

Swann Galleries, New York City

Steam Locomotive Photography Leads Ephemera Sale

by Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Swann

Much to the surprise of everyone except rail fans (train buffs), an enormous trove of American steam locomotive history sold to a dealer for \$40,000 (including buyer's premium) at the maps and atlases, natural history and historical prints, and ephemera sale on December 5, 2013, at Swann Galleries in New York City.

The mammoth archive, estimated at \$1000/2000, included several thousand vintage photographs in various formats. Each showed engine after engine after engine. Hundreds of the black-and-white 4" x 6" prints were carefully captioned.

"The idea was to have as many different photos as possible."

The typewriting along the top and bottom borders of these images gave the railroad line, a number, and a date, e.g., "Chicago, Aurora & De Kalb, 4-4-0, Oct. 1905." These images had been put into a series of spiral notebooks. There were also scores of photographic slides for projector use, 35 mm films in canisters, and a library of railroad-themed books and magazines. There were several thousand more pages of meticulously detailed and organized typewritten notes. Together the lot weighed in at 1200 pounds, said department specialist Gary Garland, who would divulge only that the stacks of cardboard boxes lined up at the preview had come from "the Midwest."

Garland is an expert in maps and magic, not locomotives, he readily admitted. The questions he could answer were limited. After the sale I contacted Richard L. Stoving, president of the New York Central System Historical Society (www.nycshs.org) and author of eight books including, most recently, *New York Central Steam Power in New Jersey and Pennsylvania* (2013). A retired New York City education administrator, Stoving was more than helpful.

When I described the scope of the collection, he quickly recognized it as the work of an "engine picture kid." As he explained it, the term describes the several dozen amateur photographers who, from the 1920's through the 1950's, took untold numbers of photos of locomotive "roster shots." Also, a definition of the term can be found on a blog called "Grumpy's World" (www.blog.grumpysworld.com). (Warning: he is indeed grumpy.) Essentially, it is a portrait of a locomotive "in a very realistic and straightforward manner," said Grumpy, who suggests thinking of a roster shot as a bodybuilder's pose but for a steam engine.

Aware that steam rail technology would not be around forever, the so-called engine picture kids appointed themselves to be its documentarians. The "kids" were actually young men who grew older with the era. It was a collegial group. "There were clubs back then," said Stoving. Members traded photos and negatives back and forth. As a result, images in any one collection could have been taken by several different people. "The idea was to have as many different photos as possible," Stoving said, adding that the number of photos in the collection at Swann is not particularly unusual.

Some of those photos were obviously taken as the trains approached or steamed past the person with the camera. Much more often, engine picture kids went into railroad yards to get their images. Stoving told me that on these excursions they "always dressed well,

like gentlemen, even into the 1940's." It "gave them more credibility." The shot they preferred was of a locomotive with its driving rods down at their lowest position. That's because "rods down" was considered to be the most aesthetically pleasing position. "If a [railroad yard] hostler happened to be around, they'd ask him to move the engine forward or back a little to get that shot, and they were often obliged," Stoving said.

One of the best-known engine picture kids, Edward L. May (1918-1998), gave his collection to Stoving several years before his death. It included approximately 10,000 negatives. Since receiving that gift, Stoving has been making prints in his darkroom and assembling them for his books, which are available from The Railroad Press (www.trpmagazine.com). The negatives in the collection that sold at Swann, if there were any, would have been the most valuable part of the lot, Stoving told me. Garland didn't recall any, and I didn't see any either, but the slides could be used for duplicating purposes.

"The value of individual prints has come way down in the last five years or so because of the Internet," said Stoving. He likened the Web to "the Wild West," with prints being scanned and made available by people without any regard for copyright.

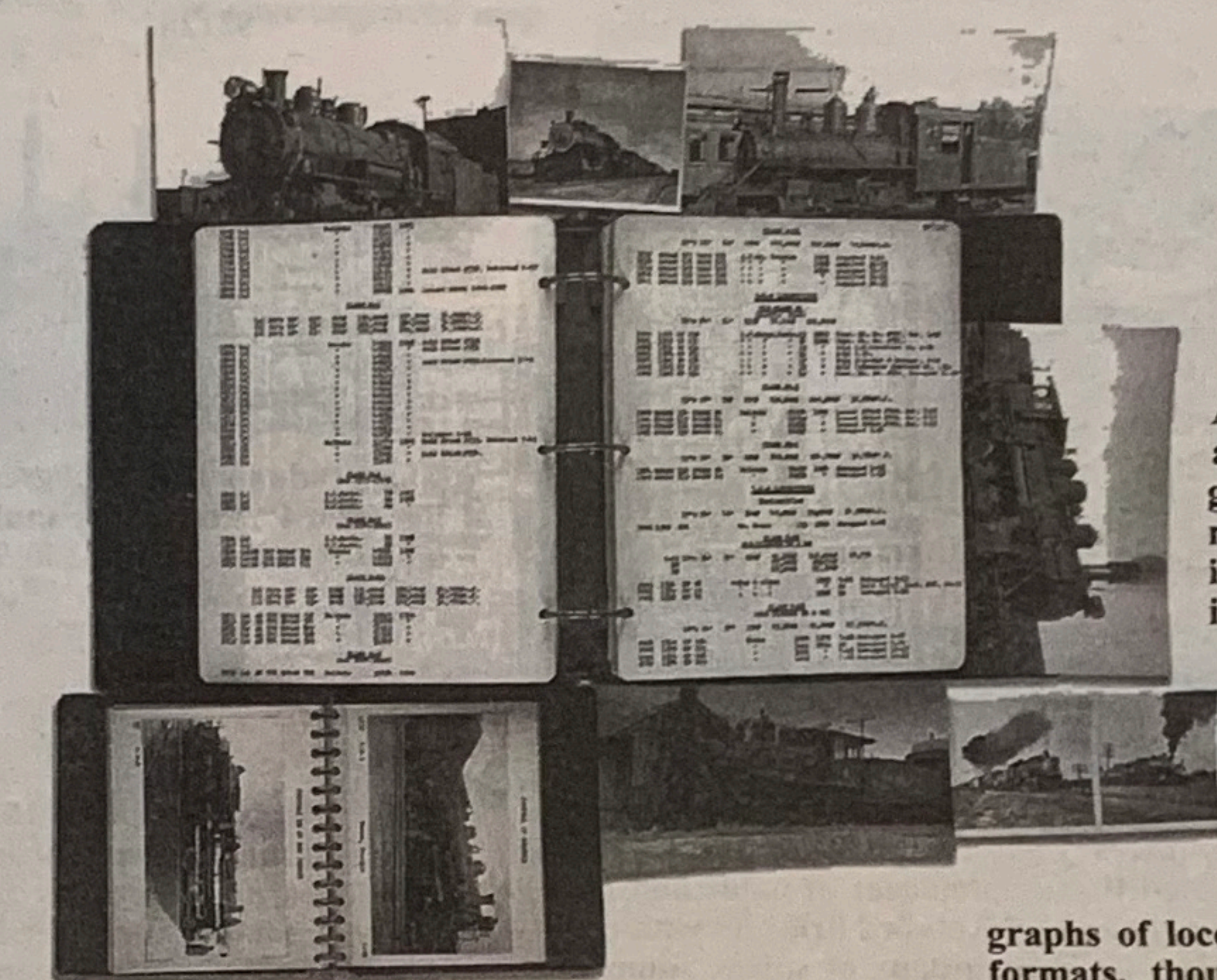
Besides May, Stoving named several other well-known engine picture kids: Joseph Lavelle, Harold Goldsmith, Robert Kern, William Curtis, Robert Collins, and Harold K. Vollrath. According to Internet sources, the Vollrath collection is currently being dispersed. In those cardboard boxes at Swann I found an envelope with the name of yet another, James Bowie of St. Louis, Missouri.

The rest of the sale went as expected, with early maps of American interest in fine condition inspiring the heaviest competition. For example, a second state of Theodore De Bry's map of Virginia achieved \$13,750 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Published in Frankfurt in 1590, the double-page engraving was the 16th-century's most accurate map of any part of North America. The catalog called this a "lovely copy" of *Americae pars, Nunc Virginia dicta* (the part of America now known as Virginia).

An early 19th-century map of New England by William Norman sold to a dealer for \$37,500. The folding five-sheet engraving is a later variant of Norman's classic and rare *Chart from New York to Timber Island, including Nantucket Shoals*. While the price was well below its \$50,000/75,000 estimate, it's understandable, since there were no comparables to go by. Swann found no records of any other copies having ever come to auction, and by default this is the new auction price record for the rarity.

Swann set another record when *A Plan of Boston, and its Environs, shewing the true Situation of His Majesty's Army* sold to a collector for \$13,750 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Published in London on March 12, 1776, the engraved and hand-colored folding map shows the British troops that were deployed in the city during the Battle of Bunker Hill, which had taken place on June 17, 1775. The catalog noted that the map had "fairly extensive repairs along most of its folds" as well as other condition problems.

No doubt unique, an American folk art painting of a map of Palestine by 19th-century artist J.N. Eaton sold to a collector for \$7500 (est. \$7000/10,000). Its cartouche dates it to July 11, 1835. It also names the place of creation as



A gargantuan archive of photographs and related material documenting the era of American steam locomotives was the top lot of the sale, selling to a dealer for \$40,000. The lot included several thousand vintage photographs of locomotives in various formats, thousands of pages of meticulously detailed and organized typed notes, slides, films, magazines, and books.



One of the loose, unidentified photos in the steam locomotive lot. Schinto photo.



One of the photos in the spiral notebooks assembled by the unnamed collector. Rail fan and author Richard "Rich" Stoving informs me that the number "4-4-0" refers to this engine's wheel configuration. In the case of this locomotive, it has four small pilot wheels in front, four large driving wheels, and no wheels behind the drivers, hence 4-4-0. Schinto photo.

"Greene," i.e., Greene County, New York. Although there isn't a great deal known about the artist, Swann was able to learn that the painting's owner, Ludwig Rosenberger (1904-1987), was "an ardent Zionist" who left Germany in 1924, lived in Palestine for about four years, and then moved to the United States. Possibly the picture had been done on commission. Garland said Rosenberger's widow could say only that

the painting had belonged to her husband before their 1970 marriage.

New York maps also caught bidders' attention. Spielmann & Brush's *Certified Copies of Original Maps of Property in New York City* sold to a dealer for \$5000 (est. \$3000/4000). The volume of 93 double-page colored map sheets was published in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1881. *Sidney's Map of Twelve Miles around New-York* by J.S. Sidney also did well, bringing \$4000 (est. \$500/750). The hand-colored folding engraving is dated 1851.

In the print bins and unframed was a striking color lithograph advertising poster for Lichtenstein Bros. & Co., cigar manufacturers of New York. Estimated at \$500/750, it sold to a collector for \$4750. Its centerpiece is an image of the company's factory down in the Bowery. The four surrounding vignettes show three men and one woman smoking the brothers' tobacco products. According to Garland, this poster's price was driven by a trend. In a phrase, "Tobacco is hot." The poster was darkened and somewhat chipped at the edges, but restoration would be "very easy," he said.

The sale as a whole achieved \$489,498 (near the top of its aggregate estimate) with a sell-through rate of 87% on the 440 lots offered. Asked for a comment, Garland said, "Another successful sale at Swann." It was his last. He has retired, and Alex Clausen has taken his place.

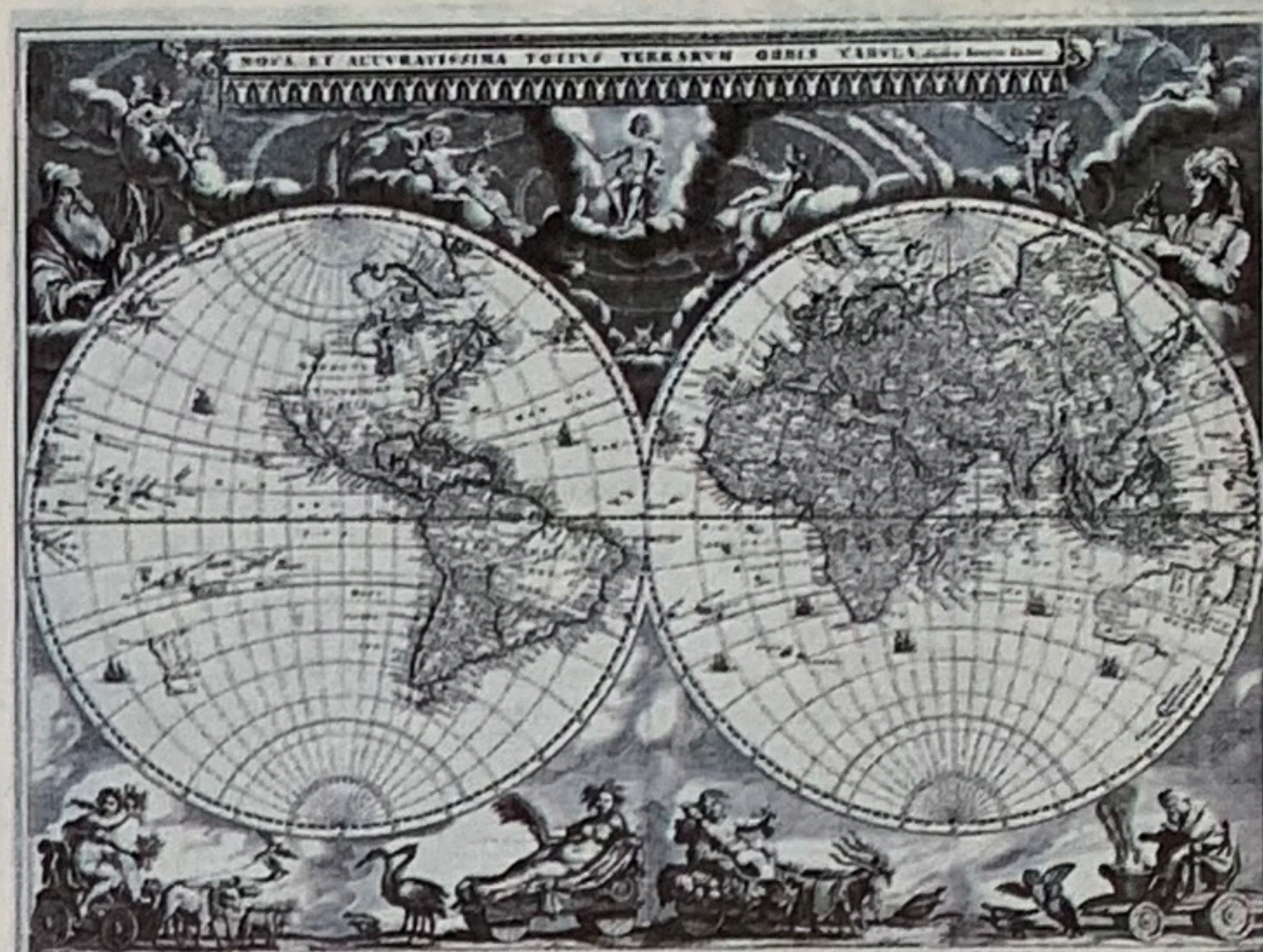
For more information, phone (212) 254-4710 or see the Web site (www.swannalleries.com).



A Plan of Boston, and its Environs. shewing the true Situation of His Majesty's Army sold for \$13,750 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Published in London on March 12, 1776, the engraved and hand-colored folding map is approximately 18" x 25½".



A second state of Theodore De Bry's *Americae pars, Nunc Virginia dicta, primum ab Anglis inuenta Sumtibus Dn. Walteri Raleigh* achieved \$13,750 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Published in Frankfurt in 1590, the double-page engraved map of Virginia is approximately 12" x 16¼".



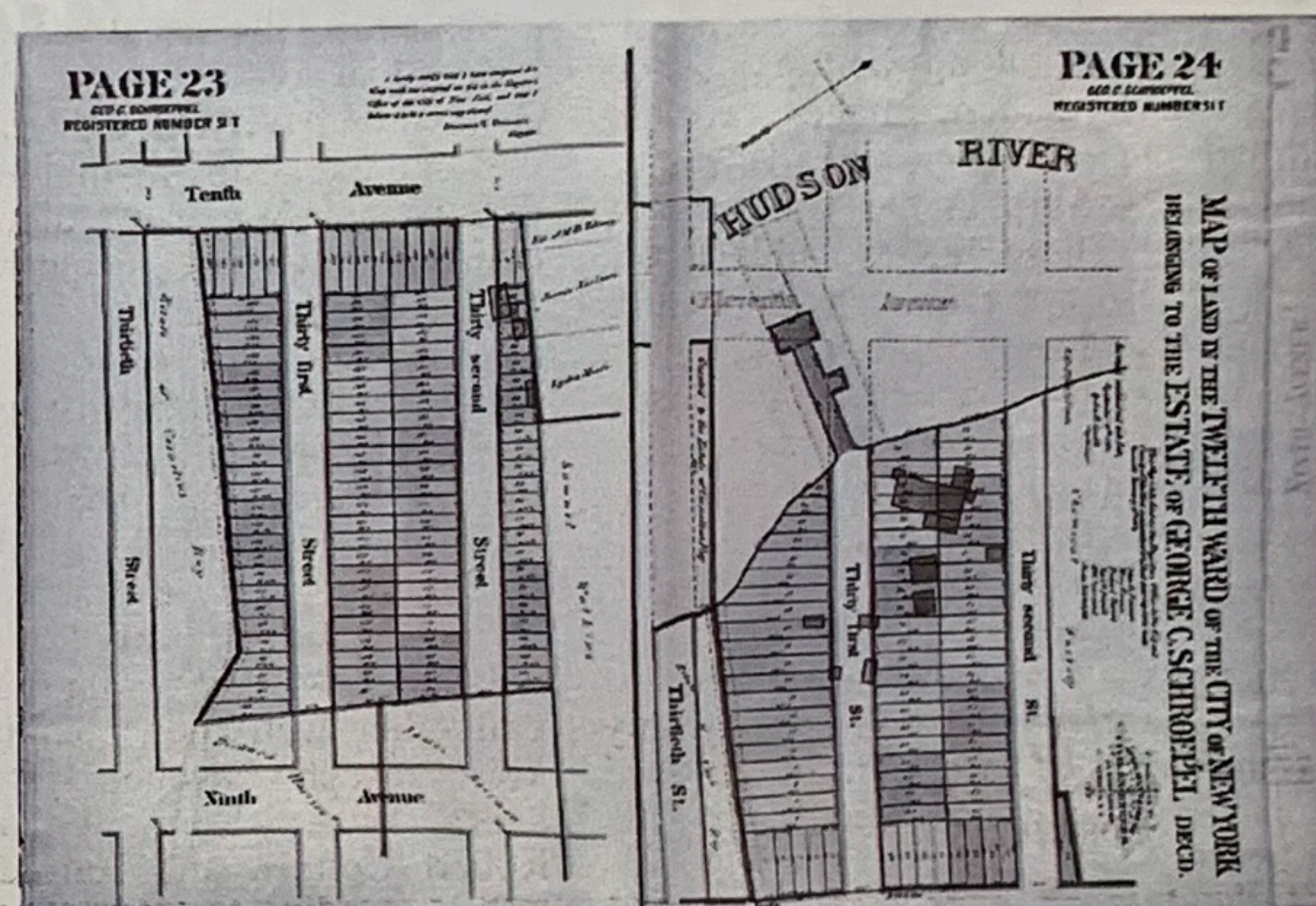
Joan Blaeu's very beautiful *Nova et Accuratissima Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula* went to a collector for \$8750 (est. \$5000/7500). The approximately 16 1/3" x 21 2/3" double-page, engraved double-hemispheric world map was published in Amsterdam in 1662. California as an island is one of its features. The top border portrays celestial elements; the bottom is devoted to the four divisions of the year (spring, summer, autumn, winter) imagined as a series of mythological people being pulled in wheeled carts by seasonally appropriate animals and birds.



This 28½" x 24¼" cloth map of the nation when it was just 26 states sold for \$2750 (est. \$2000/3000). It was engraved by G.W. Boynton and printed by Joseph W. Tuttle of Boston on sepia-colored linen in 1841. Swann said it is an "exceedingly scarce map known only in a few copies."



This 28" x 21¼" color lithograph advertising poster for Lichtenstein Bros. & Co., cigar manufacturers of New York, sold for \$4750 (est. \$500/750).



Spielmann and Brush's *Certified Copies of Original Maps of Property in New York City*, published in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1881, sold for \$5000 (est. \$3000/4000). The 93 double-page colored map sheets are approximately 25¼" x 35 7/8" each.

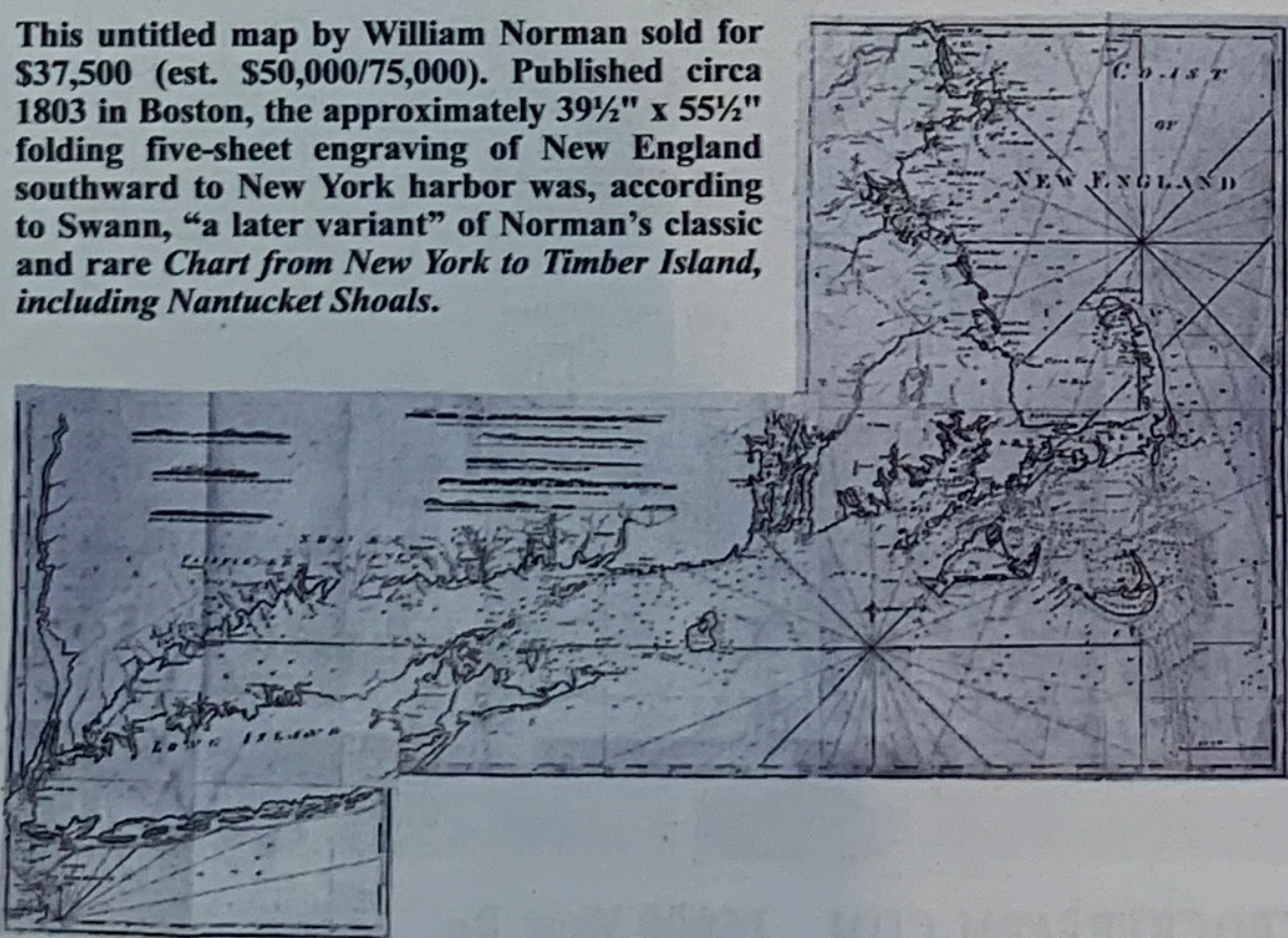


Two albums of 58 Japanese studies of birds mainly, along with some animals, sold to a dealer for \$6500 (est. \$800/1200). The artist, who worked in pen and ink or pen and ink with water-color, is anonymous. The date is probably the first quarter of the 20th century, based on two leaves that were dated 1927. An inscription notes that the works were executed at the Tokyo Museum.



This American folk art painting of a map of Palestine by 19th-century artist J.N. Eaton sold for \$7500 (est. \$7000/10,000). Including the frame, which is an integral part of the artwork, it is 28½" x 23¼".

This untitled map by William Norman sold for \$37,500 (est. \$50,000/75,000). Published circa 1803 in Boston, the approximately 39½" x 55½" folding five-sheet engraving of New England southward to New York harbor was, according to Swann, "a later variant" of Norman's classic and rare *Chart from New York to Timber Island, including Nantucket Shoals*.



A lot of 11 Japanese pen and ink and color studies of whales and whaling activities brought \$4608 (est. \$4000/6000). Perhaps studies for *Umi no Satchi*, a food phrase meaning "Sea-food Treasures," they were unsigned.

