commercially produced cameras were thought to be those manufactured by Louis Daguerre's brother-in-law Alphonse Giroux, of which some ten survive, one of them at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. It was also known that ten days before the announcement of Daguerre's invention in August 1839, a sliding-box daguerreotype camera was advertised by a Parisian firm called Susse Frères. No examples were known, and for many years it was doubted that they had ever existed. Then this one was found in an attic in Germany by a university professor.

Jim McKeown of Grantsburg, Wisconsin, was at the Vienna auction when the camera was sold. We learned from him that on October 13, 2007, the camera's original manual was offered at an auction in Germany. "My guess is that the camera and the manual will soon be reunited," said McKeown. McKeown's price guide, the world's first, is now 33 years old and in its 12th edition [www.camera-net.com](#)]).

An Internet search showed that Auction Team Köln in Cologne, Germany handled the sale of the manual that was written by Daguerre and published by Susse Frères in that eventful year of 1839. The price was €9187.50 including buyer's premium) or approximately \$13,021. On the eBay Live Web site, the winning bidder was shown as "double-exposure" (eBay lot #270167088517).

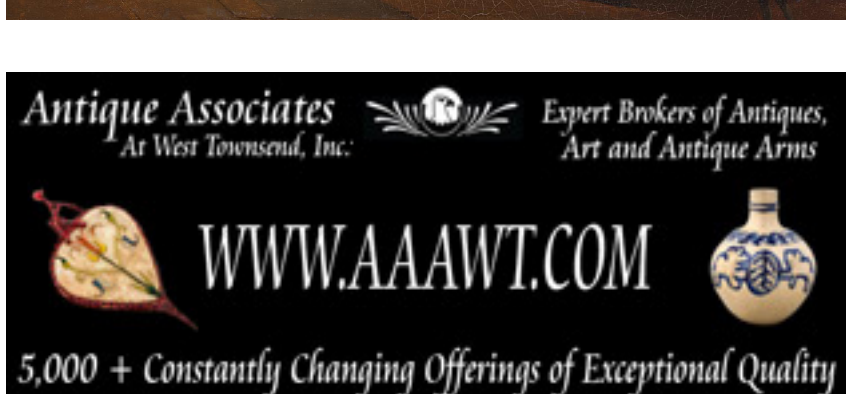
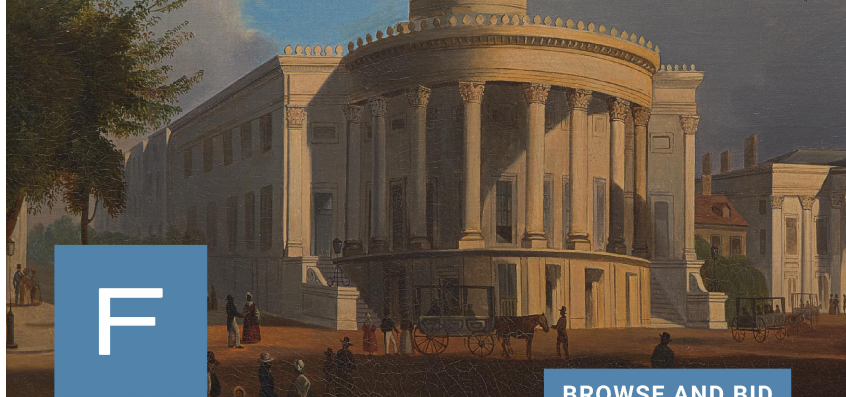
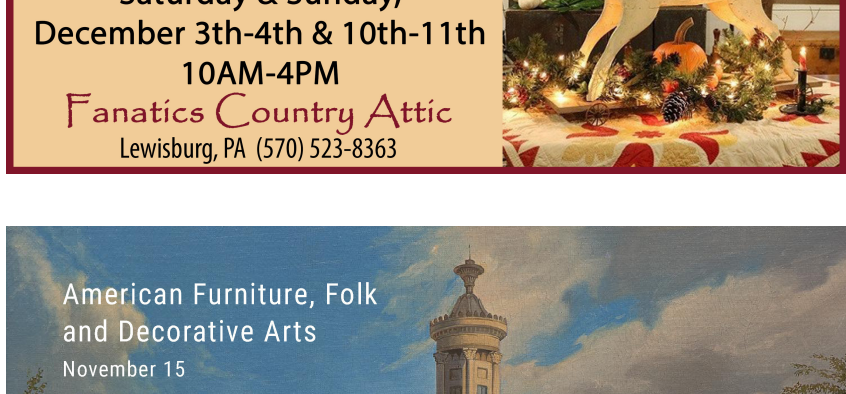
Martin Reinhart, of WestLicht Photographica Auction, confirmed by e-mail that the winner was Peter Coeln, the auction house's owner and executive director, bidding for the customer who bought the camera. For more information about the camera's sale, contact WestLicht [www.westlicht-auction.com](#)), and about the manual's sale, contact Auction Team Köln ([www.breker.com](#)). Guernsey's photo. Guernsey's, New York City, October 18-21, 2007.

Daguerreotype Sizes

From the Daguerreian Society Web site ([www.daguerre.org](#)) are approximate daguerreotype sizes, including the portion of image hidden under the mat but not including the case:

- whole plate: 6½" x 8½"
- half-plate: 4½" x 5½"
- quarter-plate: 3¼" x 4¼"
- sixth-plate (the most common size): 2¼" x 3¼"
- ninth-plate: 2" x 2½"
- sixteenth-plate: 1 3/8" x 1 5/8"

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