

# Hammered Down: White's Auctions

## **Rick Russack chats with John White and Kathryn Black**

*Photos courtesy of White's Auctions. All prices include buyer's premium.*

**F**rom a small antique shop in Middleboro, Mass., the firm of White's Auctions grew. That was nearly 23 years ago. Early on, John White learned the antiques business from the bottom up, knocking on doors, doing flea markets, exhibiting at Brimfield and Farmington, Conn., working as a runner for other auctioneers and pouring over reference books and auction catalogs. White's partner, and now his wife, Kathryn Black, remembers rescuing her first antique from the trash while she was in the fifth grade and spent years scouting every shop in the area.

In 1992, White opened what became a very busy antiques shop in town. Black put together nice window displays on Sundays and by 9:30 on Monday it was all gone. Dealers would often wait outside the shop for him to return from a day of buying to snag fresh merchandise. This seemed the perfect time for White to pursue his dream to become an auctioneer. The Black and White couple combined their shared interest and effort to create their auction business. They got a book from their local library and began to study the requirements for auctioneer licensing in Massachusetts.



**November 1993**

With their business plan and structure established, in August of 1993 John and Kathryn conducted their first auction. It was a low overhead affair in White's antiques shop, but the overflow crowd spilled out onto the sidewalk. They were successful from the start. Their second auction was held in November of the same year, at a function hall and they had a real winner for the sale. It was an oil painting of a woman in a rowboat by Hudson River School artist Alfred Thompson Bricher (1837-1908). The painting sold \$67,000, a record price for the artist at that time. This was before Internet or phone bidding so interested buyers had to attend the auction and several New York art dealers came, Black remembers, probably expecting a bargain on this important painting in an unknown, country auction. Wrong!



**December 2012**

In a previous column, we highlighted some Marklin tin boats that had been sold by Bertoia. Not to be outdone, in December of 2012, White's Auctions sold a wonderful Marklin clockwork Farman bi-plane made of celluloid and tin. It's a very rare toy in any condition and this one was fine and complete with its pilot, original passenger and wing flaps. It set an auction record for this toy, selling for \$20,700. A Lehman tin motorcycle, known as the Halloh, in its original box, from the same consignor, sold for \$5,635.

**June 2013**

White's celebrated its 20th anniversary auction in June 2013 and it was an appropriate sale for this special occasion. White had secured an important western painting, oil on canvas, by William Herbert "Buck" Dunton (1878-1936). Dunton was well known as a painter of western scenes. His artistic vision was to capture the vanishing West and its lifestyle, a lifestyle he sadly saw as disappearing quickly. The painting, an early work (1906), was executed when he was 28 years old. It sold for \$138,000 with 17 phone bidders competing. It had been hanging in an unused room in a home in the Acton/Concord area - the owners thought it was a print, but White knew it wasn't. The consignors were present at the auction and were quite pleased with the result. Dunton was a founding member of the Taos Society of Artists and is noted for paintings of cowboys and the southwest. He became one of the country's top illustrators, working for Scribners, Harpers and other magazines. He also illustrated books, including Zane Gray's novels.



### December 2013

A sale that included several pieces of mid-century modern furniture designed by Edward Wormley and manufactured by Dunbar. The furniture came from a 1950's home in Brockton, Mass., which White referred to as being "frozen in time." A hot pink upholstered sofa, 91" long, sold for \$5,750, and the matching loveseat, 55" long, sold for \$3,450. Two matching mosaic top coffee tables each sold for \$5,462. The brass-mounted coffee tables were 45" long and the mosaic glass tops were Murano. All were sold to a phone bidder in Houston, Tex. White remembers that the consignor's daughter was hopeful that the lot would bring \$1,000. Wormley went to work for Dunbar during the Depression years, after a stint at Marshall Fields. In 1944, Dunbar made the decision to concentrate on the Modern style and Wormley was the designer of their furniture. He was well regarded and his work was included in The Good Design Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in the 1950s.



### March 2014

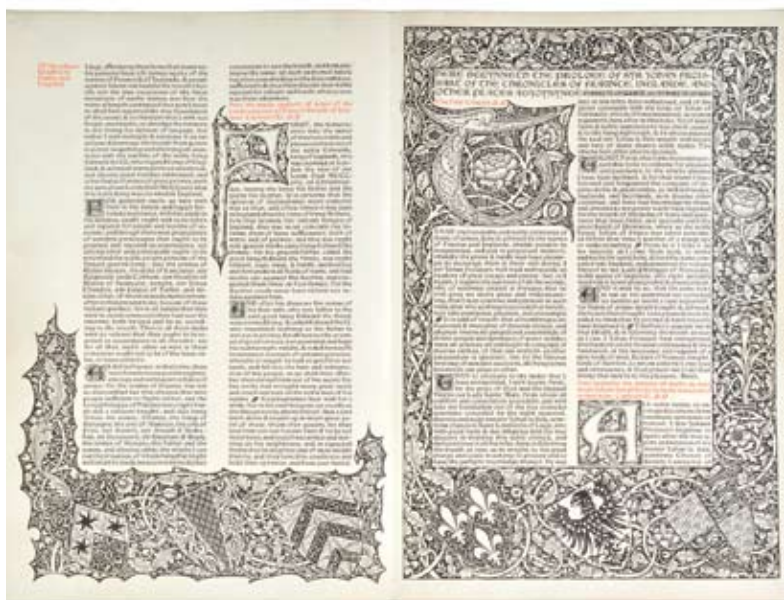
This important scrimshawed whale's tooth commemorated Commodore Thomas McDonough's victory in the Battle of Plattsburgh on Lake Champlain during the War of 1812. The British were attempting to capture Plattsburgh with both land troops and a naval squadron. That battle ended British supremacy on the lake. McDonough's naval victory rendered the land assault impractical and the British retreated to Canada. The War of 1812 ended just a short time later. The engraved six-inch tooth shows buildings in Plattsburgh and several sailing ships. It is inscribed "Battle of Plattsburg." It is not known who carved the tooth, the reverse side of which shows a female figure, symbolizing victory. It sold for \$5,060.

*White's Auctions' is located in Southeastern Massachusetts, but searches and serves a broad area in the region and beyond. The company runs four to five cataloged sales per year. Their formula for success is simple: The auctions are well run and advertised; they are selective about the merchandise they offer; and their commitment to customer service is second to none. For more information, visit [www.whitesauctions.com](http://www.whitesauctions.com) and [www.auctionzip.com](http://www.auctionzip.com) (ID 7546).*

## UK Knocked Down: William Morris Vellum Pages

Contributed by UK Correspondent Patricia Hilton-Johnson

CIRENCESTER – In 1891 William Morris, the English textile/decorative arts designer and novelist, founded Kelmscott Press, which published Morris's own books, as well as modern editions of medieval texts and sagas, on handmade paper and vellum. Two 1897 Kelmscott Press trial pages, for a future translated edition of Froissart's Chronicles (a 14th-century record of the Hundred Years' War), came up for sale in December 2014 at Dominic Winter's auction house. Although Morris died before these pages were finished, his designs helped others to complete them. An English private collector had inherited the 16.5- by 11.25-inch pages, and a German private collector, online during the auction, paid £17,686 (\$26,804), surpassing the pre-auction estimate of £4,000 to £6,000 (\$6,062 to \$9,092). [www.dominic-winter.co.uk](http://www.dominic-winter.co.uk).



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