

Stolen Hamilton Letter Resurfaces

On February 27, 1950, Francis E. Kelly, the attorney general of Massachusetts, sent a four-page letter to dealers of rare books and documents, informing them that the attorney general's office was investigating the loss or theft of "irreplaceable" historical documents taken from the Massachusetts Archives. The letter listed missing documents from Benjamin Franklin, Benedict Arnold, George Washington, and more, and asked the dealers to keep an eye out for purloined pages.

The thefts from the archives took place between 1937 and 1945 by a "former employee" of the archives, court papers state.

In March 1950, the *Boston Globe* reported the arrest of Harold E. Perry, 45, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in connection with the document thefts. Perry gave state police "a full, oral confession," according to the *Globe*. Perry allegedly told authorities he knew he would be discovered eventually and took the documents more as a collector than "a seeker of financial gain."

(Perry eventually pleaded guilty but not to the archives theft. He admitted stealing Jonathan Swift's *Cadenus and Vanessa* from Harvard's Houghton Library. He was given a suspended one-year sentence, under the condition that he help find other documents he had stolen.)

Not listed as missing in the attorney general's 1950 letter was a July 21, 1780, letter from Alexander Hamilton to the Marquis de Lafayette. Almost 70 years later, the Hamilton letter turned up, consigned in November 2018 to The Potomack Company Auctions and Appraisals in Alexandria, Virginia. The letter would have been estimated at \$25,000/35,000.

"A South Carolina family consigned a nice collection of documents that had been collected by their grandfather. Our researchers and catalogers were cataloging them when they found the Hamilton document had been stolen from the Massachusetts Archives," said Elizabeth Haynie Wainstein, owner and CEO of The Potomack Company.

Wainstein called the archives to confirm the identification, which was done quickly. A stain on the document also appeared on the archive's microfiche copy of the letter.

"The family had no idea" the document was stolen, said Wainstein. "They were agreeable, and we all worked with the FBI to have the right outcome." The family believes the grandfather acquired the letter from Elmer Heise, a documents and book dealer in Syracuse, New York, in the 1940s.

On May 15 the United States of America commenced a forfeiture action to recover the Hamilton letter.



Photo courtesy The Potomack Company.

This is not the first time The Potomack Company has helped stolen goods find their way back to their owners. A pair of historic urns from Arlington National Cemetery, a long-lost Renoir, and an Ivan the Terrible painting looted during World War II had all been flagged as stolen. "The urns are back at Arlington National Cemetery, the Renoir is once again at the Baltimore Museum, and the Ivan the Terrible painting will be repatriated to a museum in the Ukraine," a press release from the firm stated.

New York Attorney General Acts in National Book Auctions Case

by Matt Butler

Portions of this article were originally published in the *Ithaca Times*.

New York Attorney General Letitia James has officially taken action against National Book Auctions, the disgraced consignment and auction business formerly stationed in Freeville, New York.

In special proceedings filed on May 15 in Tompkins County Court, the attorney general's office laid out a set of restrictions on Bid Club, Inc., which operated National Book Auctions, Worth Auctions, and JLF Holdings. David Hall, the owner and operator of all the businesses, was arrested in November 2018 on one charge of grand larceny amid millions of dollars of complaints, though it's possible the list of charges will grow now that the attorney general's office has conducted its investigation.

On May 29, the attorney general's office announced that a consent order and a judgment had been obtained. The judgment requires Hall and his businesses to pay \$1,041,542.74 for consumer restitution and \$52,000 in civil penalties and costs. The judgment also requires Hall to hire an independent trustee to handle all money from future auctions to ensure that proceeds go to consigning consumers and to victims who were cheated out of their funds.

The New York attorney general's office and the Tompkins County district attorney had both declined

to specify the number of victims, but this most recent action does just that: according to the proceeding, the attorney general's office has found at least 115 consumer victims so far. There's a chance more theft charges will emerge, as the office is opening up an additional reporting period for more victims to come forward and be added to the restitution list. In the order, the attorney general's office calls National Book Auctions' conduct "deceptive, fraudulent or illegal."

"Respondents are permanently enjoined from receiving, administering or any way controlling the proceeds of any sales of property owned by others, including auction sales, until such time that all restitution, civil penalties and costs awarded herein have been paid in full," the injunction order said. "When all restitution, civil penalties and costs awarded herein have been paid in full, respondents shall be permanently enjoined from receiving, administering or any way controlling the proceeds of any sales of property owned by others, including auction sales, until they shall obtain and continuously maintain a \$500,000 performance bond that is filed with the Attorney General by a surety or bonding company...guaranteeing that respondents will comply with this order and judgment, the proceeds of the bond to be applied to restitution to consumers injured by the deceptive, fraudulent or illegal conduct of the respondents and to ensure payment of penalties, allowances and cash."

National Book Auctions will also have to engage

with a trustee that will control its accounts and report to the attorney general's office. Thirty percent of all sale proceeds to National Book Auctions will go directly toward restitution, and 80% of any property or items actually owned by National Book Auctions that are sold off will be dedicated to restitution. People who have not yet reported losses to the attorney general's Binghamton regional office have until August 18 to file a complaint. Claims will be vetted and calculated by the attorney general's office. To file a complaint, call (607) 251-2770.

At the time of Hall's arrest, several victims had come forward to tell their stories of losing money to Hall, usually through similar means: they would bring items to him so that he could auction them off through either National Book Auctions or Worth Auctions, taking an agreed-upon cut of the profit (usually between 5% and 35%, according to the attorney general's suit). But when the items would sell, the original owners would have a difficult time collecting their money from Hall, waiting months or even years to receive their compensation, if they received it at all. Those who came forward had expressed anger at what they felt was a lack of transparency regarding the investigation into Hall's business dealings.

The two highest amounts of reported thefts appear to be from two men who lost over \$227,000 and \$166,000 each. Other notable victims include the Putnam Museum and Science Center, Davenport, Iowa, and the local friends of the library organization.

Antiques and Artisans in the Church Yard under New Management

Antiques and Artisans in the Church Yard is now under the management of Debbie Turi of D. Turi Antique Shows. The 27th annual show will feature country antiques, folk art, vintage antiques, jewelry, and fine art and prints. Among the approximately 70 dealers will be Merle Koblenz of Koblenz & Co. Antique & Estate Jewelry, Linda Borchers' Victorian to Vintage, Bleecker Street Antiques, Maile Allen, Arline and Bob Kimerling, Kathy Brown, Francis Crespo, Jamie's Antiques, and Lara Joyce Antiques.

The show will be held on the grounds of Stevens Memorial United Methodist Church, 8 Shady Lane, South Salem, New York, on July 4 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is \$9. An all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast, prepared by the church, will be offered from 9 to 11 a.m. for \$6 (\$4 for children).

For more information, contact Debbie Turi at <debbieturi@gmail.com> or (973) 464-9793 or visit the website (www.dturiantiqueshow.com).

146 Maine Antique Digest, July 2019

Record for Paul Evans

A Paul Evans Sculpture Front sideboard, 100½" long, established a new world record auction price for the designer when it sold for \$536,000 (includes buyer's premium) at Sotheby's on May 23. The estimate was \$120,000/180,000. Made of lacquered and gilt steel and brass with a painted wood base and a slate top, the sideboard is a quintessential example of Evans's designs, which incorporate sculpted metal in his idiosyncratic style.

Evans's Sculpture Front sideboards have been selling for more than \$200,000 since December 2013, when Sotheby's sold a vertical Sculpture Front cabinet for \$269,000. Rago Arts & Auction Center sold a horizontal steel front cabinet in June 2014 for \$219,750, then a record for a horizontal cabinet, and a Wavy Front horizontal cabinet in June 2015 for \$286,000.

In 2016 Richard Wright's Chicago auction house Wright got \$293,000 for an Argente cabinet made in 1970 of welded and patinated aluminum, lacquered wood, welded steel, and leather, with a slate top, 96.2" wide, topping Wright's previous high price of \$233,000 for a horizontal Sculpture Front cabinet of gilt and enameled steel and painted wood with a slate top, 98½" wide, that sold in November 2015.

Why did the price of an Evans horizontal cabinet



Paul Evans Sculpture Front sideboard, lacquered and gilt steel, brass, and slate, painted wood base, 33" x 100½" x 25½", circa 1967, produced by Paul Evans Studio, New Hope, Pennsylvania, sold at Sotheby's for \$536,000 (est. \$120,000/180,000), establishing a new record auction price for Evans furniture. It has had four previous owners.

double in this market when vertical Evans cabinets have brought more privately? Obviously two people wanted it, and word on the street is that there are bidders from Central Europe as well as the U.S. bidding for Evans and Nakashima furniture, making an international market for works by these New Hope, Pennsylvania, craftsmen in these days when so much business is done on the Internet.