

# Curtis Studio

## A Story of San Francisco

by Taylor Coffman

MY SUBTITLE IS indebted to Carol Green Wilson. Her main title—*Gump's Treasure Trade*—preceded those words. That was in 1949, when her endearing book about San Francisco's S. & G. Gump Company first appeared. I was born as that year ended. Not quite thirty years later, in 1979, I headed north on a brief reconnaissance; before that, an updated edition of Mrs. Wilson's book had come out. I'd read both versions of *Gump's Treasure Trade* by the late seventies and had my own story of the fabled city to pursue. Mine, too, involved the art market in that setting and its book market as well. My story was focused mainly on the 1920s, as some of the Wilson account also was.

But another thirty years, or more like thirty-three, would pass before I could do things justice. By then it was 2012. It all began to gel for me when I chanced upon a rare item, something that many booksellers or collectors would regard as ephemera. The item was gold to me just the same. I hadn't known about it before, hadn't imagined it even existed. With its pages in hand I could now look back nine decades, better than I ever could in the past.

Early in 1922 many well-heeled San Franciscans, plus certain "down Peninsula" people and other swells in the Bay Area, received a slim booklet by mail, the very item I found in 2012. Those prospective buyers were soon perusing a *Catalogue of the Internationally Famous Cattadori Collection: Authentic Antique Furniture, Textiles, Tapestries, Linens, Laces, Etc.* An auction was on tap, slated to be held at "575

Sutter St., Near Mason” in the heart of the city. The salesroom called Curtis Studio would be conducting it. Comprising 1,218 lots and spread over five afternoons, the auction would start on Tuesday, April 18. The Cattadori dispersal would therefore end with the Saturday session of April 22, 1922, reflecting an established New York pattern (and yet many a sale this large in Manhattan would have begun on a Monday and run for six afternoons, not five).

Curtis Studio was synonymous with Edward Curtis, a native of New Orleans, the Crescent City on the Mississippi River—a good place for a future San Franciscan like him to hail from. He was born in Louisiana in 1847, six months before gold was discovered in California. An old story portrayed him as the son of a man also named Edward Curtis, a sea captain who’d gone west early enough to have died there in 1850; however, Bancroft’s “Pioneer Register and Index” lists no such person. Instead, the man behind Curtis Studio counted Robert Snow Curtis as his father. Snow Curtis, his preferred name, lived until 1873 and isn’t known to have been on the coast. Thus some tall tales exist in the life of Edward Curtis. He surely had the “colorful career” he was later credited with, a few falsehoods aside. His name immediately recalls that of Edward S. Curtis, author of the monumental, twenty-volume *North American Indian* series. But the man I’m introducing here used no middle name, no initial. He was also a good deal older: Edward Curtis the auctioneer was born in 1847, as noted, whereas Edward S. Curtis the photographer—the famous “Shadow Catcher”—was born in 1868.

Curtis the crier of art sales, and of book sales too, requires deep searching. Obscurity could easily have been his middle name (the one he ignored was Hunley). His first son, H. Taylor Curtis—the H stood for the same Hunley—was briefly part of the family business in San Francisco before branching out to be his own crier. H. Taylor had begun his working years in New Orleans as a stage actor of high renown. Later on the younger Curtis son, Paul, also got involved in his father’s auctioneering. The patriarch began conducting sales in San

Francisco while in his mid-fifties; that was in 1903. Edward Curtis had done similar work in New Orleans from as far back as 1878, a profession he stuck with right up until he and his family—he had a wife and three daughters also—moved out to the coast. Those early details regarding his new life in San Francisco need more probing. The best of them is that Curtis, a “picturesque figure,” arrived in the bay city in Old South fashion, accompanied by “a retinue of negro servants and a portfolio of letters of introduction.” He didn’t much need the letters, goes another story. (What a choice archive they’d make if ever they surfaced.) In any case, 1903 figures as the salient date, the one that found him newly offering his services as an auctioneer in downtown San Francisco.

The New Orleans past of Edward Curtis can be sketchily traced. An early reference is dated 1888, when he was forty. As a member of BPOE, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, he’d paid a visit to Dallas, Texas. There some “impressive ceremonies were conducted by Brother Edward Curtis, district deputy exalted grand ruler for the jurisdiction of Louisiana.” So reported the *Dallas Morning News*, which went on to say:

Mr. Ed Curtis, is an auctioneer, well informed, bright and witty, a raconteur and one of the most popular [sales criers] in the Crescent City. He is a tall, well-proportioned man with blonde mustache and full beard. His eyes betray his merry going and sparkling disposition.

When the New Orleans [Elks] Lodge was being organized Mr. Curtis was not one of the first to join [but] he has been a constant and faithful worker ever since, having been the presiding officer of New Orleans Lodge for one term, and now serving his second year as the representative of Exalted Grand Ruler.

Mr. Curtis is so popular that there is no charitable entertainment ever given in his city that he is not called upon to contribute toward its success and he, Elk like, never fails to respond.

These were prime credentials for a man who sought a living as an auctioneer, much as his older son's stage training would serve him well when he took gavel in hand and mounted the crier's podium, the same as his father kept doing.

The elder Curtis—the patriarch Edward—can also be traced somewhat through the New Orleans press of the late 1880s and early '90s. We can skip from there all the way to 1900, when Curtis was mentioned along with the Auctioneers' Exchange on Common Street, near the French Quarter in the heart of the old city. Come 1902, Curtis was figuring as part of Curtis & Gallagher, a public-sales firm headquartered on the same Common Street in New Orleans. Early in 1903 a reference crops up in the *Times-Picayune* (the leading newspaper) to Edward Curtis' Mart, another commercial name that needs more research. Much later, following the death of Curtis in San Francisco in 1927, one of his daughters would alert her father's home town of his demise. The result was an overly brief obituary in the *Times-Picayune*, yet one that included this key passage:

Mr. Curtis was active in the politics and social life of New Orleans. He led a fight to have certain objectionable residents forced to move out of Elk Place [near the French Quarter], where he himself resided. When his efforts failed, he left the city in anger.

That had to have been in 1903. But Curtis didn't head straight to San Francisco, as other obituaries have recounted. He seems to have gone instead to San Diego, at least temporarily. In that California city a place called Webbers Southwestern Music House hosted auction sales; the one coming up that year on April 17-18 promised to be an event of rare distinction. "Paintings from Paris," a week's worth of display ads boldly announced:

This collection embraces examples of prominent artists of Paris, Munich, Naples, Rome and Milan.

Every artist the recipient of medals or honors at prominent exhibitions (five Salon artists in the collection). Collection in charge of Edward Curtis, the leading art auctioneer of New Orleans.

By the standards of 1903 a booking like this would have been big news in San Francisco, more like gigantic news in Los Angeles or Santa Barbara. And here it was happening for the greater good of isolated San Diego, a dozen years before the Panama-California Exposition was held in Balboa Park. This was historic, perhaps for San Diego unprecedented.

It was afterward, at an unknown date in 1903, that Curtis settled in San Francisco. In November of that year, a bare-bones salesroom called Curtis' Exchange sought bidders at 22 Sutter Street in the financial district, a few blocks east of what in a decade or so would become auctioneers' row in the bay city, likewise on Sutter. If an established retailer like the S. & G. Gump Company could change addresses five times from 1861 to 1909, a barker of the Edward Curtis type could be just as mobile during his quarter-century by the Golden Gate; and he was. Yet another story, more like a myth, is that this new man in town daringly established the first auction house "north of the slot"—meaning north of Market Street, with its better addresses and chances for success. This claim holds no water, nary a drop. William Butterfield and a few other criers were doing business on streets like California, Sutter, and Pine long before Curtis got started. At any rate, change was commonplace. And thus Edward Curtis did his share of fly-by-nighting in and about those parts of the city, as other auctioneers also did.

Along the way, maybe for many years already, he began calling himself Colonel Curtis (perhaps with a dose of Confederate swagger; yet he was only seventeen when the Civil War ended). The Colonel designation may trace back instead to Robert Louis Stevenson and his *New Arabian Nights*, in which Colonel Geraldine was a character that H. Taylor Curtis, the older of Edward's two sons, knew from his thespian past in New Orleans. Then again, "Colonel" was a badge proudly

worn by certain auctioneers of heartland origin. In any case the Curtis patriarch preceded another civilian in that fanciful way, the Colonel Harland Sanders of fried-chicken fame, whose goateed, gentlemanly look had also been true of Curtis, as we've seen from the Elks meeting of 1888. Exactly how Curtis got his title is unclear, is of no great importance. At least "Colonel" provides a sure means of distinguishing him from his sons—and from Edward S. Curtis the acclaimed photographer. That title will therefore appear in the pages ahead. The Colonel's western obituaries at age eighty in 1927 saluted that wishful rank, as if it had long been the norm. Professionally, though, our Edward Curtis went by his first and last name alone, as his ads in the San Francisco newspapers show, plus what his extant catalogues tell us.

An early specimen of the latter—when those rare items turn up at all—goes back to 1905. Curtis cried the Cyrus Carmany sale that year of William Keith paintings, an event held at what was then called Curtis' Art Parlors, on Post Street across from Union Square. Despite the good address that Post offered in its 300 block, Curtis kept on the itinerant go. The very day of the great earthquake in 1906—Wednesday, April 18—found the papers carrying a small "Removal Notice." Edward Curtis, it stated, was en route to nearby Geary Street, closer to the Hotel St. Francis. Such places weren't always salesrooms for an auctioneer of his hopeful stature. Often they were nothing but small offices, cramped rental spaces that carried the tenant's shingle. In 1907 Curtis was back on rebuilt Post Street but farther west; 1908 found him on Pine Street; and by 1909 he was on the corner of Pine and Van Ness, in the building used by the White House before that well-known department store moved several blocks east to Sutter and Grant. While the Portola Festival was being held in the exuberant city in October 1909, Curtis announced that he'd soon be selling "The Sargent Collection of Oriental Antiques," for which no first name was ever given. At least we know the items weren't owned by the painter John Singer Sargent. The things "culled by Mr. Sargent in person" in the Far East

“during the troubles of 1900” went under the hammer right after the Portola celebration ended.

In those early years for Edward Curtis as a general auctioneer (his frequent term), he favored on-the-premises bookings, also called residence sales when someone’s house was the setting. “Have consignment, will travel” could well have been his motto. As early as 1891, well within his New Orleans tenure, these words had appeared in his behalf: “It is more advantageous to have a residence sale than one made at the auction mart.” Thereby in 1910, fully two decades later, did Curtis hammer down paintings by the popular California artist Thomas Hill (H. Taylor Curtis would hold his own Tom Hill sale in 1913). Colonel Curtis did his selling for Hill’s sake in the Red Room of the Hotel St. Francis rather than in his own auction hall. He was steaming along nicely for himself at that juncture: the Hill sale was an upscale episode as public auctions of the period went.

The elder Curtis cried another sale at the St. Francis as 1910 ended, in this instance an unnamed consignment of Colonial jewelry and Sheffield silver. Not to gloat, though. Right before the Thomas Hill sale, Curtis had busied himself with “Medium and High Grade Goods,” also nameless, the workaday, drearier side of bringing home the bacon. By then that former New Orleans crier had moved yet again in San Francisco, two blocks north of Pine Street to the corner of Van Ness and Sacramento.

Curtis prospered enough that in 1914 he could go back to Sutter Street, where he’d started a decade before, this time to Sutter’s more stylish 300 block and the greater stability it offered. “Removed to Plum’s Old Stand,” his notices repeatedly said (a riddle meant for local-history experts like my friend Rand Richards). The name Curtis Studio was already well in use by 1914, when the Colonel’s younger son, Paul, became the office manager before serving in the Great War overseas. The patriarch had some stiff competition that was close at hand. His older son, H. Taylor—the former stage actor—had splintered off in 1911

and launched his own business, The Sutter Street Salesrooms. Thus early that year did Edward Curtis run a "Notice to the Public." If there was a hidden agenda, or if the Colonel and H. Taylor were silent partners of some elusive kind, the events to come through the teens decade didn't confirm it. But certain episodes in the following decade, the 1920s, throw a different light on these matters, as we'll be seeing. For now, at the outset of 1911, Edward Curtis (who was then sixty-three) placed this no-nonsense insertion in the papers:

H. T. Curtis, sometimes called H. Taylor Curtis, is no longer connected with the Curtis Studio, or the auction department of same.

This fact seemed to warrant reinforcement. In 1913, for instance, the Colonel touted himself as "The Old Established House of CURTIS," an enterprise having "No Connection With Any Branch." Some of his ads included "No Branch Place." Still others called Edward Curtis the "Past Master of Auctioneers." Modesty wasn't expected in his line of work; no shrinking violet was the Colonel; he'd been preceded in New Orleans by criers of slave sales, whose Roman spectacles were more raucous than any others in the South. Meanwhile, the Colonel's older son captured many a better consignment in San Francisco, or at least more appealing ones, over his ten years of local auctioneering, 1911 to 1921. One of H. Taylor's first performances, for performances they plainly were, was on behalf of Patrick J. Healy, "perhaps the most widely known bookseller" in the city's past. Healy was so portrayed by the bibliographer Robert Ernest Cowan in *Booksellers of Early San Francisco* (1953). For H. Taylor Curtis, who'd turned thirty as 1910 ended, the Healy sale a few months later was an auspicious beginning.

Two other examples of H. Taylor's virtual Midas touch from early in his career can also be noted. In 1912 Ernest Hacquette's property came that new auctioneer's way. "Formerly in The Palace of Art" (a different breed from Bernard Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts of 1915), the collection included Murillo and Rosa Bonheur among the painters

listed. We can readily suppose that some of those pictures were daubs—or close to it. Things could have been worse. The same winter day found the father, Colonel Edward, selling “Household Furniture” for an unknown account (no consignor named). ‘Twas the plainer, more humdrum side of the coin, as it no doubt had been many times before and would be again.

Then in 1913 occurred a similar mismatch: H. Taylor Curtis sold the contents of “Mrs. Mae Lewis’ Flat” whereas his father prepared to cry the best that “Ten Vanloads” could offer (again, no details of ownership given). Mae Lewis would be “returning to the New York stage,” hence H. Taylor’s dispersal of her furnishings, although they weren’t the sought-after antique or vintage type. Nonetheless, her name alone sounded more alluring than whatever those vans might yield at Van Ness and Sacramento, the Colonel’s office and salesroom all through the early teens, before he returned to Sutter Street. His ambitious, hard-working older son was already ensconced there on the auctioneers’ row that was becoming well established, not far from Union Square.

H. Taylor Curtis played hopscotch as much as anyone else in that ambulance-chasing business. He occupied at least four rental spaces on Sutter in the 1910s and, briefly, a less stylish one south of Market Street, albeit “opposite the Emporium” (marked by today’s Bloomingdale’s building), the Emporium being a department store nearly as esteemed as the White House or the City of Paris. However, H. Taylor set no records with revolving doors. Robert Cowan, the bibliographer, noted that the bookseller Samuel Wyatt “moved his shop no less than eleven times” during his twenty years in the city, 1883 to 1903. After his otherwise solid run through 1921, H. Taylor Curtis began rapping his hammer in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the Southland. He returned to San Francisco for a brief encore in the early thirties.

In 1915, when all three Curtises—Edward, H. Taylor, and Paul—were on Sutter Street, the father landed a noteworthy sale, held at the

St. Francis in its Colonial Ballroom, a booking akin to the stylish sales held in the ballroom of the Plaza Hotel in distant New York, often as evening events in that eastern venue. The St. Francis sessions through Curtis Studio featured paintings owned by a master orchid grower, John Martin, dispersed “Because of the Impending Subdivision and Sale of His Ross Valley Estate,” across the bay in Marin County. Of the Edward Curtis sales before the 1920s, the one consigned by John Martin in 1915 is the best known, the best documented.

It remains the case, though, that copies of the Martin catalogue and of other auctions held over twenty-odd years by Edward Curtis—of both the art and the book variety, by long custom usually separate events—are very hard to find. They’re as scarce as hen’s teeth; I can readily vouch for that. The Cattadori art sale of April 1922 is a prime example, precious few copies of its booklet having survived. I was fortunate to get my copy in 2012 as painlessly as I did. The situation is the exact opposite of the one regarding Earl Stendahl, an art dealer in Los Angeles who figures in the pages to come. Whereas Stendahl’s extensive records were largely “donated to the Smithsonian Archives of American Art,” said his biographer, no such thing was done for the historical account of Edward Curtis. Sad but unavoidably true.

Late in 1919 that well-established auctioneer moved for what, mercifully, was the last time—to the more commodious 575 Sutter, which remains an attractive building. By that means can the Colonel be said to have fully arrived, nearly twenty years after leaving New Orleans in 1903 for points west.

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**II** AN ARRESTING THING about the Cattadori sale at Curtis Studio in 1922 is that it was held in San Francisco. New York, after all, was the capital, the pulse beat of the American auction market, especially for consignments or importations like the Cattadori items.

Boston and Philadelphia ran well behind, as did Chicago and Washington, D.C. San Francisco, despite post-earthquake triumphs like the Portola Festival of 1909, and, above all, the city's grand revival through the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, figured more quietly among the collectors, dealers, museums, and libraries that kept the American market humming. New York had long been the "shopping mecca regularly mentioned in the same breath as Paris and London." Such has been knowingly said of earlier times, and it's surely true also of a year like 1922. In Carol Green Wilson's case, the days she described in *Gump's Treasure Trade* were mostly bygone, the days when "San Franciscans, sport-loving by tradition, flocked to auctions with the avidity of racetrack followers." In large part she was alluding to the boisterous 1890s—to the period also recalled in *Champagne Days of San Francisco*, an equally winning book by the writer Evelyn Wells, published in 1939. The catastrophic quake and fire of 1906 had yet to come in Mrs. Wilson's history of Gump's (her recounting of that disaster is regional prose at its best). By the time the city reinvented itself, assuming a more serious air along the way, New York had fully attained its premier status in the art and book markets.

Ah, but try telling Edward Curtis that. He was a tireless booster, a pitchman of the frontier school, on par with Buffalo Bill or, closer to home, with Charles F. Lummis of Los Angeles (where Curtis booked an "Extraordinary Auction" as far back as 1910, followed by Curtis Studio branch-office efforts in Los Angeles in the early twenties). The last thing Curtis wanted to hear was that New York ruled the collecting roost and that San Franciscans and other Californians couldn't begin to compete with the wealthy buyers who fueled the auction-room craze, a cultural trend that had been gaining steam in Manhattan since the late nineteenth century. A few weeks before the Cattadori event in 1922, while hawking the Boutwell Dunlap book sale at Curtis Studio (its catalogue is likewise a great rarity), Colonel Curtis led off by saying:

This sale proves untrue the frequent plaint [protest] that collecting of Californiana is a multi-millionaire's sport, a fascinating gamble, reserved for purseful persons who are able to bid at New York auctions.

Curtis meant the mighty American Art Association in Manhattan. And with regard to book sales per se, he also meant the often sprightlier Anderson Galleries. The Anderson had held a Boutwell Dunlap sale in November 1920—"Historian and Bibliographer of San Francisco, California," that consignor was then called. It's the only Boutwell Dunlap sale to be found in the extensive New York annals. Dunlap stayed closer to home after his eastern debut.

The Anderson Galleries counted bibliophiles like Henry E. Huntington among its regulars; he'd formerly been a Gump's customer in his early art collecting. The Anderson Galleries also catered to William Randolph Hearst. In fact Hearst was a San Franciscan by birth and upbringing, and Huntington had also lived in the city for a time. But Hearst had been in Manhattan since 1895, when he was in his brashly madcap thirties. As regards collecting in any form—books, art works, and in Hearst's case so much more as he grew older—he knew which side his bread was buttered on. Despite their strong West Coast ties, neither he nor Huntington, nor any of their eastern foes, are known to have bid at the Boutwell Dunlap book sale at Curtis Studio in February 1922. That didn't keep Edward Curtis from boasting, "It is the most valuable collection of Californiana ever offered at auction in San Francisco." Oh, please, esteemed Colonel. Seventy years before, almost to the very month in 1852, Henry S. Fitch & Co. had touted an auction in the city by saying, "This sale will present the finest opportunity for the purchase of Books, ever offered in California." True, Fitch & Co., mainly real-estate auctioneers, didn't mean *Californiana* per se. The term had yet to be coined. The early pitch was uncannily prophetic just the same, made when Edward Curtis was a boy of five in antebellum New Orleans.

The much older Colonel (seventy-four by 1922) assured his clientele that what was going under the hammer in the Dunlap sale on Sutter Street was distinguished, that it was “free from junk.” That claim won Curtis some indirect publicity in a new journal, the *California Historical Society Quarterly*. It came in an unsigned comment, probably by the senatorial Robert Ernest Cowan; but it avoided mentioning any names:

During the [1921-22] season a try-out was made of the San Francisco market by a sale February 4, which was stated in the foreword to contain no “junk.” However, if it contained no junk it contained no item of any particular interest.

The sale was “well attended” regardless “and the books brought very fair prices.” The event was scarcely front-page news, not with the second Roscoe Arbuckle trial in San Francisco having deadlocked the day before, on February 3. Plus the William Desmond Taylor murder in Hollywood on February 1 had further headlines to make. Nonetheless, the “try-out” aspect of the Boutwell Dunlap sale is of great interest here. The implication above is that such a dispersal, dating from early in 1922, was something of a novelty, perhaps almost a quirk, as if the local market had been unbookish of late. That thought needs more probing, more research. Certainly through the 1910s H. Taylor Curtis had cried his share of books sales. His father most likely had done the same.

Curtis Studio—as in Edward Curtis, lest there be any doubt—held a second Dunlap book sale in June 1924. The event also played to a local audience, presumably, as had the first Dunlap sale, and left behind another catalogue that’s seldom seen (the Autry Library and two others in California have copies, but that’s apparently it for public coverage). Anyone who examines its forty-six pages today will be sure to notice this bit of Curtis puffery, familiar in scope:

Books on California in today's sale are perhaps the most valuable offered at one time in an American auction room.

If such were true, wouldn't the literature on historic sales say so? Might not a knowing writer like A. Edward Newton have touched on this in his *Greatest Book in the World* (1925) or in one of his other works of the period? A more sober comment on such matters appeared years later; it did so through the Bay Area's esteemed Harold C. Holmes of the Holmes Book Company, Oakland. What follows was in the pages of *Some Random Reminiscences of an Antiquarian Bookseller* (1967):

It was not until after the earthquake and fire of 1906 that Californiana slowly embarked on its upward stride in both interest and value.

The cordial, warmhearted Mr. Holmes will have other points to make for us further on. Edward Curtis, all the while, had more chest-beating to do in 1924 before stepping up to the rostrum on that summer afternoon, in further behalf of Boutwell Dunlap:

Whether or not the books offered are the most valuable on California ever sold at auction, there is no question they are the most valuable ever sold in an American auction room in one afternoon.

Versus those books sold after dinner, that is. If this claim were equally true, the higher stature, sometimes the more festive stature, of certain evening sales—whether held in New York or San Francisco or elsewhere—was what Curtis was alluding to. A single session of fast-paced selling (as in “one afternoon”) was the operative part of what he was thumping. He had still more to say in his foreword:

Book-collecting is America's most sporting speculation and finest sport. There is more money now being poured into it than into the royal sport of horse-racing. . . . Book-collecting is now America's foremost diversion.

That stated, Curtis got historical for the moment, richly so, waxing eloquent in a long paragraph. The first part of it went like this:

In all diversions, for three-quarters of a century, San Francisco and California have excelled New York and America. Senator [William M.] Gwin in Washington in the '50s, startled the East by teaching it how to entertain lavishly. In racing, since General Taylor and Norfolk [two champion steeds] took world's records in the '50s and '60s, California has had faster horses than Kentucky. Fast clipper ships, "floating palaces" for ocean travel, were built first for the California passage. [Junius] Booth, the Menken [Adah Isaacs Menken], Matilda Heron, Lola Montez, in drama, and Emma Nevada, in opera, all of California, were first American glittering stars. The Palace was the first palatial hotel in the world. America's first world-champion pugilist was John C. Heenan, the "Benicia Boy" of the '60s. There was more duelling—hardly a diversion, but an exciting social form—in California in the decade of the '50s, than in any other commonwealth. Californians built the first long-distance railroad in the world and were the first to equip one for long-distance luxurious travel.

At this time, in 1924, Colonel Curtis had been a widower for the past several years and was living well in the very Palace Hotel he named—the newer Palace, of course, as rebuilt after 1906. Maybe he did some of his spirited writing there. In any case he was only halfway through his historical musings:

San Francisco restaurants were cosmopolitan in the '50s and '60s before those in New York ceased to be provincial. In literary diversions, John Phoenix and Mark Twain of San Francisco, were America's first humorists; Ambrose Bierce was greatest in satire since [Jonathan] Swift; and Bret Harte taught America how to write the short story. Color-of-yellow newspapers and cartoons had their beginnings in San Francisco in the '50s. Most important element of social diversion—men and women from the first were recruited for San Francisco [peerage], as for no other city, from America's widely-scattered best—Van Rensselaer of New York, Fairfax of Virginia, Hayne of South Carolina, Preston of Kentucky, and scores more. As spenders and gamblers—compared with

gold-finders, Comstockers, bonanza wheat-ranchers, land barons and railroad magnates—New Yorkers were pikers [skinflints or tightwads].

Curtis penned a final sentence for this epic paragraph, as part of his foreword to the Boutwell Dunlap catalogue (whose entries were written by Dunlap himself, a learned collector). Disembodied, incomplete, and wholly separate in meaning from all the lines preceding it, these next words by the Colonel evoked an image of southern California, a region he knew better than most San Franciscans did:

To say nothing of the Babbitry of climate, scenery and real estate—and movie queens.

Curtis the pitchman—the purported Colonel—closed on the following note, ready now to cry the Dunlap sale at one o'clock on that afternoon of June 21, 1924.

Will California also excell in America's latest great diversion, book-collecting? The answer is the state's most widely renowned institution, the twenty-million dollar Huntington Library—ranking with the Bodleian [Library] and British Museum.

Despite his droll spellings and usage, Curtis had no doubt that Californians would rally to the acquisitive cause. Perhaps it was his sheer bravado alone, his diehard salesmanship that had lured Pietro and Regina Cattadori to the city by the Golden Gate, two years prior, for a very different kind of event.

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**III** THE CATTADORI CONSIGNMENT of April 1922 was the other side of the dispersal coin, namely, an art sale. Those moments, wherever they occurred, often brought much stronger prices than book sales. Pietro Cattadori was not only an established importer—one of several supplying the American market from European sources, during and right after World War I—he was also a dealer

who'd recently kept shop in strategically situated Manhattan. A year before his sale at Curtis Studio, Cattadori consigned 718 lots of "Antique Art Property" to the American Art Association (the AAA), New York's premier auction house. The contents of the Cattadori Italian Art Galleries, said the AAA in 1921, had been removed from that dealership's "now-demolished premises at 734 Fifth Avenue." Among the hometown buyers then was W. R. Hearst. Some of his gleanings from the first Cattadori sale (seven more followed in New York in the twenties decade) are still displayed at Mediterranean-spirited Hearst Castle—on the Enchanted Hill overlooking San Simeon Bay—half a day's drive down the coast from San Francisco.

A few months after the Cattadori debut of 1921, that consignor's wife offered 168 lots in New York. Although small as such sales went, hers was a notable assortment of "beautiful table and bed linen," old textiles being a staple for those two antiquaries. In mentioning the Cattadoris in his catalogue for April 1922, Edward Curtis said that their current, restocked collection, newly arrived in the Colonel's adopted city, was "under the guardianship of Signora Cattadori," who was staying "with her secretary and her son" at the Hotel St. Francis on Union Square. The Curtis write-up, headed "Treasures From War-Torn Italy," recalls such statements found in the better-known, more abundant catalogues of the American Art Association, the Anderson Galleries, plus those of New York's third-ranked Clarke's Art Rooms. The difference—a big difference—is that an extra three thousand miles were involved at this juncture in 1922. The Cattadoris' goods had presumably crossed the continent by rail to far-removed California, rather than having been shipped through the Panama Canal.

It remains unclear, though, how and why Pietro and Regina Cattadori made their pact with Colonel Curtis, beyond the latter's bold persuasiveness. A key letter or two could speak volumes in the matter, but no such documents are known to exist.

The John Martin sale of paintings, conducted by the Colonel at the St. Francis in 1915, has been noted in Part I. After that things get spotty with regard to Curtis Studio, pending more research. From today's vantage point there's little else to recount for that auction firm besides the Carl Oscar Borg sale in 1916 (featuring seventy of that admired artist's paintings) and, in 1917, the dispersal of Herman Heyneman's bon-vivant holdings—a year that saw H. Taylor Curtis countering with the Frank C. Havens collection of paintings, 600 examples strong. In 1918 Colonel Edward, the Curtis patriarch, sold Augustine Constantian's Persian and Chinese carpets, their consignor being an adventurous woman who'd spent four years in the field gathering her treasures. A "carnival of bargains," the Colonel said of her opening session. From there we can skip to 1921, when the George Roos house at 3680 Jackson Street went on the block, a residence auction conducted by the Colonel on the premises—conveniently in the city (near Presidio Hill School) and done in the Curtis past-master style. "Antique and Modern Furnishings," the Colonel promised of the Roos house, "Mostly From the Art Centers of Spain, France and Italy."

Compared to those sales through Curtis Studio, held from 1915 through 1921, the Cattadori trove of 1922 stands out sharply on the art side of the ledger, ample in size and strong in pedigree. Edward Curtis himself left us with highly quotable words in the catalogue he compiled for that latest event:

Things that were priceless a few short years ago are finding their way under the auctioneer's hammer . . . .

Most of the treasures, that must be converted to meet the pressing needs of decadent aristocracy, find their way to Fifth Avenue, in the great metropolis, but not all.

As San Francisco is the recognized Gotham of the West, so has Sutter Street come to be looked upon as the Fifth Avenue of our New York, and an occasional collection of varieties comes directly from Europe for dispersal here.

Curtis likened Signor Cattadori to “Sir Charles Duveen,” two art dealers whom he said were “of nice discrimination.” The Duveen he mentioned was more familiar as Charles of London, or simply as Charles, a medievalist who in fact was never knighted and whose English and more numerous American clients included a fellow medievalist named Hearst. (The older brother of the purported Sir Charles was the far more famous and also wealthy Joe Duveen—a bona fide Sir Joseph as of 1919 and Lord Duveen as of 1933.)

Accuracy aside, the AAA or the Anderson couldn’t have plugged this kind of Gotham lore any better. Both of those houses made frequent comments like the foregoing, aimed at their East Coast clientele. As for the “occasional collection” that Curtis recounted had gone as far as California before 1922, expressly for auction purposes, the efforts of his older son must be considered to make better sense of what the father was saying. The son’s ads in the 1910s often outweighed insertions for “E. Curtis” found on the same page in the daily papers. In November 1911, for instance, The Sutter Street Salesrooms of H. Taylor Curtis offered the Sidky Bey shipment of Oriental rugs, transported cross-country from points east. Identified as the “Former Secretary of the Turkish Legation at Washington, D.C.,” Bey had become a dealer. A booking like his rug sale of 1911 may have been partly what Edward Curtis had in mind a decade later. Sidky Bey had made similar consignments to the Canadian market—a novelty of sorts: the Canadian art market of yore—shortly before his San Francisco venture. Bey had reached out to Winnipeg in 1910 and to Montreal earlier in 1911. That’s getting off track, though, geographically far afield of this treatise on Curtis Studio and, for the teens decade, on the fortunes of The Sutter Street Salesrooms. Sidky Bey and his rug trading of years ago merely lend perspective, largely of an uncommon, unexpected kind.

In 1914 “The Famous Collection from the Mary Danesi Estate” came to town, late of Hartford, Connecticut—once more to H. Taylor’s

Sutter Street Salesrooms. That wasn't exactly direct from Europe, as Edward Curtis would later say. But with all those miles to its name, the Danesi consignment figured prominently. Its 215 lots, though small in stature, were mostly of top quality; item for item, New York's leading houses seldom offered better works. H. Taylor Curtis also figured in a unique sale the year before, held early in 1913, an occasion of the keenest historical interest: the heroic San Francisco editor James King of William (d. 1856) once owned the "Books, Letters, Papers and Pictures" that had surfaced. A journalist for less than a year, King of William wrote "blasting editorials," tracts whose "devastating bolts" enraged an assassin; the tragedy led directly to San Francisco's second Committee of Vigilance being formed. And now, nearly sixty years later, that martyr's things appeared in a single evening session at The Sutter Street Salesrooms, no doubt a vivid one. When a copy of the catalogue (all of fourteen pages) surfaced a century later outside of special-collection library circles, it fully warranted the words "Extremely Rare."

More on the theme of collections from Europe: in 1921, H. Taylor Curtis sold the trappings of "A Hillsborough Mansion and a Chateau in Nantes," with Nantes meaning the city so-named in western France. Did that event have a bearing on what Colonel Curtis said about sources abroad? How many other consignments like it could be cited in a history of the San Francisco salesrooms? The French had been prominent in the city since the Gold Rush. Was that a contributing factor? It may well have been. Consider what Lula May Garrett recounted for the California Historical Society in 1943. Through its quarterly journal, she was speaking of San Francisco in 1851:

The French . . . were not considered foreigners. The French immigration was so large that some parts of the city were completely French in appearance, the shops, restaurants, and estaminets [small cafes] being painted according to French taste and exhibiting French signs the very letters of which had a French look about them. There were two French

newspapers, the Adelphi theater was French, and so were a number of other places of amusement, especially the big gambling house, the Polka.

Another woman of keen perceptions, Marguerite Eyer Wilbur, had also been writing for the California Historical Society when she offered what follows several years before, in 1927:

The majority of the French emigrants belonged not to the lower classes—the French peasant clings primarily to his own soil and is not naturally nomadic—but to the intelligentsia; they were mainly younger sons of the nobility, lawyers, doctors, bankers, scholars, and political free-thinkers rather than men of brawn and muscle. . . . These were the men who formed the nucleus of the French colony in San Francisco and who, despite their inbred clannishness, contributed materially to the intellectual, social, and commercial growth of the city.

The French connection in bay-city terms—as regards importing, dealing, collecting, and the like—is a story that remains mostly unwritten, buried in catalogues and other records far too scarce, too unknown. Thank God for vintage newspapers. The Hillsborough-Nantes sale of 1921 is eye-catching as well in having been held in late July. With the rarest exceptions, none but the lowliest auction houses in New York did business during the Empire City's torrid summers. But cool and gray San Francisco was a different world unto itself, un beholden to the habits of the east.

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**IV** CAROL GREEN WILSON'S book about S. & G. Gump's relates how business slumps "slowed up buying" at times, enough so that Gump's "called in the auctioneer." Doing such honors in the early days were "the experienced auctioneers Louderback and Brother, of New York." Upon latter-day probing, this makes but a small impression. In Harold Lancour's compilation of 1944, *American Art Auction Cata-*

*logues: 1785-1942*—still a prime jumping-off point for provenance research—“Louderback” barely figures. In checking myriad sales catalogues, Lancour found only one with that auctioneer’s name, linked to a dispersal of paintings in 1891, possibly held in Chicago. The similar compilation of 1937 by George L. McKay, *American Book Auction Catalogues: 1713-1934*, has nary a word about Louderback. Lancour checked no farther west than Chicago. McKay checked the Huntington Library in San Marino, California; otherwise he didn’t look past Madison, Wisconsin. And thus the Lancour and McKay source books, biblical as they are, have a decidedly northeastern, territorial, and almost elitist slant, being heavily dependent on institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and their reference holdings. Not surprisingly, neither of the Lancour-McKay *American Auction* works has anything on the Canadian market (such as it was years ago). Sidky Bey’s shipments to Winnipeg and Montreal may as well have gone to remote, thinly documented San Francisco. They would have garnered as little attention there as they did north of the international border.

In further regard to Louderback, as touched on by Mrs. Wilson, the marvelous book of 1970 by Wesley Towner and Stephen Varble—*The Elegant Auctioneers*—contains nothing at all. The same goes for Malcolm Goldstein’s *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (2000): not a word about Louderback. For their part, today’s computer search engines aren’t of much help. An Internet posting, dated January 2013 and seeking information about a Chicago art critic of more than a century ago, says the person “worked for Louderback & Co. Auctioneer” in that city in 1886. Below the posting appears “No followups yet.” Chances are, there won’t be many. However, the second of six Gump’s auctions that can be cited before the 1940s (there may well have been more) was in fact handled by “Louderback & Bro.” The date was 1890. That’s what the archival newspapers disclose; and thus can Mrs. Wilson be absolved. Also, a certain A. W. Louderback & Co. began auctioneering in San Francisco

in the late 1800s. Louderback & Co. was awarded the fourth of those Gump's auctions; by then it was 1900. Before that there'd been a Gump's auction in 1893. Earlier still, the first of those sales took place in 1888 through Easton, Eldridge & Co., mainly real-estate auctioneers in the city. Another Gump's dispersal, the fifth before the earthquake, is dated 1905 and was conducted by C. H. Luengene. The latter was a much-traveled auctioneer who usually worked in the east; his predecessor for the 1893 sale, the equally mobile B. Scott, Jr., had also been summoned to San Francisco from afar. All told, the sales of 1888, 1890, 1893, 1900, and 1905 indicate a willingness on Gump's part to divide the action between local criers and out-of-towners.

The sixth sale requires our fast-forwarding all the way to 1933. H. Taylor Curtis, newly returned from the Southland after his father died in 1927, was now calling his business Curtis Studios, using the plural form. He held a Gump's dispersal on dear old Sutter Street, a sale comprising one session only. Carol Green Wilson said nothing of that obscure event; its details require much digging to unearth. Forget ever finding a catalogue of those proceedings unless antiquarian luck intervenes. As for catalogues of the much earlier Gump's auctions, few copies outlived the debacle of 1906.

Sometime "before the Fire," as Evelyn Wells liked to say with a capital F—the A. W. Louderback firm, as cited above, held a sale for the account of Charles F. Haseltine. A dealer based in Philadelphia, Haseltine specialized in paintings; he was also a painter himself, who exhibited "Summer Day in Vermont" and other works at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915. Much earlier, he'd compiled a long record of consignments to auction houses in the east, made from 1872 through 1894. Altogether nearly thirty Haseltine sales occurred in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Boston in that period, and also in Cincinnati. At least once, meanwhile, evidently prior to the century's turn, Haseltine brought a "Choice Collection of Paintings" to San Francisco for Louderback's to sell. Perhaps passing moments like that from

before the Fire (Miss Wells again), along with bookings like the H. Taylor Curtis offering of 1921 from a French chateau, influenced what Edward Curtis spoke of in regard to the Cattadori goods in 1922—when he referred to “an occasional collection of varieties” said to come all the way from Europe.

In contrast, an episode akin to the undated Haseltine shipment is firmly dated: 1893. William Butterfield, one of the oldest, most storied auctioneers in the city, advertised a sale then at his rooms on California Street. “Third Consignment from Great Britain of Valuable Books,” he called it. The source was Bernard Quaritch of London, a man later called by *The Times* in that ancient city “the greatest bookseller who ever lived.” Quaritch was widely renowned for his tireless activity. Among the efforts he made, he’d been consigning books to the American market since at least 1867, the first date recorded for any of his auctions in New York. Until his death in 1899 he kept sending stock from London to New York and to Boston and Philadelphia; there was also a Quaritch sale in Cincinnati before the famous man was done. Back in 1893, while still going strong, Quaritch wanted to “test the San Francisco market for valuable books.” Those were William Butterfield’s words. They recall Robert Cowan’s “try-out” remark about the Boutwell Dunlap sale of 1922, fully three decades later. As for Quaritch in 1893 and his previous shipments to remote California, no details come readily to hand. No such sales are recorded by George L. McKay. For that matter, neither does McKay include the “Third Consignment” from Bernard Quaritch that William Butterfield specified. However, Cowan once mentioned an auction consignment “of very fine books sent out from London by Quaritch.” Yet he cited no particulars.

Furthermore on the auction side of things, anecdotal history remains essential for the earliest decades and, in turn, for later in the nineteenth century. We’ve seen how Lula May Garrett wrote in 1943 about the French in the Gold Rush period. Her essay “San Francisco in 1851: As Described by Eyewitnesses” drew extensively from the J. D.

Borthwick classic of 1857, *Three Years in California*. She paraphrased Borthwick's telling how the city's streets "were full of thimble riggers, auction sales, and street vendors." On the retail side it's a different story, less circus-like. In *Some Random Reminiscences*, Harold C. Holmes recalled "all the good secondhand books imported to San Francisco from 1870 to 1890" by a trader named Moore. Better yet, the *Alta California* newspaper carried the following notice by a dealer based in the emerging city; it did so as early as 1853:

CHEAP BOOKS AT NEW YORK PRICES—The subscribers have on hand upwards of 100,000 volumes of light literature, and are constantly receiving fresh additions to their large stock, by clipper ships and steamers.

Walter Scott and Bulwer-Lytton were among the authors named. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, in two volumes, could be had for a single dollar—more like \$30 in the money of 2013, more than 150 years later.

The point in citing these details about old San Francisco isn't to demean Carol Green Wilson's book of 1949, a recognized classic. Far from it. *Gump's Treasure Trade* is too charming, too richly informative. The challenge, while keeping Curtis Studio in focus and events like its Cattadori sale of 1922, is to get a clearer picture of what the local art and book markets—with an auction-room emphasis—amounted to then, three-plus years after the World War ended, nearly twice that long after the Panama-Pacific spectacle ran its course. Some of the imported items shown at the world's fair had remained in town, thence to be sold by retail firms like Vickery, Atkins & Torrey or by the Asian-specializing S. & G. Gump's; both companies had become San Francisco variations on New York dealerships of the French & Company stature. In 1915 Pietro Cattadori's laces had enriched the Palace of Manufactures, whose Italian Section "was constantly thronged" and from which "many sales were made." So reported Frank Morton Todd in his five-volume *Story of the Exposition* (1921). Cattadori found the

city promising enough that he opened a retail store downtown on Post Street. He already had one in affluent Pasadena, near Los Angeles. But he was in San Francisco in that way for a short time only. There's a business listing from 1917 in the local annals; and then nothing afterward. The Pasadena venture was evidently more successful, last heard from in 1921. In a sense, the Los Angeles art dealer Earl Stendahl took up where Signor Cattadori left off in the Southland. Stendahl branched out from the Ambassador Hotel on Wilshire Boulevard, where he had his first gallery as of 1921, and established similar galleries in Pasadena and San Diego.

Without question, what Edward Curtis was doing on Sutter Street with the Cattadoris about that same time, early in the twenties decade, was daring and experimental, partly a gamble, despite his having the world's fair as an impetus and precedent (and despite the advertised "14 Per Cent" commission he'd be earning). The gala moments provided by the Panama-Pacific were "burned in the memories of San Franciscans," wrote Mrs. Wilson in her Gump's book; she also recounted "the lasting effect that the 1915 exposition had had on the life of the city." By the same token, Stendahl's biographer acknowledged the PPIE for the important bearing it had on the emerging art scene in Los Angeles, hundreds of miles south.

The specifics for Colonel Curtis of booking and scheduling the Cattadori sale of April 1922, of the money that changed hands, and of so many other factors will be fascinating to know someday—if indeed they ever become known. A few details appeared in the *Call*, the *Chronicle*, and other papers. Such accounts are by no means complete. In the greater Bay Area an Edward Curtis or a Curtis Studio archive at the Bancroft Library would be ideal. Or at the California Historical Society, right in the city itself. Few local repositories have much on the eldest Curtis, though (again, apart from files concerning the photographer Edward S. Curtis). As recently as August 2013, the Oakland Museum—known for its strength in local art-historical holdings—

reported that “searches came up empty” in regard to Curtis Studio and related names.

H. Taylor Curtis is nearly as hard to trace, apart from ads for the sales he signed up and the scarce copies of his catalogues that sometimes surface beyond the indifferent library holdings in California and elsewhere. I’m fortunate in having two booklets issued by The Sutter Street Salesrooms, from back when H. Taylor was using that name during his 1910s heyday: the Mary Danesi sale of 1914 and the Takuma Kuroda of 1915. (Shortly before that younger auctioneer moved south in the early twenties, he changed his business name to H. Taylor Curtis Co. and dropped the Sutter part; thus did another crier, William Goodman, begin using “Sutter Street Salesrooms” as his own, while running the byline “Furnishings to make the home idyllic.”) Along with those vintage booklets from H. Taylor Curtis, I have three Curtis Studio originals, as in Edward Curtis himself. By far the best of the group is the *Internationally Famous Cattadori Collection* of April 1922—although for comic relief, the final entry of H. Taylor’s Kuroda catalogue of 1915 is priceless, following lot 208: “Together with many other objects of art, too numerous to mention.”

Those innocent words are a reminder of what in New York, at least on its higher levels, would have been unthinkable: the conducting of a sale without a catalogue, as ads in San Francisco sometimes specified (mostly placed by auctioneers besides the Curtises). Amidst the seemingly free-and-easy conditions, “Every piece by request” was how those unstructured sessions went. A prime example dates from February 1922, ten weeks before the Cattadori sale began at Curtis Studio. In this case Edward Curtis himself said what follows, regarding a “Grande De Luxe Auction” then under way on his main floor:

We abandoned the numerical order of the catalog and took up the “request” plan to accommodate some out-of-town bidders, with the result that some of the most important numbers [lots] were not offered.

Curtis meant that those unsold items could still be had, some during that very afternoon. He also noted, "Do not think that the cream of what we commenced with yesterday has been bought up." Things sounded ripe for improvisation, as though the rules and customs that New York and other auction centers lived by were for church mice or prudes.

Despite all the mysteries and black holes, all the quirks, irregularities, and foibles, much can be learned by comparing the Cattadori catalogue of 1922 with its eastern counterparts. The Cattadori, a pamphlet in essence, is just thirty-eight pages long. An American Art Association or Anderson catalogue for a sale of this caliber would be perfect-bound (with its deluxe numbers case-bound) and a good deal thicker as well, true especially of the AAA. It's striking to note how that leading New York house treated the similar Benguiat textiles sale in 1919: its 1,182 lots were close in quantity to the 1,218 lots that the Cattadoris would offer in San Francisco three years later. The Benguiat ran for six sessions instead of five, and its catalogue weighed in at a whopping 327 pages. Many a Clarke's catalogue of the era or some from Silo's, another auction house in Manhattan, would have fallen between those extremes.

Internally, the Curtis Cattadori catalogue conveys a country-sale aspect, reflective of the Colonel's on-the-premises heritage. One page has a good forty entries of "Pillow Case with filet medallions," minus dimensions or a speck of description; why those repeated lots weren't ganged or consolidated is puzzling. Another stretch in the same catalogue has more than fifty entries of "Table Runner," again lacking a further word. How could Curtis Studio have expected any absentee bids? No one but a hopeful buyer viewing the one-day preview of April 17 on Sutter Street, not to mention attending the sale in person, could have withstood so little information. New York and other eastern auctions were normally on pre-sale display for much longer. Also, the five Cattadori sessions in San Francisco in 1922 aren't specified in the

run-on pamphlet entries. The first session—held on Tuesday, April 18, the very date in 1906 when the earth shook and the great fire started—no doubt got well into the 200s range, what with 1,200-plus lots having to be hammered down by Saturday the 22nd. But no such sub-divisions are at hand. Nonetheless, a noble air hovers over those quaint pages, thanks to the coated paper stock used by Curtis Studio and a skillful printing job.

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**V** HOW WELL THE Cattadori sale performed at Curtis comes down to prices, to the dollars bid and the dollars realized, as it always does for any auction sale in any venue, whether of an art- or a book-dominated kind. A single dollar in 1922 converts to \$13 in 2013, closer to \$14. The postwar recession of 1920-21 had passed. Financial stability was on the rebound. But the endlessly overblown “Roaring Twenties” were a ways off. Warren Harding was still the President in 1922; he wouldn’t die until August 1923—in San Francisco, no less. In the meantime the Coolidge Prosperity of the mid- to late 1920s lay ahead, hadn’t yet taken hold. True, Herbert Asbury’s backward glance of 1933, *The Barbary Coast*, told of “the decade that followed the rebuilding and reopening” of that ribald zone after the great earthquake and fire of 1906, a renewed period of “glamour and spectacularity, of hullabaloo and ballyhoo, of bright lights and feverish gayety.” Not on Sutter Street, though, not on auctioneers’ row, despite its proximity to the old red-light district that was all but shuttered from 1917 onward. The chances are good, quite good, that a sale like the Cattadori of 1922 was no gin-soaked frolic in the 500 block of Sutter, complete with silver flasks and Jazz Age romping, never mind the informal “request” method described by Colonel Curtis and, especially, all the later clichés—the ones about that storied time and its risqué, unquenchable merriment. Baz Lurhmann’s remake of *The Great Gatsby* hardly

applies: that overwrought film of 2013 is a flawed portrait at best; the more even-keeled *Gatsby* of 1974, with Robert Redford and Mia Farrow, is more like it, much more Cattadorian one could say, despite its maudlin streak. And as for the often breezy, even hyper-ventilating Julia Cooley Altrocchi, whose book the *Spectacular San Franciscans* has been admired since 1949, its chapter on the twenties—"Dancing Between Two Wars"—has all the flapperism (her term) that anyone could ever want, should her approach seem valid or useful.

But did Mrs. Altrocchi convey the true nature of things, applicable to the spring of 1922—the very year in which F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* novella is mostly set? Two months earlier, in February of that postwar year while promoting the Boutwell Dunlap book sale, Edward Curtis had sounded almost as windy as Julia Altrocchi would in the late 1940s:

If Californians are going to grow with their state, they are either going to spend the money they cannot escape making in riotous living or they are going in for culture.

Then he got cultural himself, to an uncommon degree. He quoted the English poet John Dryden—although the lines he set forth prove to have been another poet's, those of William Cowper. Apart from his error, the Colonel's effort (perhaps based on Southern self-education) went well beyond the Sutter Street standard. And yet "riotous living" aside, the Cattadori art sale probably imparted an atmosphere closer to what Helen Dare, a *San Francisco Chronicle* writer, had recounted of a paintings sale cried by H. Taylor Curtis in 1913. She wrote then of the "two hundred in attendance" who were "sitting as quietly on their chairs as Quakers at a meeting," their strategic bids being "scarcely audible." With all the Cattadori sessions staged as afternoon affairs, Mrs. Dare's column could plausibly apply just as much to those April moments of nine years later:

It was no trick at all to start the sale comfortably after luncheon, and finish it off in ample time for tea.

She was speaking of a single day in 1913, yes. But what she wrote then can be extrapolated more broadly, can be applied to all five sessions of the Cattadori sale in 1922. And if the action ever ended too late for tea, an early dinner could suffice.

Be such reflections as they may, with the \$1-become-\$14 equivalence in mind—based on John J. McCusker’s precise tables of 2001, the best to be had—we can make good sense of what “priced” auction catalogues disclose. These are catalogues that got marked during sales sessions. (Unfortunately, my hen’s-tooth copy of the Curtis Cattadori sale has no annotations at all.) Each session normally lasted three hours or a trifle longer, and each required quick recording: the best auctioneers could reel off descriptions, buyers’ names, and winning bids with dizzying speed, almost without pause. We should also remember that, generally, auction prices constituted what passed for wholesale prices. An art dealer or bookseller paying a certain amount at Curtis Studio or at any other house would be applying a retail markup, insofar as his clientele could bear the increase. And thus the appearance of “1” in the margins of book-sale catalogues to mean \$1, or even “50/” to mean a half-dollar, needn’t cause nostalgic smiles. Given a reasonable markup, the retail version of those minuscule prices in the early 1920s could easily be \$20 or more today.

My priced catalogues of the Boutwell Dunlap book sales, held at Curtis in 1922 and 1924, contain several one-dollar notations, plus a few fifty-centers—the bottom of the scale. Most of the prices range back and forth through the single figures (as high as \$9). Others are in the double figures, though not many. The highest prices in the 1922 Californiana sale (a few lots went unmarked) are \$35 for a 15-volume set of *The Overland Monthly* (dated 1868-1875, the magazine’s “Bret Harte times”). Topping that amount is the \$54 paid for *A Natural and*

*Civil History of California*, by Miguel Venegas (1759). By the standards of 2013 that larger figure resembles our \$732. If such should be considered wholesale, none but a well-heeled collector could afford its retail pricing, whether in 1922 or some ninety years hence.

A book sale at the Anderson Galleries, held later in 1922, emphasizes the gulf between the Manhattan market and its San Francisco counterpart. On that occasion the Anderson's 1,157 lots "Relating to the Early West and the Far West" could just as easily have played to a regional audience at Curtis Studio. But New York had captured yet another choice consignment from afar (whose ownership wasn't stated in this case). Across the board the prices realized in that November event, Sale Number 1686, were decidedly more East Coast than West. Some \$1 notations appear in my copy of the Anderson catalogue, though not many; there's even one instance (one only) of 50 cents; \$2 was more the minimum. Beyond that the single-figure and double-figure ranges are more fluidly covered than in the Dunlap sale at Curtis the same year. The three-figure range in Sale 1686 is also amply represented, usually toward its lower end. Ultimately, three lots cleared the thousand-dollar mark through the four sessions (which included an evening session, oddly staged on a Monday). One such price was \$1,250. A buyer paid that much for John James Audubon's *Birds of America from Original Drawings*, a multi-volume set dated 1827-30 and said to be "one of the best ever offered." When the Anderson spoke this way, it usually did so more plausibly than when Colonel Curtis blared his Sutter Street trumpet. The highest price in Sale 1686 was a shade more: \$1,275. That was the winning bid for San Francisco's *Daily Morning Call* of 1856-57, comprising 158 issues—"the only file of Vol. 1 now known to be in existence." Again, the Anderson Galleries knew its well-researched business. Its book-sale catalogues of the 1910s and 1920s are richly detailed, replete with bibliographical minutiae, often exemplifying the highest standards.

“Often” is needed here because of the curmudgeonly Robert Ernest Cowan. He said of the Anderson’s Sale 1686 that its catalogue was “disfigured by many statements which are entirely erroneous, and therefore misleading.” There weren’t many bookmen, East Coast or West, who could spar effectively in Cowan’s ring. Henry Raup Wagner of Berkeley, just across the bay from San Francisco (and later of San Marino, to position himself near the Huntington Library), was one of the very few collector-scholars who could hold his own against Cowan. Boutwell Dunlap was another. And so was Templeton Crocker of San Francisco, founder of the California Historical Society (the revamped version, that is, effective 1922).

Those two generous bids in that same postwar year—\$1,250 and \$1,275 at the Anderson’s Sale 1686 in 1922—would approximate \$17,000 in 2013. It’s only fair to say that had such antiquarian jewels appeared at Curtis Studio or elsewhere on Sutter Street, perhaps in the lesser but age-old salesrooms of Joseph Basch, they would have prompted bidding just as lively. At the second Dunlap book sale at Curtis (the one in 1924), Jose Figueroa’s *Manifiesto a la Republica Mejicana*, printed in Monterey in 1835, brought a rousing \$950. Earlier in ’24 the American Art Association offered a similar item; the AAA claimed it was the “only perfect copy” known to exist. The hammer fell at \$850, fully a hundred dollars less than what the San Francisco market would soon command. Such values could be fickle. Harold Holmes recounted that, back in 1920, he consigned a copy of the Figueroa rarity to the Anderson Galleries, where it brought as much as \$1,500—“at that time a record price” (it would be like \$16,950 today). But to hell with the whole mess, the American kept saying. No wonder that house had all but conceded the book-auction field in Manhattan to the Anderson as the twenties got going. Art sales were far more lucrative and had been for a long time.

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**VI** THE FIRST OF THE Cattadori sales in New York—the one at the AAA in April 1921—was a good case in point. Its 718 lots of Renaissance and other decorative arts ranged through the three figures and the lower fours; the \$720 paid by Charles of London during the second session was the top price that afternoon. For that amount he got a set of velvet panels having a “lustrous sheen.” Today we can imagine \$9,100 or so, without any thought of appreciation or related factors (true of all such figures cited thus far). By the third and fourth sessions of the Cattadori debut in 1921, some prices were well on the rise. The most paid by W. R. Hearst, through French & Company in this instance, was \$1,250 for a Venetian bed, soon sent to San Simeon. Hearst went higher still in spending \$1,500 on a circular relief whose frame was ascribed to Giovanni della Robbia. That may well have been true: few other examples of the della Robbia works Hearst eventually owned, this one from 1921 also sent to San Simeon, are as crisp, as deftly and cleanly modeled. Such attributions, however, had to be taken cautiously. Under its “Conditions of Sale,” the AAA offered no guarantee that year (or in any other year) “of the correctness of the description, genuineness or authenticity of any lot.” *Caveat emptor* was the saying (as in a “buyer beware” plan once spelled out by Edward Curtis). Such warnings had long been standard. Hearst knew the drill, and so did every other collector or dealer who swore by those entrancing episodes, wherever and through whomever’s house they took place. As for New York on that note, the American Art Association had the highest reputation of any auction house in the country in art matters, much as the Anderson Galleries had become pre-eminent in its dispersal of books.

Together, those two prices Hearst paid in April 1921—a combined \$2,750—bring \$35,000 to mind in present terms. Obviously, none but a well-heeled buyer could endure those expenses, not to mention the costs of storage, insurance, and trans-shipment that lay ahead for Hearst. If he’d been keeping close track, as he normally did, he’d have

known that in paying \$650 for a Venetian Gothic chasuble, he was enjoying a buyer's market; true at least for the moment. Signor Cattadori had paid \$850 for that very item at a New York auction in 1919—consigned by the dealer Emil Pares—at which Hearst had also bid productively, share and share alike in what, even in those rarefied terms, amounted to fluctuating wholesale prices.

The bargain-loving Hearst thrived on heading off and circumventing retail prospects. San Simeon and his other great houses would have cost a good deal more had he not been a Manhattan insider, an auction-room devotee, a virtual day-trader in art works as commodities—with the same applying to many of the rare books and manuscripts he bought. As for the Venetian chasuble, he displayed it in his private Gothic Suite at San Simeon. It remains there today, framed under glass as a quietly stunning wall ornament, its sapphire-blue silk and gold-thread details beautifully preserved.

With a quality sale like the Cattadori of 1921 lodged in his mind, Hearst must have looked forward to that consignor's next offering. Or did he? He apparently skipped the single-session Madame Cattadori sale at the AAA in December that year. (The Metropolitan Museum's priced-and-named catalogue shows that Mrs. Bernard Baruch did well for herself in buying antique linens. Her focus paralleled the strong interest in "lace collecting among middle- and upper-class American women" that stemmed largely from the world's fair in Chicago in 1893, a trend reinforced out west by the Cattadoris at the Panama-Pacific in 1915.) Whether Hearst paid much attention early in 1922 to the pending event at Curtis Studio in San Francisco is something to ponder. Surely he knew about it. After all, he had two newspapers in the city, copies of which quickly reached him in New York for his page-by-page perusal, much as they did from the other cities—ranging from New England to the West Coast—that carried his bold mastheads. Besides, Hearst was in constant touch with the architect Julia Morgan. He had been since the summer of 1919, when plans began taking shape for the

work at San Simeon. Miss Morgan had been practicing in San Francisco for nearly twenty years when she and Hearst got started on his remote hilltop. A major art sale in the city (her office was deeply downtown on California Street) was sure to catch her attention, knowing his tastes as she did and being on the alert for her client's best interests. Her tracking of such matters at Curtis Studio would prove timely in 1923 and again in 1924, when similar Italian sales followed upon the Cattadori of 1922.

Still, Hearst seems to have ignored the Cattadori sale at Curtis. His correspondence with Morgan—much of it preserved at Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo—contains nothing in 1922 about that trailblazing event. He was in New York that winter and early spring. His current collecting focus was greatly on Spanish and Italian art. For San Simeon's sake, the timing couldn't have been better: the New York market had reached fever pitch in its promotion of Southern European themes. "Mediterranean" provides a handy catch-all term. The movement had gained serious steam during World War I and kept prospering well into the twenties. On the East Coast alone there was enough demand for such material on Long Island, down in Florida, and right in Manhattan itself that, even without Hearst, the Mediterranean craze would have flourished. And of course in California there were Hollywood and Beverly Hills and Pasadena, as well as old-money Santa Barbara; plus there were La Jolla and San Diego, and, up in the Bay Area, Hillsborough and Burlingame and still other enclaves besides San Francisco itself. All those places were poised like birds in the nest, eager to feed on the next round of Southern European art, of whatever tile-roofed kind. Yet Hearst's presence in New York, his devotion to the new cause that was centered there, naturally heightened the drama. Again, though, had there never been a William Randolph Hearst, the Spanish-Italian sales at the American and other auction houses in Manhattan would have taken place. The same went for the Early

American sales, the Near Eastern sales, the Oriental sales, and still other types to varying degrees. Eclecticism reigned supreme.

The bookish but liberal Anderson Galleries got in on the action, too. At the dawn of 1922, akin to saying midway through the 1921-22 season, the Anderson hosted what Harold Lancour's *American Art Auction Catalogues* called a sale of "Early Italian and other furniture, bronzes, brasses, [and] wrought iron." Lancour gave the consignor's name simply as Nannelli, minus any details. Nannelli of Florence proves to have been the full name, a dealership closing its New York branch, perhaps a casualty of the recent recession. At 502 lots, Lancour's entry stemmed from a routine dispersal, a workaday sale requiring three sessions. Hearst was nowhere in sight. He could only do so much; nor did he feel he had to stay current merely for its own sake. There'd be plenty of other sales, of varied kinds and stature, before the current activity ended in June for the summer break. Mid-season, the Raoul Tolentino sale at the American in February 1922 was a tempting prospect. It proved to be New York's headliner in the Spanish-Italian realm during that stretch. Hearst partook of it fully. He also covered Joseph Dabissi's debut as a New York consignor, through a sale likewise at the American, held a few weeks later in 1922.

But what about the Cattadori sale, scheduled for April 18-22 in San Francisco? Couldn't Hearst's local people, Julia Morgan among them, have acted as proxies? Back in 1914 Hearst had cabled auction-room orders to faraway London from one of his two newspapers in Los Angeles, relying on a young employee, a novice wet behind the ears named James Richardson. So recounted Richardson of himself with rare humor long afterward; by then he was the city editor of Hearst's *Examiner* in the Southland. Why not similar string-pulling by Hearst through the more worldly, more attuned Miss Morgan or someone else in San Francisco? For whatever reason, it didn't happen at this point in 1922. Hearst sung a decidedly Spanish tune instead during those very days in Manhattan. The Anderson was playing host on April 19-22 to

the latest Luis Ruiz shipment. That importer had switched from Clarke's Art Rooms in 1921, his New York debut the year before. It was a local event matched by his younger brother's debut at Clarke's in 1921 as well, separately made for the account of Raimundo Ruiz. Before that the two Ruiz brothers and their father, Pedro, had combined in staging a gigantic Spanish sale at Clarke's in 1920 (ten sessions; 2,027 lots; thirty-plus hours cried by Augustus W. Clarke in his Irish brogue). Hearst fielded all the Ruiz influxes without fail. San Simeon was the steady impetus. For him to focus on the Luis Ruiz sale of 1922 at the Anderson—all the while turning a deaf ear toward the Cattadori out west—was his chosen strategy of the hour. Some of the Spanish tiles he got then in New York have been part of the former Hearst holdings at the Saint Louis Museum of Art since 1939, acquired by that Midwest facility when much of the man's backlog was being dispersed.

The voracious Hearst could draw the line, and frequently did, with surprising bluntness. His foregoing a sale like the Cattadori sale of 1922 had occurred many times before and would be repeated again, despite accounts of his incessant, unmethodical buying. No, he was much more selective than the literature insists. He had to be. Lesser salesrooms in New York like Elliott Haaseman's or the Monarch Auction Co. came and went, plus many a retail dealership, without ever seeing a dime from him, just as lesser rooms in San Francisco like Garnie's or Bossong's paled next to Curtis Studio in ample numbers. Hearst was frankly snobbish. Or at least discerning often enough. For him it was constantly the American and the Anderson, the American and the Anderson, along with Clarke's at times and occasionally Silo's. Beyond that he drew distinct lines. He did the same with the retailers he favored, among which were French & Company and also Charles of London.

It happens that in April 1922, right after the bypassed Cattadori sale at Curtis Studio, Hearst made a quick trip to California. His correspondence with Miss Morgan discloses some of the details; he was at

emerging San Simeon, for instance, on his birthday, April 29, which saw him turning fifty-nine. The day before he'd wired her from there that he'd "decided definitely to do big central house." Those words confirmed that he wanted to start on Casa Grande, the Castle itself as it would soon be called. He and Morgan had long been planning to take the plunge. They already had three smaller, outlying buildings under construction in the "architectural group" they'd begun dramatically conceiving back in 1919.

A week later in 1922 Hearst went through Truckee, California, on May 6, by rail in return to New York. The latest Raimundo Ruiz sale opened at Clarke's that very day, a Saturday. On a Saturday? Yes; that's because at 1,345 lots, seven sessions (minus Sunday the 7th) were needed to hammer down a consignment that big. Curtis Studio or other Sutter Street criers may have got by with six installments had that Ruiz sale come their way. But an average of 175 to 200 lots per session was the New York standard. By the second day at Clarke's in May 1922, Hearst was in Utah, still heading east. His distance from home was no hardship, not with Western Union at his beck and call. He covered the early part of the Raimundo Ruiz sale *in absentia* with some quick planning, a pattern seen throughout his collecting life, witness Jimmy Richardson's story from Los Angeles about the London market. Hearst was back in Manhattan in time to cover the final session at Clarke's; he did so firsthand on Saturday, May 13. He bought, among several other things, a huge silver sanctuary lamp that's to die for, easily the best of its numerous kind at San Simeon (for a cool \$1,450 in its wholesale essence, as though \$19,700 today). And thus Hearst's waiving of the Cattadori sale at Curtis stands out even more. He could easily have placed bids through his people in San Francisco had he wanted to.

What did he miss by ignoring the Cattadori sale of 1922? Aside from smiles that the lean-scripted Curtis catalogue would surely have brought, he must have known that Pietro and Regina Cattadori were recycling parts of their stock—offering things to San Franciscans that

New York bidders had passed up. This had happened before in the auction rooms and would happen again. A consigning owner would “buy in” an item because it was lagging, despite the auctioneer’s best efforts, the owner hoping to sell it more profitably later, thus recovering or surpassing his heightened investment, often a risky ploy. At least four lots in the Curtis Cattadori sale, probably more, had appeared in the AAA’s Cattadori sale of April 1921. One such item—an elaborate “hood” that once enriched a priest’s cope—ranked front-cover status in the catalogue produced by Edward Curtis. A priced-and-named copy of the stouter AAA catalogue of 1921 (the Metropolitan Museum has one) should be checked to see what happened; in addition, sales reports in dailies like *The New York Times* or the weekly *American Art New* could help greatly.

Apart from doing such research, by comparing the Curtis illustrations (what few there are) with those in its eastern predecessor, the priest’s hood stands out. So do a Louis XV mantel clock; a Capo di Monte porcelain group; and, unmistakably, a Venetian Doge’s chair that Hearst, whose tastes were conventional, must have found absurd. These four things, at any rate, were retained by Pietro Cattadori from his consignment in 1921 and were sent to San Francisco a year later. Whether they won over their western audience in 1922 has yet to be learned. The priest’s hood especially was meant for posterity. Examples of intricate hoods—plus fully intact copes, not just orphreys and similar fragments—can be found at the Metropolitan and elsewhere in textile collections, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and San Francisco’s own Fine Arts Museums being other noted repositories. Hearst Castle has its rightful share of copes, vestments, and related items, tracing back to importations of this very kind.

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## VII

THE WIDE BERTH that Hearst gave the Cattadori sale hadn’t kept Edward Curtis from extolling the event. His ads were

boldly designed, emphatically worded. They took potential buyers well beyond what the frugal catalogue could impart. On Sunday, April 16, 1922—the day before the overly brief pre-sale exhibition was held on Sutter Street, and thus two days before he began crying the 1,218 lots—Curtis appealed “To the Discriminating Class Seeking Furnishings Rare, Valuable, and, in Some Instances Regal.” He added some stirring lines, as though he truly *had* been a Confederate officer who could rally the troops:

We would ask those of our customers who have observed our course in the auction business for two decades to believe us when we say [that] these wonderful things will stand the test of their closest scrutiny. No such aggregation of Antique Treasures has ever been offered here in an auction. It must be seen to be understood.

On the morning of the Thursday session, that of April 20, the main Curtis ad was bolstered by an “Auctioneer’s Note.” It alluded to the Panama-Pacific fair of seven years earlier, saying in part:

The reputation of the Cattadoris, whose magnificent display at our late Exposition elicited not only the admiration of our community, but of the world, stands behind this great collection.

Earlier in the week, on Monday the 17th—concurrent with the Cattadori pre-sale showing—Curtis began laying important new groundwork. He said the Studio’s “best floor” (the street level of three floors, plus a basement for lesser sales) would be “devoted for two weeks to come to European antiques.” Not until Saturday the 22nd, though, with the Cattadori sale ending that afternoon, did Curtis Studio formally announce “the Arrival of a Grand French Consignment,” scheduled for the days close ahead, with four sessions on tap starting Wednesday, April 26. The goods were “Principally the Collection of M. Marie De Besiade Duc d’Avaray,” Curtis further declared, “whose home was the Chateau de Mareil le Cuyon.” The huge Sunday ad, dated the 23rd, got the spelling right: Mareil le Guyon. All the Colonel needed

now were the hyphens, as in Mareil-le-Guyon. Either way, the estate he named was traceable for those with a good command of French geography. The village where the chateau stood was near Paris in north-central France.

Today, in following up on this rare episode—typically, no catalogue seems to exist, nor is Hearst known to have taken part—the shortened name Duc d’Avaray is the one to dwell on. It’s the best means of aligning some choice details, partly on the strength of the Curtis ads in 1922 plus Harold Lancour’s essential *American Art Auction Catalogues*. Lancour noted that in 1915 the AAA in New York held a sale of tapestries and laces, the consignors of record including the Duc d’Avaray (“Costly Art Property,” the sale was headed). Much closer to the Curtis event—as recently as January 1922 in New York—Clarke’s held its own Duc d’Avaray sale, rendering the name “Avary” in its catalogue. Looking ahead to 1923, a much grander sale (comprising 1,410 lots) in what was nonetheless much smaller-market Philadelphia would be partly consigned by the Duc de Besiade, perhaps a relative of Madame Marie.

Beyond that there’s nothing in the standard annals. The ball is mostly in the Curtis Studio court. In his first mention of Marie De Besiade and Mareil-le-Guyon in 1922, in his ad dated April 22, Edward Curtis included a note that begs decipherment:

This collection comes to the Curtis Studio in charge of Mr. Sam H. Stern, of Paris and New York.

Sam H. Stern? Didn’t the Colonel know how hard it would be to trace a name like that more than ninety years later—unless Stern were someone of renown? He apparently wasn’t. In his insertions for the next two days, April 23 and 24, the Colonel said more about Stern. That operative was “backed by documentary proofs of the authenticity of these objets d’art.” The French term *objets d’art* seemed on the lofty side for Edward Curtis, despite his New Orleans heritage. At any rate,

what the mysterious Sam H. Stern had in hand were “letters and affidavits by the Duc d’Avaray.” (Unlike August W. Clarke, the Colonel always spelled that nobleman’s name correctly.) Such documents as Stern was carrying would make for archival gold today.

As for things French, it all brings to mind the obituaries of Edward Curtis in 1927. In the *San Francisco Chronicle* the eighty-year-old man was said to have been “wiped out by the fire of 1906.” After that he embarked on a “stereopticon lecture tour.” That local write-up didn’t specify where (yet the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* said he returned to the Crescent City for that very purpose, with the obituary emphasizing “the catastrophe” he’d witnessed in San Francisco). Nor did the *Chronicle* say that the Colonel’s long-departed wife, Camille, a fellow native of New Orleans, was of French Creole descent; her parents had been born in the Old Country before they’d immigrated. Could French have been spoken in the Curtis home in San Francisco? Could Edward and Camille’s older son, H. Taylor, have known the language well enough to help secure a booking like the one from Nantes in 1921? Do related ideas have a bearing on Curtis Studio and its Duc d’Avaray consignment of 1922? Perhaps San Francisco had been a Francophile city long enough—witness Lula May Garrett’s account and also Marguerite Eyer Wilbur’s—that sales like these were to be expected, even if no more than sporadically. Or as still another observer said, the cultural influence of the French in California had historically been “out of all proportion to their actual numbers.”

For the sake of perspective, though: French sales as a distinct type (on par especially with Spanish, Italian, or more broadly Mediterranean sales) weren’t an established, familiar part of the New York mix, so far as that eastern indicator goes. Such importations appeared now and then in Manhattan. But not often. Consider what the revered museum director John Walker said in 1974 (he found it “amusing to watch the dissemination of a fashion”). With regard to things French in

America in the early twentieth-century, Walker portrayed them as having been “a drug on the market.”

The *Chronicle*, at any rate, had more to say in its obituary of Edward Curtis in 1927, following its mention of the lecture tour he made after the tragic fire:

With the money thus acquired he went to Paris and bought enough antiques to open another store.

Presumably that meant another auction house, rather than a retail gallery, with his Parisian items serving as start-up goods. It must have mattered little that, by its purest, most exalted definition, an auctioneer doesn't (or ideally shouldn't) *own* the things he cries and sells; a consigning party holds title until the hammer falls. Curtis, however, early in his post-earthquake days—evidently after his trip to Paris—identified himself as a “Collector of Antiques” and an “Importer,” not just as an auctioneer. His son H. Taylor would later do the same. An earlier obituary, published in the *San Mateo Times*, closer to where the Colonel died, said the patriarch was “an authority on art,” a man who'd gone on “frequent trips abroad in quest of treasures ordered by Pacific Coast collectors.” The report singled out “the late M. H. de Young” of local newspaper and museum fame as one of Curtis Studio's best customers. The Colonel also figured as a “venerable art collector” in the *Chronicle* obituary, published the day after the San Mateo version.

But whether Edward Curtis was significantly imbued with French culture is hard to know (any more than if he was steeped in Italian culture, à la Pietro Cattadori). The *Chronicle* said nothing of the kind regarding France or the Parisian trends that San Francisco was famous for. Instead, that paper emphasized the Colonel's ties to the Elks and the Masons, plus his renown as a “wild game hunter.” He'd recently gone after ducks near the Sacramento River.

Back in April 1922 the Colonel had taken pains to announce that what Sam Stern brought over on Marie De Besiade's behalf included “a

magnificent silver service,” a rarity “presented by Napoleon to the great-grandfather of the Duc d’Avaray.” (Three months earlier the d’Avaray sale at Clarke’s in New York had also included “historical silver.”) If any heirloom was apt to entice a collector of W. R. Hearst’s stature, a Napoleonic piece like the silver service would seem to have been it: Hearst very much favored association items. And yet just what hands the service passed into remains unclear—along with much else, art historically and in other ways, stemming from an auction in San Francisco that deserves a good deal more attention. We’ll be seeing the Napoleon service again, further ahead in a most unusual manner.

Close by in the city, coinciding with the De Besiade sale at Curtis Studio, an unusual premises event took place, one falling outside the Colonel’s past-master bounds. Two local criers, Alfred B. Clark and Fred Butterfield, did the momentary honors for “An Auction Sale of a Decade.” They conducted it a few blocks away on Bush Street. “The Passing of The Old Poodle Dog” went the billing—in reference to a restaurant and hostelry that traced clear back to 1849 and the Gold Rush. More than seven decades later, Prohibition finally did what the great earthquake and fire had failed to do: shutter that ribald shrine of French culture, its last night of business having been as recent as April 15, 1922, the Saturday before the Cattadori goods began changing hands at Curtis.

Five months after the Cattadori , the De Besiade, and the nearby Poodle Dog sales—at the outset of the 1922-23 auction season—the Colonel came through with yet another spectacle, yet another “Auction De Luxe” at 575 Sutter. Were its catalogue to surface (no copies seem extant), its title would start with *The Internationally Famous Leone Ricci Collection*. How Edward Curtis kept landing these cross-country shipments is much to be marveled at. He must have had strong connections in the east, with a proven means of luring importers like Ricci to the western gate; the Italians, especially, seemed to be his forte. Ricci, a Florentine specialist in old laces and textiles, had first brought

his wares to New York even before the Cattadoris had; his debut through the Anderson Galleries in 1915 had been a trailblazing sale. Since the 1890s, said that house's Ricci catalogue of his 546 lots, "He had in mind their use for educational purposes through exhibition in a museum." The Anderson also noted in 1915 that "No such collection of Altar Frontals has been brought to this country heretofore." Alas, Leone Ricci led a stormier life in wartime and postwar Manhattan than did Pietro Cattadori and other antiquaries. Ricci was bankrupt by 1921, at least momentarily (the twenties decade, especially the first part, didn't boom for everyone).

And thus a surprise awaits anyone who combs old files of the *Chronicle* or other San Francisco papers: therein does Ricci's name appear in typically bold, self-assured ads placed by the Colonel on behalf of Curtis Studio. The Ricci sale, perhaps fueled by insider scavenging in New York rather than a foreign buying trip, would command three sessions in the bay city, September 28-30, 1922. In the Curtis trademark style, this latest haul was proclaimed to be "The Most Noteworthy and Comprehensive Assemblage of Italian Antiques Ever Offered in the West." Besides, there weren't just laces, not just altar frontals or similar fabrics. Signor Ricci had been encyclopedic in gathering Italian decorative arts of every description, leaving few stones unturned. Said the Colonel's rousing pitch:

The chain of circumstances responsible for the presentation of this Collection should be regarded by collectors as a stroke of good fortune, for if they combed the art shops of the world in quest of Italian Treasures, they would not meet with greater opportunities than this sale affords.

Were Hillsborough and Burlingame and Atherton listening? What about upper-crust Piedmont across the bay? And in the city itself, would S. & Gump's be providing coverage, the same as Vickery, Atkins & Torrey might be? That's what French & Company and other leading

dealers in New York did when the AAA or the Anderson staged its better sales. Or was this Leone Ricci bonanza, this latest gusher, meant for lesser types, more for those who found an auction room as appealing as some did a gambling den? All such images aside, that question and others like it have yet to be answered in San Francisco's case. Among them: how much of this Old World material, of whatever grade or assay, could be absorbed in the greater Bay Area and northern California? How much would make its way to Santa Barbara and Montecito, or to other affluent places down south? When offerings like the Ricci were sold in New York their contents went hither and yon across many state lines, dispersed through legions of dealers, agents, and the idle rich, as well as through curators and museum reps. But the situation and its prospects out west were somewhat different, in many ways greatly different. Little if any of the Ricci haul would be finding homes in Salt Lake City or Phoenix or Denver.

Meanwhile, at the very moment that the Leone Ricci sale got going at Curtis Studio, culture with a capital C—undeniably, unquestionably, indisputably—bowled San Francisco over with the Retrospective Loan Exhibition of European Tapestries, held at the Museum of Art in the bay city, with Bernard Maybeck's beloved Palace of Fine Arts as its setting. The serene, quietly impressive catalogue came out on September 29, 1922. It was the fourth such event, said the tapestries catalogue. The first had been the Phoebe A. Hearst retrospective in 1917; the second the Pierpont Morgan in 1920; the third the Old Masters show, also in 1920. J. Nilsen Laurvik, director of the San Francisco Museum, opened with impressive words, so differently intoned from what Edward Curtis would have said had a new consignment required hawking. As Laurvik put it from his loftier perch:

Although important exhibitions of European tapestries have been held at various times both here and abroad, it has remained for our museum to arrange the first complete historical survey of this art given in America.

An imposing claim if true. But Laurvik was no pitchman, no grasping auctioneer. His words were perfectly sane and level-headed, embodying altruistic purposes of the highest sort. He went on to say:

I sincerely trust that this exhibition, culled from seventeen collections in New York, San Francisco, and Paris, may successfully contribute something toward abolishing the hypnotic spell of the gold-framed oil-painting.

Some of those works alluded to were canvases of the heroic barroom kind, sold by Gump's and other local retailers during the wild and woolly days in the city. The director was fixated on that point. Laurvik further commented, many words later in his preface, that certain tapestries warranted "something better than the left-handed compliment of a comparison with painting."

He also described tapestry-weaving as an "aristocratic art." It was surely that; in fact more like godly or celestial. With examples of the kind shown in San Francisco in 1922, Laurvik wasn't bluffing. Kings and popes and emperors owned weavings of this caliber. Few of these hangings ever passed through auction halls, with the most sporadic exceptions—perhaps in London or Paris now and then, infrequently in New York, almost never in other American cities. The best examples simply cost too much for most agents or importers to have them in stock. Or if they did possess them, the risk of putting such treasures before fickle bidders at "public sale" was usually too great under normal conditions—conditions like those often found at an auction house as epitomized by Curtis Studio, not long removed from the city's hell-roarin' past.

No, the tapestries that came to San Francisco in 1922 were a special breed, hugely expensive for any dealer to acquire, even more so for any private collector or museum to become their next owner. "Demotte, Duveen Brothers, P. W. French & Company," went part of Laurvik's acknowledgments, through which he cited the sources of the

weavings. Names just as imposing, just as princely in the best sense were also cited: Jacques Seligmann; Kelekian; Frank Partridge; Wildenstein; plus others as well. Locally, from among the Bay Area's own patricians, Templeton Crocker was named; so was Mrs. William H. Crocker. However, W. R. Hearst and Henry Huntington—both of them devoted buyers of premier tapestries—were not named. And yet mentioned or not, those two titans and several others must have been salivating when the Loan Exhibition catalogue made its rounds. In comparison, the Leone Ricci sale on Sutter Street may have seemed like a party soon to be forgotten, the glitzy kind that F. Scott Fitzgerald had Jay Gatsby throwing that very year on Long Island, a place whose make-believe West Egg was full of “raw vigor” that some found banal and offensive.

The display of fine tapestries in the Palace of Fine Arts was successful enough for the catalogue to be reissued in November, less than two months later. Life went on all the while on Sutter Street through the fall of '22. On October 18 Curtis Studio staged yet another Auction De Luxe, this time a nameless consignment that included “furnishings from a large Vallejo Street residence.” One of the Colonel's rivals, Joseph Basch, did even better. At that same juncture in October, Basch's sold the “Henri Dumont Collection of Italian Linens and Laces.” As that lesser house boasted, “Never in the history of auctions have such laces been offered.” Not even by the Cattadoris, just six months prior? Was there truly no honor among thieves? It seems not. All was fair in love and war, in San Francisco as much as anywhere else in a free country.

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**VIII** WORKS OFTEN SIMILAR to what Pietro and Regina Cattadori offered in April 1922, or consigned by Leone Ricci in September the same year, filled the first floor at Curtis Studio

in March 1923. That area remained the special reserve of Curtis De Luxe activity, as the drum-rolling ads kept touting. A player as prominent as Pietro Cattadori or Signor Ricci, if not more so, was poised now to try his luck in San Francisco. He was Raoul Tolentino—Chevalier Tolentino by Old World title. Like Cattadori and Ricci, Tolentino had been learning the New York ropes since the 1910s. He'd been preceded there by the more renowned Elia Volpi and Stefano Bardini. The historic Volpi-Davanzatti sale at the AAA had taken place in 1916, before the Bardini of 1918. Nonetheless, Signor Bardini's name was the preferred one for Tolentino and other successors to drop, the hallowed one for them to invoke in citing pedigrees and descent. In Pietro Cattadori's first New York outing (the one in 1921), nearly thirty lots were noted as coming from the deified Bardini sale. The latter's 782 lots had brought almost \$450,000 in 1918, a stout average of \$568 per lot every time the hammer fell. That's close to \$8,600 in current terms—or \$6.7 million for the famous Bardini sale overall.

Raoul Tolentino made similar claims in his New York consignments of 1919, 1920, and 1922. In that latest year he figured twice: first at the AAA, as part of the 1921-22 season, and then several months later at third-ranked Clarke's, a sale within the new season extending into 1923.

Long before New York became a constant world's fair of things Mediterranean, Stefano Bardini had gone from Florence to London, there to stage a sale at Christie, Manson & Woods. That was back in 1902, almost olden times. He'd also been at Christie's in 1899 with a bounty of Italian art. Bardini was already in his sixties for those two events; Edward Curtis wasn't far behind come the sale of 1902, right before he quit New Orleans in favor of the West Coast. But 1902 was on the early side for Mediterranean pageantry in New York, Stanford White's unique and infectious presence aside, much less in faraway, pre-earthquake San Francisco—its worldly French rhythms notwithstanding. By 1918 at the AAA, however, with his load of "Beautiful

Treasures Illustrating the Golden Age of Italian Art,” shipped overseas thanks to the “disturbed state of his country,” Bardini had become the grand old man among importers, antiquarians, and foreign tastemakers. Whether an omen or an act of godspeed, he died in 1922. His was the revered legacy that Pietro Cattadori, Leone Ricci, Raoul Tolentino, Luigi Orselli, Joseph Dabissi, and still other Italians, most of them well known to Hearst and his rivals, were carrying into the postwar twenties. The Ruiz brothers and a few of their Spanish countrymen were also leaving kindred marks in the cultural ledger.

If it was a hard act for Edward Curtis to follow from his far-removed vantage point, or at least a pronounced challenge, he didn’t show any outward signs. He gave things his past-master all, starting with the Cattadori sale in 1922—that trove of “princely treasures,” he gloated—followed closely by the Marie De Besiade and the Leone Ricci sales. And now, by equally hopeful means, the Colonel was offering a fresh influx through the good offices of the suave and debonair Raoul Tolentino. There was also a more imposing name for the establishment at 575 Sutter Street in San Francisco. It figured now as The Curtis Studio, capitalized across the board.

This time, after skipping all three of those sales in 1922, Hearst took the bait. He rose to the occasion. It was as though the Tolentino sale booked for March 21-24, 1923, three thousand miles away, were handily taking place in Manhattan at one of his preferred auction halls, even if his purchases from that Italian’s latest round—six sessions at Clarke’s in November 1922—were barely paid for come the winter of ’23. How, at any rate, could Tolentino have enough on hand to warrant comparable action at The Curtis Studio so soon thereafter? Certain items in the Clarke’s sale prove to have carried over to the Curtis sale, much as there’d been items recycled through the Cattadori sale in 1922, following their initial appearance in New York. Still, two sales that large in Raoul Tolentino’s case, featuring the same consignor just a few months apart, weren’t a common ploy. It was more understanda-

ble that Tolentino's New York sales had skipped from the 1919-20 season to that of 1921-22, a full two years having passed without his presence. He'd been stocking up in the interim, mostly overseas, before unveiling his two sales in 1922, first at the American Art Association and then at Clarke's Art Galleries.

It probably made little difference to Hearst. He was ready to play ball, Gotham style, as Edward Curtis might have said. "If any of all those Tolentino things mentioned are defective or uninteresting please let me know quickly." So went a wire from Hearst to Julia Morgan, sent from New York on March 19, 1923, two days before the sale began. "We will only get the good things," he added, speaking in the first-person plural that's true of all his correspondence, whether of a business or a casual kind.

Miss Morgan wired back on March 22 that she had "just returned from San Simeon" and that she had seen the "Tolentino collection opened." She meant she had seen the items when they were laid out by Paul Curtis and his crew on Sutter Street for the pre-sale exhibition. Certain things earned Morgan's praise. Yet she specifically said that lots 214 and 215, both of them "period furniture," were "generally not as good as [in] photographs." Hearst heeded her warning. He'd been considering forty-eight lots, an advance copy of the 206-page catalogue—a real tome by Curtis Studio standards—being at hand for him in New York. After hearing back from his architect-agent out west, Hearst pared his list to twenty-nine lots.

Tolentino was credited with writing the catalogue entries, just as Boutwell Dunlap had done for his book auction at Curtis in 1922 and as Dunlap would also do for his next round there in 1924. In the front matter of the Tolentino catalogue—its full title being *De Luxe Catalogue of The Rare Artistic Properties Collected by the Expert and Connoisseur Chevalier Raoul Tolentino of Rome*—Edward Curtis offered "A Word of Appreciation." Tolentino, he said, needed "no introduction to the art-loving public." Funny thing: Augustus Clarke had

said those very words four months before in New York, in his identically headed “Word of Appreciation” for Tolentino’s sake. In reality, few San Franciscans in 1923, no matter their means or stature, would have known who the Chevalier was, any more than Leone Ricci would have been a household name. It was up to Colonel Curtis now to make Raoul Tolentino widely familiar, in the shortest possible order. The “sturdy Southerner,” as the Colonel would later be called, was every bit the booster still, the barker he’d always been when he led off in full character by asserting:

I can proudly say that never before has the scope of the collection described herein been surpassed.

Familiar words on the Colonel’s part, surely; indeed, old man Clarke had said the very same thing back in November on E. 58th Street in Manhattan. Those two venerable criers aside, the Tolentino sale at the AAA in April 1920 already stood out as that consignor’s high-water mark, whether Edward Curtis or anyone else in San Francisco knew it. Hearst no doubt recalled that New York event warmly, with its lasting contribution to emergent San Simeon. But now, three years later, a new dog-and-pony show had come to the city by the Golden Gate, having gone overland in high style. The 1923 catalogue told the tale in self-evident terms: at 206 pages it was more than five times longer than what the pioneering Cattadori sale had warranted the year before. Colonel Curtis was placing what must have been one of the biggest bets he’d ever wagered—maybe more than he ever had, devotee of bare-fisted boxing that he was.

Following his statement about the Tolentino collection, Curtis quoted at length from Seymour de Ricci, well known to Hearst et al. for his art-historical tracts, and also from Horace Townsend of the AAA (who Wesley Towner said “wrote eloquent, if indulgent, catalogues from descriptions furnished by the antiquarian-consignors”). Town-

send had done so until his sudden death in 1922. The extracts, as compiled by the equally indulgent Colonel, began with:

Nothing possibly makes a stronger appeal to an amateur's curiosity than [than] the appearance on the American market of a considerable number of works of art hitherto unknown or unseen, buried in castles and churches and private collections, and unearthed for his benefit by an eminent connoisseur.

So far, so good with what Curtis was conveying, despite his mistaken "then." Better yet, he was saying more than the taciturn Augustus Clarke had intoned back in November, and he was about to say even more. In his next paragraph Curtis had to be speaking in his own voice when he noted that Tolentino had "brought together a large collection of works of art of every description," items he would "submit to the public of San Francisco." It's unlikely that Seymour de Ricci or the late Horace Townsend had ever cited Tolentino's plan of going west come 1923. For Edward Curtis to insert words entirely of his own authorship would have been nothing odd for that promoter. Joseph Basch and Curtis's other auctioneering neighbors on Sutter Street, plus criers elsewhere in town, would have been quick to do the same.

The next paragraph—as many as thirty more would follow—was drawn by the Colonel from past writings in New York. The Tolentino Galleries catalogue of 1919 or one of its successors provided the following passage, mostly word for word, with its first sentence repeating an assertion that Curtis had already made:

Personally, Chev. Tolentino needs no introduction: a Roman by birth, he has traveled extensively and had a perfect experience of the art trade and its conditions in Europe. He is well known as a careful and judicious buyer, with a keen eye for quality and an almost uncanny sharpness in detecting a fake. American museums and private collections owe many a satisfactory purchase to his expert assistance.

This last point was well taken. As early as 1913, Tolentino had dealt with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, selling that institution a Hellenistic urn of the third century B.C. It was a fine object, acclaimed by that famous museum to this day. Although that transaction preceded the Curtis Studio event by just ten years, it may as well have occurred long before. The New York auction-room barometer remained slow to read “ancient” to any extent in 1913, or even more generally Mediterranean (there being a decidedly southern slant lying close ahead). The Leone Ricci textiles sale lay two years in the future still, the much more comprehensive Volpi-Davanzatti sale three years hence, and the Bardini sale five. Tolentino had been well in advance of the times in providing Boston with that Hellenistic rarity when he did, a year before the Great War broke out in Europe.

Edward Curtis had more to say or paraphrase in 1923—or to appropriate—as a given sentence would have it. “Italian furniture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is for Americans a comparatively recent discovery.” This might have gone over profoundly in San Francisco, yet in cutting-edge, even jaded New York it was old news. “It has been a most welcome addition to their artistic stores,” the Colonel nonetheless added. Whoever wrote the next line was more on the mark: “The days of gilded halls and gaudy mansions are past.” Fair enough, since in San Francisco so much had been lost to the horrific fire of 1906.

There was more to impart, of whatever authorship, whether as current words or as repeated ones from catalogues past:

Unfortunately for future collectors, the supply of Gothic and Renaissance furniture, long since exhausted in France, England and Germany, is now rapidly failing in Italy. Much as he might desire to do so, Chev. Tolentino could not to-day duplicate the collection he is offering to American buyers.

In fact, that antiquarian would make salesrooms showings four more times: impressively in 1924, somewhat less so in 1925 and 1926, and then as a final round in 1927, each appearance entrusted to the American Art Association in New York, never again to a place like The Curtis Studio, so far removed from the main action. Here the Studio's head man, the goateed Colonel, added a key point to his long write-up of 1923: "Even now, for many articles [being offered], the prospective buyer arrives ten years too late." Hearst and others may have been taking such words to heart, perhaps almost nervously. Those very words, plus others in the Tolentino catalogue, will be turning up for us again almost to the letter, nearly four years down the road—in Hollywood in 1927. We'll come to that surprising incident in due course.

Several lines later in 1923, meanwhile, still with many to go for Tolentino's sake, the Colonel's words recalled what he'd said about the Cattadori consignment of the year before:

It is seldom that such a large group of furniture and sculptures has been moved en bloc across the Atlantic to the Pacific, regardless of the enormous expenses, to be presented in San Francisco.

Across the Atlantic to the Pacific? Meaning, through the Canal? The Colonel made no further comment, gave no explanation. More paragraphs followed with references to paintings, furniture, and other things Tolentino was offering. The old auctioneer identified them by their lot numbers (Julia Morgan's frowned-upon 214 and 215 weren't among them). At least five items—lots 220, 259, 262, 263, and 295—made the final cut for Hearst's purposes and went on to become his, with San Simeon in mind. Two of those five were Savonarola chairs that remain on the Enchanted Hill today.

Twenty-plus lots on Hearst's wish list weren't mentioned by the Colonel. That's a good sign. Hearst was relying, at least in part, on the descriptive entries in the catalogue, doing more than simply choosing illustrated pieces, as some have assumed about his approach to cata-

logue-prompted buying, especially the absentee kind. The Colonel spoke of “three reliefs by Donatello (Nos. 399, 400, 401)” that Stefano Bardini had once owned and that Tolentino had been “fortunate enough to secure and bring to America.” Hearst passed on all three. He opted for No. 402 instead, likewise a reputed Donatello; yet doubtfully so in retrospect, such reproductions or takeoffs being common fare. Hearst would be paying \$1,100 to capture that minor prize, on par with what the New York wholesale market would have commanded.

Much more arresting, more telling and fascinating was Hearst’s apparent acceptance of the Curtis pitch on one of the strangest sculptures ever seen in the salesrooms, east or west:

But the outstanding feature of his collection [Tolentino’s consignment], is assuredly the bust of Jeanne de Laval, (No. 409) the second wife of Rene of Anjou, King of Naples. Francesco de Laurana (circa 1430-1501), medallist and sculptor, who made it, was born in Laurana near Zara [today’s Zadar, coastal Croatia], and it is largely due to Professor Wilhelm Bode that his place among Italian Renaissance sculptors is now assured [von Bode’s *Florentine Sculptors of the Renaissance* had come out in 1909].

It was one thing to tout a questionable Donatello—all part of the Volpi or even Bardini legacies at their thinnest, a downside that often applied, unavoidably. In his book *Florentine Sculptors*, von Bode had reverently called Donatello “the greatest character artist of all time.” For Tolentino or anyone else to drop the name Francesco Laurana (the shorter, preferred form) was nearly as impudent as bandying Donatello’s name about, as crassly commercial in spirit. Edward Curtis may as well have said that a bona fide masterpiece by Rembrandt or, better yet, by Leonardo da Vinci, was reposing on his vaunted first floor, awaiting the hammer’s fall. Hearst should have known the score on this one, which was given three full-page plates (side, front, and back views) in the Curtis catalogue. If Raoul Tolentino indeed had “an

almost uncanny sharpness” where fakes were concerned, “almost” was now the hot-button word. He had to have known better.

What emerges on close scrutiny is that Tolentino may have misled Curtis Studio in this salient instance, may have caused needless confusion. Whereas the Colonel mentioned “the bust of Jeanne de Laval,” as quoted a moment ago, Tolentino’s catalogue entry (again, all of them were in that importer’s own words), specified “the sister” of that woman, followed by a reference to “the young sister.” The sibling remained unnamed. Today’s foremost Laurana scholar simply calls her *Giovane donna* (Italian for “Young woman”). Tolentino, who twice spoke errantly of “Francisco” Laurana, seemed to be saying that the bust *might* be the master’s work; after all, it was “remarkable to what an extent” Wilhelm von Bode’s view of Laurana’s bewitching style could be invoked here—with its “aura of mystery,” a style that “seemed calculated to appeal to the neo-Romantic historicist imagination.” These last several words are as recent as 2007, written by a curator at the Louvre. In contrast, the ones about Professor von Bode, written by Raoul Tolentino for his Curtis Studio booking of 1923, were mostly auction-room banter, steeped in the buyer-beware tradition. Let’s also regard them as historian-beware.

The situation recalls a Silo’s sale of 1915 in New York, consigned by Madame la Vicomtesse Aigneaux of Calvados, France, in which a “Portuguese Cabinet, called Borgegno” was offered. The wooden item on its four-legged stand was no doubt a vargueno, and Spanish at that (no photo was included). “Borgegno” it amounted to, though, for anyone who then or later would take the Silo’s catalogue at its word. A separate entry in the same sale of a “Hispano Mauresque Borgegno, handsomely carved and inlaid with ivory” reinforced the errant point.

And so it may have been with the alleged Laurana bust in 1923, whether it depicted a queen or her obscure sister or just a plain-featured lass, a virtual washerwoman. Hearst proved to be good for \$5,500 in her case. He saw to the bust’s purchase during the second

afternoon at Curtis Studio, Thursday, March 22. It was the highest price he paid in the San Francisco sale. Think of it as \$73,000 in current terms—spent on what most likely was a nineteenth-century creation, a clumsy one at that by some chisel-wielding simpleton, worth no more than a few thousand dollars in today's money (or perhaps \$300 or so in 1923).

Before things got under way at 575 Sutter, Edward Curtis had a final paragraph for his prospective bidders. Its first-person authorship may have been his or someone else's; or maybe it was a combination of voices:

Such are a few of the works of art contained in the Tolentino collection. They have been brought together with infinite pains and with the most earnest endeavor to select only pieces as are worthy of the attention of the student and collector. Most of these examples, all, I believe, in time, will find their way into public museums and permanent galleries. May I express the hope that their origin should not be forgotten and that they should carry down to future generations the name of the eminent connoisseur who has so successfully brought them together?

That's how the passage ended: with a question mark. Regardless, the time had come for the local buyers to gather at The Curtis Studio and for Colonel Curtis to mount the rostrum. Four sessions of his animated, ad-libbed cajoling lay ahead now. Make that four sessions as originally planned, catalogued, and advertised. That's because on short notice a fifth session, plus even a sixth, took place the next Tuesday and Wednesday, March 27-28. Sunday and Monday had been skipped before the action resumed in this ad-hoc style, following the original ending of Saturday the 24th. Where else but in indoctrinaire San Francisco? The efficient New York auction market hadn't played fast and loose like that in many a year, nay, in many a decade.

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**IX** MORE THAN TWO weeks passed before Hearst gave Julia Morgan a summary of the events at Curtis Studio in late March. He wrote to her from New York on April 14, 1923; this was two weeks before Hearst turned sixty (he would live to be eighty-eight):

I bought a good deal of stuff at the Tolentino sale in San Francisco. I suppose you know all about that. At any rate Mr. Fairchild [of Hearst's *Examiner* newspaper] will give you full information.

There is one extremely handsome, elaborately carved Renaissance library table [lot 295]. It is, however, pretty well worm-eaten and I wish we could get our furniture-mending man [a Frenchman, Mr. Divet] to treat it with his preparation for killing the worms, as soon as possible, in order to preserve it.

Also it must be packed and shipped [to San Simeon] with especial care or it is likely to crumble to pieces. It is a handsome table, and was valued here at \$7500. I think we did pretty well to get it for \$3500.

Hearst's belief in auctions as the surest path to wholesale bliss is manifest here. Valuations of the kind he mentioned were easy to secure: largely a matter of shop talk in Manhattan among dealers, agents, scouts, and their peers. The old table, made worm-proof or not, was never "in use" at San Simeon (that is, placed decoratively in the Castle or its outlying houses on the Enchanted Hill). Instead, it was long mothballed in the bayside warehouses, five miles below the Castle compound, and was sold from those treasure-laden buildings after Hearst died in 1951. So were hundreds of other stockpiled objects he'd accrued, mostly since San Simeon was launched in 1919. He had more to tell Miss Morgan in his letter of April 1923:

Another important object is the marble doorway. I paid all that [it] was worth, I think, [\$3,500] but I wanted it very badly to go in the lobby of the big house [Casa Grande: the Castle] opposite the entrance door, as the frame of the door leading toward the assembly room. We can fill the top part of the arch with marble tracery of some kind, and use the bronze doors as entrance doors to the assembly room.

The doorway was soon used as Hearst said, although it required some deft alterations. Plus a facing counterpart had to be created in matching marble to form a pair of such units, as skillful an instance of 1920s craftsmanship as any on display at San Simeon.

In New York at least (never mind in San Francisco), items this imposing could be traded back and forth with remarkable ease. The marble doorway had been in Raoul Tolentino's first auction at the AAA, in the Tolentino Galleries dispersal of May 1919. Leone Ricci pledged \$4,900 for the doorway then, as much as \$1,400 more than Hearst would pay in 1923. In view of Ricci's financial grief in 1921, he may have returned that stately item to Tolentino. Or perhaps his ostensible prize never even left Tolentino's hands. Such commercial details aside, the marble doorway stood nearly fifteen feet high and was attributed to the Florentine sculptor Andrea Sansovino; the plinths below the pilasters bore the escutcheon of Pope Julius II. As for the bronze doors intended for that setting, the ones Hearst mentioned in the same letter to Morgan, he'd bought them earlier in 1923 on the retail market for a numbing \$10,000. But he decided against using them. They're now at Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Hollywood Hills, in southern California.

Hearst said nothing, though, about lot 409, the marble bust bearing the vaunted name Francesco Laurana.

He gave it a favored setting, at least for a while, during his heyday at San Simeon: he put it in Casa del Mar, the foremost building among the three smaller houses that serve as foils to the Castle itself. Later relegated to storage, the bust was sold from the oceanside warehouses after Hearst died, along with so much else. A seasoned collector-dealer bought the piece. It remains in that party's hands at last accounting. The bust has been cleaned by its owner and its marble surface polished. The result is a striking makeover, bearing a close resemblance to what appeared in San Francisco in 1923. And yet a double-take is needed to identify the bust as the same object, not a variant or a duplicate.

In summary, Hearst's twenty-nine lots from the Curtis Tolentino sale stack up as follows in Miss Morgan's "Pacific Coast Register," her huge inventory of the Hearst Collection, compiled by her office over a period of two decades. The fifteen lots (comprising twenty-three items) that are still at San Simeon bear an asterisk; their prices are what Hearst paid for them in 1923:

Lot 51	Bronze Bell, Florentine	\$45
Lot 52	Two Wrought Iron Mirror Frames*	\$250
Lot 55	Wrought Iron Tavern Sign	\$125
Lot 61	Wrought Iron Chandelier*	\$120
Lot 62	Wrought Iron Chandelier*	\$120
Lot 82	Two Gilded Forged Iron Brackets	\$220
Lot 83	Two Gilded Iron Brackets*	\$350
Lot 91	Two Wrought Iron Brackets	\$70
Lot 92	Three Wrought Iron Candle Holders*	\$250
Lot 98	Four-Light Candleabra, Gothic	\$525
Lot 105	Pair of Wrought Iron Torcheres*	\$200
Lot 108	Pair of Wrought Iron Torcheres*	\$350
Lot 109	Two Wrought Iron Torcheres*	\$350
Lot 113	Gothic Window Guard, Venetian	\$525
Lot 195	Walnut "Amatoria" Chair*	\$225
Lot 197	"Sgabello" Chair, Florentine Renaissance*	\$1,000
Lot 220	Walnut Armchair, Renaissance	\$700
Lot 259	Pair "Savonarola" Chairs, Tuscan	\$400
Lot 260	Early Gothic [Chair?], 15th Century	\$400
Lot 262	Walnut "Savonarola" Chair, Florentine*	\$400
Lot 263	Walnut "Savonarola" Chair, Florentine*	\$400
Lot 295	Carved Table, Venetian	\$3,500
Lot 297	Two Florentine Torcheres (Pair), 16th Century*	\$700
Lot 300	Two Mirrors, Renaissance	\$450
Lot 358	Walnut Cabinet, Tuscan*	\$1,250

Lot 402	Offertory Shrine, by Donatello	\$1,100
Lot 403	Marble Bas-Relief “Adoration”	\$1,200
Lot 407	Marble Doorway, by Sansovino, Early 16th Century*	\$3,500
Lot 409	Marble Bust by Laurana	\$5,500

The grand total Hearst spent at the Curtis Tolentino sale was \$24,225, a decidedly high average of \$835 per lot. Regard that as about \$322,000 in its latter-day equivalence. The updated average per lot, in early twenty-first century terms, is almost \$11,100. The \$5,500 paid for the so-called Laurana was the one price well off the charts. Strike that, along with Hearst’s \$45 for the Florentine bell, and a more reasonable average of \$692 per lot can be cited in old-school dollars, class of 1923.

All in all, Hearst did as well as he would have in New York at many a Spanish or Italian sale. Why he or Tolentino chose to do business this way so removed from their accustomed base is one question. As far as our taking a stab at higher criticism, Hearst’s opting for lot 409—the much-acclaimed marble bust—is another question, a more important one. Why? Because that object’s listless, even insipid character mocks his collecting legacy; perhaps that’s why Hearst later removed it from Casa del Mar, sent it down the hill into warehouse oblivion. That sculpture would have been perfect in *Citizen Kane*, a prop emphasizing the man’s lack of taste and common sense, a widespread belief then and, in many circles, a conviction still held this side of 1941, when the almost cultish Orson Welles movie was released.

Raoul Tolentino may have been hard to fool. In addition, Edward Curtis may indeed have been “widely known as a connoisseur of art”; he was also quick to denounce “swindlers” in his chosen field. Nonetheless, both Tolentino and Curtis missed the mark on the marble bust. *Forgery* could well be the term that applies here. If so, it means that some stone carver, probably in the late 1800s, produced a naïve, vaguely Laurana-like image in marble, life-sized and perhaps stemming from a bronze medal struck by that master. However, the latter-

day sculptor, whose training had to be slight, rendered the young woman in a crudely French rather than Italian spirit. Her eyes were left vapidly blank, her forehead greatly pronounced and her hairline well recessed. Below those artless features appeared tightly scrolled hair curls, seldom seen in portrait sculpture of its purported age, whether French or any other Western type. The five rectangular panels—forming the socle or base of the composition—were another oddity. A master like Laurana would never have been so bland, so drab and rigid in his handling of those details.

All the while a convincing sense of the old, of the aged and the worn—of the “discreetly distressed,” as an expert on forgeries once wrote in *Apollo* magazine—was called for on the sculptor’s part, if deception was indeed his goal (which the profound observer Otto Kurz emphasized was *always* a forger’s goal). Burial in harsh, acidic soil was a technique often used by that tribe, whose patron saint in such clever ploys was none other than Michelangelo; marble, being highly porous, readily absorbs impurities. Voilà! A hitherto unknown, Late Gothic-to-Renaissance sculpture surfaced in dealers’ circles, some four centuries after Francesco Laurana breathed his last.

The reality is that when that artist’s ethereal works reach the market (they seldom did years ago, and they still don’t now), they command shockingly high prices. In 1933, at the Thomas Fortune Ryan sale in New York, Joseph Duveen paid \$102,500—in deflationary Depression dollars—for a Laurana bust that even the sternest critics accepted. It’s a gorgeous, mesmerizing piece, currently held by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. However, its veracity has since been doubted by Chrysa Damianaki, the leading scholar alluded to earlier.

Today a collector or art lover or curator should no more trifle with Donatello, Laurana, Desiderio, or any similar master than was true in Hearst’s time, back when Colonel Curtis was among those who had no trouble passing for experts. Ironically, a Laurana bust—no doubt a

modern but skillful Florentine copy—figured in 1928 in *Show People*, a movie starring Marion Davies. The unique arrangement that she and W. R. Hearst had with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer led to the making of that silent film, a beloved one considered Marion's best. Whether the portrait bust of a young woman (visible several times above a fireplace) was an MGM prop or was something from the Hearst arsenal, the piece was stylistically "right," unlike its French-tempered counterpart that Tolentino found somewhere and saw fit to bring west.

Some final thoughts on the bust. Whoever produced it may have been too innocent, too limited to have sought deception, even for a minute, Otto Kurz notwithstanding. If so, "forgery" would be wrongly applied in the situation being weighed here. Laurana's work may not have been what inspired that latter-day sculptor—whose creation wasn't Italian in spirit but rather French, a crucial point. The sculptor may even have been alluding to Joan of Arc in his simplistic, storybook way; in turn, Hearst's record-keepers called the bust Gothic, omitting any reference to Francesco Laurana or to a region or country. But if Raoul Tolentino saw Laurana in the piece and tried to pass it off as such, that could have been quite enough to put several considerations into lasting motion. Did Hearst see through it all? Was he buying a nameless French sculpture on its own small merits, disregarding the catalogue as he did so? The prospect may well have been worth an inflated \$5,500 in his view—and even placement in Casa del Mar for a time. (But who was underbidding at Curtis Studio when the "Laurana" came up as lot 409? That's also a question.) On occasion Hearst had had his passing pleasure this way during auctions in the past. Ultimately, that may be all there is to this beguiling matter—a wealthy man's indulgence amid the fleeting moment.

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**X** THE BETTER PART of a year went by after the Curtis Tolentino sale of 1923. It was now 1924—or well along in the 1923-24

season, as New York auction parlance would equate things, much like speaking of the traditional school year that begins in the fall. Along with his retail buying, which Hearst had stepped up mightily once the twenties dawned, he'd been keeping up with hometown prospects in Manhattan, epitomized by the incessant, weekly salesroom action. He also kept after his English and Continental prospects. In November 1923 there'd been another Luis Ruiz sale at the Anderson Galleries in New York, featuring "a considerably more important collection" than before. In fact, that older of the Ruiz brothers was overburdened with stock: he staged a second sale at Clarke's a month later, the two consignments jointly bringing almost 2,500 lots to the eager stateside market. There'd also been the Carlo Girard sale at the AAA in that part of 1923. For Hearst's purposes the Girard was a quality influx, good for two dozen or more lots, most of them still at San Simeon today. In addition, there'd been a Leone Ricci sale at Haaseman's in New York, three weeks before the Girard (although held at the wrong house by Hearst's usual standards: the equivalent in San Francisco terms of having Basch's or Garnie's do the honors instead of The Curtis Studio).

Down in Los Angeles, overlapping with the Carlo Girard event in New York, an auction firm named Kemp & Ball cried a "premises" sale near the downtown core; in the larger view, Kemp & Ball was every bit as obscure as Curtis or Basch's or the other Sutter Street houses up north, if not more so. But no matter for the moment: "Impelling 5-Day Motion Picture Studio Auction" shouted the Chandler family's *Times*, Hearst's archrival for the past twenty years in the Southland. "The Most Unique, Spectacular and Stupendous Sale of Its Kind, Ever Held!!!" The consignor was the film legend William Selig, like Edward Curtis a self-styled, pseudo-officer of high standing. Selig was well known to Hearst; the two had partnered on *The Hearst-Selig News Pictorial* as early as 1914. Andrew Erish, author of *Col. William N. Selig: The Man Who Invented Hollywood* (2012), has since noted that "Selig and W. R. attended the San Francisco Exposition in July 1915" to

promote their newsreel. Despite a nonexistent catalogue—Kemp & Ball normally got by with ads and handbills—might not that weeklong affair have drawn Hearst, in moth-to-flame style? That firm's technique recalled the ancient Romans, for whom "public auctions were announced by placards or a simple writing on the walls." In any case, with two daily newspapers in Los Angeles, Hearst would have heard the shouting in plenty of time. Yet he seems not to have opted for a "gorgeous 17-piece Louis XIV" boudoir suite or its Chinese Chippendale equivalent. Wouldn't they have been useful set pieces for his Cosmopolitan Productions, the ornate movies he'd been making in recent years, some of them starring Marion Davies?

Hearst must have figured he could do better in New York. All that build-up, though, all that noise and pageantry—with the sessions themselves being held at the Selig Zoo, from which Hearst drew partial inspiration for his own zoo at San Simeon: how could he sit out such a carnival? The inscrutable Hearst, forever the man of mystery, could do precisely that, much as he'd passed up the more discreet Cattadori sale at Curtis Studio in 1922.

For its part Kemp & Ball was staying busy these days in 1923. Right before the Selig sale it disposed of "the Former Francis Ford Studios." This reflected an established trend. Three years earlier to the very month, in November 1920, Kemp & Ball had auctioned the contents of David Horsley's pioneering film studio in Hollywood. The lineup then had included "1001 Other Articles Too Numerous to Mention" (or to bother cataloguing).

Hearst likewise kept busy in 1923, still hunkered down in New York. In December that year the dealers Montllor Brothers held a Spanish sale at Clarke's, good for winning him over. That same month saw the Cattadoris hold a sale at the AAA; they'd also had one in December 1922, less than a year after their San Francisco venture. Except for bringing still more Italian art to the AAA in the next few years, Pietro and Regina Cattadori soon focused on Palm Beach, Flor-

ida, where the Hotel Poinciana provided a stylish new venue for their exhibitions, and for auctions, too, much as the Plaza in New York and the Palace and the St. Francis in San Francisco did for certain consignors (and much as the Ambassador and other hotels did for the dealer Earl Stendahl out on the coast). Almost predictably, those Florida events involving the Cattadoris are unrecorded in Harold Lancour, in Wesley Towner-Stephen Varble, or in other mainstream accounts of buying and selling in the art and book realms.

Upon turning the corner into 1924, the same auction house in Manhattan—the AAA, still the industry leader—held the C. & E. Canessa sale, a notable one that Hearst made sure not to miss. The Canessas, like the Cattadoris, had a Panama-Pacific exhibit in 1915 to their name, as Hearst surely recalled; San Simeon would soon be the more distinguished, and still is, from what that dispersal of 1924 yielded. Then came the Kano Oshima sale at the AAA, providing a good chance for Hearst to buy “Oriental art,” as the event was billed. Oshima had been a consignor to the New York market for more than thirty years, since at least 1892. In periodic moments when Hearst felt like going Asian (he mostly did so for accent pieces), a sale of the Oshima kind was ideal. At times he found other Asian prospects equally suitable. These included a Yamanaka sale or two, consigned by the “largest distributors of Japanese art in the world,” as Carol Green Wilson said about that well-known firm in *Gump’s Treasure Trade*.

And thus a setting of the stage here, a prelude to what happened next in this story of San Francisco, this account of Curtis Studio as the twenties marched on. The Oshima sale opened on Wednesday, February 20, 1924. Concurrently, Edward Curtis unlimbered his display-ad guns, three thousand miles away. He did so that morning with a “Very Important Preliminary Notice to Art Lovers.” Signor Alberto Adolfo di Segni (his name got bungled in this first round) had brought his collection “directly to San Francisco.” The Colonel must have hoped this new sale would rival the Cattadori and the Ricci, both of 1922, and

the Tolentino of 1923. It might even surpass them all. Two days later, on Friday the 22nd, the consignor's name stood corrected. He was Adolfo Alberto di Segni, whose treasures had come all the way from Rome—"Brought by him directly to this city." The Colonel also noted that "the vogue motif in furnishings" was Italian, as was obvious to anyone "abreast of the times." The Colonel's ads waxed more eloquent than ever in citing "Princely Possessions From Palaces of Patricians," rarities not "Possible to Purchase in Pre-War Periods." It was as though Stefano Bardini himself had come back to life and was holed up in the St. Francis on Union Square, the way Madame Cattadori and her son had been in 1922.

The drum roll continued during the next week in 1924, when the sessions began at 575 Sutter Street. The first of them was held on Wednesday, February 27, aimed at a four-day run through Saturday, March 1. Sundays often boasted the liveliest ads placed by Curtis Studio and its rivals, meant to whet people's appetites for the days close ahead. Thus did the Colonel offer these enticing words under "An Extra Day's Exhibition," the day in question being the present one, Sunday the 24th:

Although it has heretofore been against the policy of the Curtis Studio to open on Sundays, we will admit visitors [today] to the Grand Di Segni Collection of Italian and French Antique Art Furnishings.

So the French was also part of the mix—a key point, a notable point. It may have reflected San Francisco's special regard for that country, a feeling traceable from decades long past, a part of local history that "would call for the literary genius of Honoré de Balzac" to recount sufficiently (as Gilbert Chinard said in 1943 in his essay "When the French Came to California"). Sundays, in any event, were seldom sacred in the east, not in the way that Edward Curtis was indicating in 1924; whereas "Sundays excepted" had once been standard in New York's listings of exhibition hours, that rule had long since changed.

But the Lord's day must have been verboten out west if this had been the Colonel's approach up till now. After all, the "dean of auctioneers" in the city, as the *Chronicle* later called him, was someone who knew the score. That detail aside, the patriarchal head of Curtis Studio had more to add about the upcoming sale:

Not one connoisseur that has visited it, so far, but has pronounced it, par excellence, the finest, the most beautiful, and the most comprehensive collection ever seen in San Francisco.

In the exceedingly rare catalogue itself (one copy only is known to be extant in art-reference libraries nationwide), the usual foreword appeared, signed "Respectfully, The Curtis Studio":

In presenting the di Segni Collection of Italian and French Antiques and Objects d' Art, we cannot dwell too strongly on the unusual fact that this collection comes first to San Francisco [not to New York or elsewhere in the U.S.], that it was cleared in the custom house of San Francisco, and that this public will be the first to see it in its entirety, and first to bid upon the rare and beautiful things that compose it.

Three more paragraphs followed. They warrant quoting in full, so rare and little-known is the catalogue of 1924 that contains them:

Not only is Signor di Segni a collector by inheritance, both his father and grandfather having been Antiquaires but his entire life, (excepting the four years of service in France that he rendered the Italian government as an officer in its Army), has been devoted to the study of antique furniture, textiles, bronzes, and ceramiques.

So, acting upon the advice of his friends and countrymen in San Francisco, he extends its art lovers the privilege of competing for the rare treasures, made possible for even him to secure, only by the vicissitudes that the devastating World War wrought in the fortunes of his countrymen.

To those of our customers who know our conservatism in matters of publicity, we say that *NOTHING* in point of grandeur and extent has ever been presented before in this city.

Julia Morgan proved to be among the recent visitors Edward Curtis mentioned in his big Sunday ad placed on February 24, 1924. She had wired Hearst in New York on Friday the 22nd, the same day the Colonel Curtis began touting the Roman consignment for the week to come. A penciled draft of her message says in part:

A. De Segni Collection which goes on sale Wednesday [the 27th] has some extra fine things. Their catalogue delayed, will be mailed you Tuesday.

Collection came to San Francisco direct from Italy.

A more polished copy of her message said the items were “much finer than Tolentino’s,” an allusion to March 1923. Morgan’s spelling could be faulty at times; she repeated that the “de Segny” catalogue wasn’t available yet, but it would be ready for her to send to New York on Tuesday—as in February 26.

Oddly, though, that strategic moment would be just one day before the sale started, poised for the coming Wednesday. She must have had express service in mind. Her papers at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, also include a sketchy note. It’s a list she included with the catalogue when it finally went forward on the 26th. Thus did she specify for Hearst what the “really fine things” were. Lot 775, for example, was a “fine big doorway—but you probably have enough of these,” she told him. Big indeed: the item was nearly fifteen feet high and said to be from a church. Moreover, there were at least three lots boasting “Collection of Madame Sarah Bernhardt” as their provenance. But whether Hearst had enough monumental doorways, and whether Madame Bernhardt’s name sounded promising, and, above all, whether he received the catalogue in time is impossible to say. The Morgan Collection at Cal Poly is our best hope with these questions. Subsequent to her note and list of February 26, 1924, there’s nothing else on file with regard to all this, either outgoing from her or incoming from Hearst. Nor is there any mention of it in her Pacific Coast

Register, the inventory she kept for his sake. Edward Curtis, meanwhile—one wonders if he and Hearst ever met—kept running ads while Signor di Segni's sale unfolded. One appeared on Thursday the 28th, the second day of the auction. It assured the public that 575 Sutter was where people could find "The Grandest and Most Extensive Collection of Italian and French Art Furnishings Ever Dispersed in This City."

How true that claim was we may never know.

It was like old-home week for Hearst in New York as 1924 progressed. In late March, a month after the Adolfo di Segni sale at the Curtis rooms, the AAA offered yet another Italian sale, courtesy of Joseph Dabissi, his third outing at that house. Dabissi, the catalogue said, would be "shortly returning to Italy to continue his activities in Florence," as if he'd never be seen in Manhattan again. In truth he had five more auctions to go, through 1928; all would be held at the AAA—except for one that's far off the charts, thanks to its having been held in Los Angeles in 1927, astoundingly enough. The Manhattan hype and operatics aside, Dabissi, though a better-than-average importer and dealer, was outclassed at this earlier point in 1924 by Raoul Tolentino. The Chevalier had bid San Francisco a lasting adieu and was back at the American with a big sale in April, one that caught Hearst's eye. It was much to San Simeon's benefit once more. Plus on the Spanish side, there was an ample showing by Raimundo Ruiz at Clarke's in May, comprising 914 lots to Tolentino's recent 954.

Some of those latest Tolentino items, class of 1924, were charter members of what can be called the Twelve Thousand Club. That is, the things had accrued some three thousand miles in their initial trip from Europe to New York, another three thousand in heading west for the Curtis event of 1923, three thousand more in going back to New York (certain items hadn't sold in San Francisco)—and a last three thousand miles in being westbound a second time, Hearst *finally* having bought them for San Simeon or other California settings. Few other things he

gathered had quite that distinction, that much of a zigzagging track record. There were plenty that would later gain Nine Thousand status, as in Europe to New York to California and back to New York again. All told it makes the Twelve Thousand Club a special case. For certain Asian objects, however, a Thirteen Thousand status awaited them, as in Hong Kong to San Francisco to New York and then a doubling-back to San Simeon—or a virtual Twenty Thousand distinction if Europe also got involved. But that’s another story . . .

An unusual printed item—more like a great rarity—bears the date September 1, 1924. Could what follows hearken back in part to Adolfo di Segni, the recent Curtis Studio consignor from Rome? Perhaps. With Edward Curtis one always has to be ready for surprises. In the short-lived *For Art’s Sake*, a newsletter published bi-monthly in Los Angeles, a brief notice appeared under “Curtis Studios Change Hands.” That plural form was repeated as below:

The Curtis Studios, on Figueroa Street, [has] become the Di Segni-Meyer Studios of 640 South Figueroa Street [downtown]. Interesting to note is that besides their antiques they are now conducting an art gallery in charge of Frank J. Richards of Santa Barbara.

In the new “International Salon” now hangs the work of Adolph Brougier [1844-1934], a well-known “old school” painter.

Many questions are hereby raised. In order of their appearance, the plural Curtis Studios, if faithfully rendered in *For Art’s Sake*, was a form used by H. Taylor Curtis a decade later in San Francisco. We’ll be seeing evidence of that further on. After relocating to the Southland in the early 1920s, that older son of Colonel Curtis became aligned with a Los Angeles auctioneer of good repute, A. H. Weil; one or perhaps both of those criers (H. Taylor and Weil) did business under a little-known shingle, the Los Angeles Art Sales Association. Perhaps one or both men had some tie-in with the local entity, the gallery called Curtis Studios in 1924 by the local newsletter. The patriarch himself, the Colonel, had some early ties to Los Angeles. We saw back in Part II that

he touted a sale on Spring Street in 1910, an auction he hoped would gain some Bay Area patronage. Later, in 1922, the Colonel advertised what figured as a southern Curtis Studio, a branch on 421 S. Western Avenue, near Windsor Square. Downtown's 640 S. Figueroa, on the corner of Wilshire Boulevard, post-dated that branch. As for "Di Segni," how much of a coincidence could *that* be, so closely on the heels of Signor Adolfo's presence at Curtis Studio up north? The correct form is Meyer and di Segni, a business further identified in a period photo of its Spanish Baroque entrance as a "Fine Arts Gallery."

The Meyer and di Segni firm appears to have been short-lived. A standard Google search will yield one item—one only, dating from 1924—in which that company "provided the antique table and benches" for a theater production, a reference that leads to the impresario Gilmor Brown and the Pasadena Playhouse.

All of these details are, as usual, on the obscure side—very much below-radar, as the latter-day saying goes. Newspaper files, with their advertisements and sporadic notices, are the best means of shedding more light. For now, pending more research, at least there's no confusing the Curtis "antiques" activity in 1924 with the efforts of the closely named Curtis (the shadow-catching photographer). The often wayward Edward S. Curtis sought to establish himself in Los Angeles after World War I, through one of his daughters and a small gallery she managed in the Biltmore Hotel. That was further on in the twenties, though, about 1927.

Finally, the reference in *For Art's Sake* to Frank J. Richards of Santa Barbara brings H. Taylor Curtis to mind once more. He tried that city briefly after leaving San Francisco in 1921 and after first being in Los Angeles, mid-1920s period, when he and A. H. Weil interacted. H. Taylor's one son, Taylor Curtis, would later spend much of his life in Santa Barbara after a fleeting attempt at auctioneering. H. Taylor Curtis also left pronounced traces in Pasadena in 1925 and in San Diego in 1926 and '27.

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**XI** BUT WHAT ABOUT Edward Curtis and Curtis Studio—and their main locale, San Francisco? What transpired after the 1923-24 season ran its course? What else is there to tell? With regard to W. R. Hearst or Julia Morgan or San Simeon, frustratingly little. No further entries of “Curtis Studio, S.F.” appeared in the P C Register that Morgan’s office was maintaining. And never again did her correspondence mention the auction house on Sutter Street that bore that name. However, the plural version Curtis Studios *did* appear in her files on what Hearst was buying. That was nearly a decade later, in 1933, in reference to the Colonel’s older son, H. Taylor Curtis. We caught a quick glimpse in Part IV of what prompted that variant “Studios” entry (a Gump’s sale). We’ll encounter that date and H. Taylor’s name again several pages ahead.

The year 1924 was noteworthy just the same. It saw Hearst quitting New York in favor of Los Angeles as his main address, with Marion Davies in tow—the premier, still-youthful veteran of his Cosmopolitan Productions, to the tune of sixteen often-lavish films through 1923. There’d be several more for her to come.

Apart from the Curtis Studio connection (the singular form, as in Edward Curtis), Hearst’s collecting is richly traceable from 1924 through the rest of the twenties, and well into the thirties too. New York sources and their opposites overseas were always on tap for “the Chief.” Concerning the San Francisco market, sporadic purchases by him from the S. & G. Gump Company stand out in his coverage of that western arena; for instance, he got a life-sized figure of Venus by the Russian sculptor Boris Lovet-Lorski from that firm in 1935, cited by Carol Green Wilson in *Gump’s Treasure Trade*. At an unrecorded date Hearst also bought two doorways, gilded and polychromed and thus suited for San Simeon; these came from a well-known but, for him, atypical source: the City of Paris department store at the corner of

Union Square. An auction-room moment—one of two that were closely spaced for him in San Francisco in 1933—had him buying some Early American tables from Joseph Basch’s house. That’s when the Chief was starting a new project at Wyntoon, his variation on San Simeon in northern California. There the items from the Basch sale went, and there they’ve stayed.

By then, by the summer of 1933, Edward Curtis was nearly six years gone. He’d died in December 1927, half a year after Henry Huntington of San Marino had done the same. A car had struck the Colonel as a pedestrian in Belmont, a town just south of San Francisco. His obituary in the *Chronicle* said he’d been retired since 1922. He surely hadn’t been quiet for that long. No, he remained active at Curtis Studio until the end of 1926, when he conducted the Fernande de Conde sale; in fact, the Colonel was still active into 1927, at age seventy-nine. In Fernande de Conde’s case, that veteran importer-consignor drew upon his Chateau de Biarge in France for his round on Sutter Street. He would soon be in Hollywood, in late January 1927. The Monsieur would be offering similar French and Flemish works at The Hall of Art Studios, a commodious space on North Highland Avenue used by the roving Los Angeles crier A. H. Weil (mostly a “general” auctioneer, as Edward Curtis used to identify himself, and earlier in the twenties a colleague of H. Taylor Curtis). So Curtis-like—as in Colonel Edward—was that dimly known episode at The Hall in 1927 that its catalogue begs to be quoted. From the foreword:

The appearance of the fine collection for disposal on the Los Angeles market, and not the New York market, comes as a great surprise, and we can proudly say that never before has the scope and importance of this collection been surpassed. It is hoped that this sale will receive the consideration it deserves, for if we can absorb it here, it will mean much toward the rapid establishment of an art center in Western America. . . .

Such are a few of the numerous works of art contained in this collection, which are being submitted to the Los Angeles public with earnest confidence and anticipation of their approval.

Mind you, this was 1927, not 1917. A city long lacking in “cultural consciousness,” Los Angeles was supposed to be getting art-friendly. New wealth had been accruing for some time, for more than a decade so far as the vibrant film industry went. In fact, a solid dealing and decorating firm, Cannell & Chaffin, dated from that earlier year, 1917, and had been flourishing ever since. In its best moments C & C was a Southland answer to Vickery’s in San Francisco and, at its very best, to S. & G. Gump’s. Yet many potential art buyers around Los Angeles were still “developing sophistication,” as Earl Stendahl’s biographer has noted. In regard to Monsieur Conde’s booking at The Hall of Art Studios in 1927, it was one of a few such ventures during these Coolidge-to-Hoover years by the auctioneer Weil, a man headquartered at Seventh and Spring downtown. He staged an unknown though evidently small number of sales at The Hall of Art out in Hollywood; they date from before and shortly after the Great Crash of ’29. Archival vestiges of those upscale, celebrity events—like the handsome Fernande de Conde “Historic Treasures” catalogue—are as seldom seen as the super-scarce Cattadori pamphlet from Curtis Studio in 1922.

Before touching on the Rudolph Valentino sale under the same Weil-Hall of Art auspices in December 1926, some further words are called for from the Fernande Conde catalogue. If Edward Curtis himself didn’t write what appears below for the Monsieur’s event early in 1927, he or whoever wrote the Tolentino foreword of 1923 should have howled “plagiarism!” from clear up on Sutter Street. Besides, coincidentally or not, Fernande de Conde’s stock bore many resemblances to the Italian-and-French inventory that Adolfo Alberto di Segni had brought to San Francisco three years earlier, in 1924:

Unfortunately for future collectors, the supply in Europe of authentic or original examples of art is rapidly becoming exhausted. Even now, for many articles, the prospective buyer arrives just ten years too late. This scarcity of genuine examples of art in Europe can be attested to by buyers of knowledge and experience who have traveled in Europe during the last year or so. . . . When one searches Europe today for important specimens of art they find the harvest surprisingly meager.

That second sentence, starting with “Even now,” had appeared in Tolentino’s behalf—verbatim at that—in San Francisco four years before, as though it were now in suspended animation in 1927, oblivious of real time. Repetition was either fair game or the Colonel was involved with A. H. Weil at this juncture in Hollywood’s past, as a silent partner, an advisor, or perhaps as the father of H. Taylor Curtis, once a colleague of Weil’s. But we mustn’t let obscurity, that constant historical curse, cloud our aesthetic judgment. The Fernande de Conde sale at The Hall of Art Studios in 1927 was a quality showing, an outing of genuine excellence spread over 908 lots; indeed, its catalogue cost three dollars to the Rudolph Valentino’s two (as though \$40 today in the Monsieur’s case). That more expensive catalogue recalled the one issued by Silo’s in 1915 for the Vicomtesse Aigneaux sale, a stylish event that counted then as one of the first moments in behalf of French art and furnishings for the New York market.

As with the pamphlet for the Cattadori sale at Curtis in 1922, the Fernande de Conde catalogue of five years later—that rare keepsake-to-be of 1927—ignored some New York traditions. It left the daily sessions unspecified, for example. There must have been a few of them (they began on a Tuesday at an unnamed hour). Likewise a far cry from the New York mode, A. H. Weil opened the sale not with some minor warm-ups or a bit of chumming but by presenting a truly grand item, the kind typically saved for the heat of battle, when the bidders reached full fighting trim. Lot 1 warranted two pages in the catalogue, an ormolu bronze cabinet “given by Louis XVI, King of France, to a Prin-

cess of Conde as a wedding gift.” The spectacle didn’t stop there. The tapestries—lesser versions often being true of auction fare, even at the mighty AAA—were of impressive heirloom quality, rightly said to be destined for “public museums and permanent galleries.” The best of those weavings could have held their own against the Retrospective Loan Exhibition in San Francisco in 1922. Many of the furnishings and other things at stake were of equal quality.

More surprising, though, certain de Conde lots in 1927 were recycles from a Curtis Studio “De Luxe” in San Francisco, none other than the Marie De Besiade sale that Colonel Edward had held as far back as 1922. The standout in this startling way was the Napoleonic table service; all 276 of its silver pieces remained intact from before. What was afoot? Who besides Weil—the wily Weil, he seemed to be—was calling the shots? Where was a collector of W. R. Hearst’s stature, long-established Southlander that he was?

The Chief devoted much of his bidding in January 1927 to sales like the Alphonse Kann and the Conde de las Almenas at the American in New York, and also to the Luigi Grassi at the same house, events not to be shirked (and ones that San Simeon’s allure still depends on). And soon, likewise in the early part of 1927, there’d be another Elia Volpi sale at the AAA, taking up in essence where that consignor left off with his historic Davanzati consignments during World War I. In this later part of the twenties Hearst had also done a recent New York turn, absentee style from California, regarding the Raoul Tolentino and the Raimundo Ruiz sales in December 1926; both were also held at the AAA. And yet with the Rudolph Valentino that same month at The Hall of Art in Hollywood, and with the Fernande de Conde shortly thereafter, also staged at The Hall, Hearst seemed to be a no-show, whether in person or by proxy. Never mind that Valentino had bought several things at the Tolentino sales and other Italian dispersals in New York—or that a certain cigarette tray of Valentino’s was thought to be “a gift from the Chevalier Raoul Tolentino of Rome.” The Shiek’s sale of 1926

also included some items from Charles of London, another source well known to Hearst. All the same, this entire December-January period at the turn of 1927 is so little known, so off the historical charts that we may long be *ignorante*. If we've been in the dark for this many years already, why not for several more?

The only other sales conducted by A. H. Weil at The Hall of Art Studios and handily on record—after Monsieur de Conde's presence there that winter—date from later in 1927 and from an isolated moment in 1931, almost four years later. This leaves the Rudolph Valentino, in the final days of 1926, as the shining moment in Hall of Art history, its rousing sessions prompted by the Shiek's death a few months before. Based on whatever logic, a second Valentino sale took place in San Francisco as soon as February of '27; the house that hosted it was none other than The Curtis Studio at 575 Sutter. The daily ads for that booking were kingly. They ran up front in the city's papers, not as common insertions in the back. Oddly, no auctioneer was named in the expensive publicity (the crier's name normally appeared). But during the week right after the Valentino sale at Curtis, that house's latest bookings proved to include the familiar "Edw. Curtis, auctioneer." The old man was still alive and well, still hawking his wares. Unlike many a sale at Curtis Studio or elsewhere in town, the Rudolph Valentino garnered some lively press. "Auction Sale of Valentino Art Objects Opened Here." Thus ran the *Chronicle's* coverage on February 9. The report was sobering, a throwback to Helen Dare's column of 1913 and its "Quakers at a meeting." Now, more than a dozen years later in high-flying 1927, San Franciscans could read about the "subdued murmur of voices mingled with the keen-eyed auctioneer's decisive tones."

If that commanding person was anyone but Edward Curtis, the *Chronicle* didn't give his name. The Valentino administrator, S. George Ullman, was identified as "conducting the sale." That was misleading; Ullman surely didn't cry the lots and rap the gavel. More important

were that executor's own words as reported the next day, February 10, 1927, under "Rudy Fans Crowd Sale for Souvenirs of Favorite." Ullman cited the "subdued attitude" of the San Francisco audience, a roomful of bidders "less demonstrative than those down South." He also said they were "more like New York people." So much for the Roaring Twenties on a Wednesday afternoon—in a year better known for antics and confetti than 1922 had ever been, half a decade prior when the Cattadoris consigned their antique laces and more somber goods.

As for Ullman's allusions to the first Valentino sale, the one held in Hollywood at The Hall of Art during the Christmas season of 1926, the account given months later by *Picture-Play* magazine struck a vivid chord:

When the doors of the studio were at last opened [on Tuesday, December 14], at one forty-five, policemen were almost swept off their feet as the women surged into the building. The thousand chairs were quickly filled.

"That's all!" a police sergeant ordered.

Still they came. The crowd gathered in the doorway, blocked the sidewalk, pushed out into the street. Women stood with their faces pressed against the windows, while others strained to hear the voice of the auctioneer [Weil] as the precious possessions of Valentino were put up for sale. . . .

Far into the evening of that first day, the auctioneer's voice droned over the late star's precious belongings.

It was "the largest individual sale ever held in Hollywood over a screen star's effects," *Picture-Play* said in closing. Weeks before the magazine did so—its feature "When Rudy's Belongings Were Sold" finally appeared in April 1927—the scene had shifted to Sutter Street in San Francisco, as recounted above, to Curtis Studio as presided over by Colonel Edward himself, the aging but still-commanding lord of auctioneers' row.

Hoping not to be outdone at that point early in February 1927, Joseph Basch's rooms on Sutter countered with the "Most Stupendous Collection of Persian and Chinese Carpets Ever Brought to Our City," a sale in which buyers should "be prepared to find unmerciful reductions in fine rugs." Same old, same old: there truly *was* nothing new under the sun, despite the Shiek's allure on the ever-dueling row. Even then, The Curtis Studio disclosed that its Valentino haul had been "augmented by other valuable artistic properties from various consignors and estates." Read: fluff and padding, the leftovers or unsold things from December of '26 that George Ullman had brought up from Hollywood being insufficient—or perhaps being unfit to withstand the weeklong sessions.

A year before the Valentino show descended on Sutter row in 1927, Edward Curtis had run a typically bold ad. That was on March 3, 1926. It looked exactly like those from earlier in the twenties, when the Colonel was at his pulsating peak (he was said to be worth \$100,000 when he died, "a considerable fortune" for the era). "The Art of China and Japan," the notice blared. A man named Y. Nakamura was the consignor, an "Eminent Japanese Scholar and Connoisseur" whose items had been gathered "Over a Period of Fifty Years"—the likes of "Rare Brocades, Tapestries, Embroideries, Wall Hangings, Spanish Shawls," and much more. It was as if New York's Kano Oshima had gone west instead of focusing on the AAA; Oshima's last sale there was in March 1926 as well, closely parallel to the Nakamura in San Francisco. Of course Asian art had a perennial, time-honored following in the Colonel's city, from back when the Australian dealer George Turner Marsh was in his prime and kept a gallery "Under Palace Hotel," as Marsh termed his street-level space. Dating from as early as 1876, the same year as the great Centennial in Philadelphia, his Japanese Art Repository "was probably the first [business] of its kind in the United States"; so recounted a later profile of that company. Edward Curtis, at any rate, booked some Asian sales over the years, much as his son H.

Taylor likewise did while in San Francisco. Basch's house also had at least one "Oriental" consignment to its credit, perhaps several more, the same as with the competition.

The Colonel's older son was still in the Southland in 1926. He'd been there for the past five years. Of those dates, 1924 is the one that stands out in a probing of H. Taylor's activities in that period—the same date we saw in Part X when the name Meyer and di Segni cropped up. For example, in June 1924 a premises sale was held near Lafayette Park, west of downtown, through the Los Angeles Art Sales Association; H. Taylor Curtis was named as the sole crier. A subsequent sale, held in November that year, named H. Taylor and A. H. Weil jointly. In that same part of 1924, H. Taylor's name was cited alone for the account of "Mrs. Violet Tropp of San Francisco." This was another premises affair, held in the heart of Hollywood on Franklin Avenue, close to where The Hall of Art Studios would later stand on North Highland. The Tropp sale promised "Magnificent Furnishings" that had been "Collected in Europe," together with things "from Gump & Co. of San Francisco and other Noted Art Dealers"—for which their owner had paid \$30,000 and which would be sold in a single morning session. Not the most prestigious timing as auction rhythms went: one or two p.m. would have been a good deal more chic and fashionable, at least by New York or San Francisco standards.

The Colonel's younger son, Paul, had stuck with the auctioneering life in the bay city. By the first part of 1927 he finally parted with his father and opened a salesroom on nearby Geary Street; there he did business simply as Paul Curtis. The musical-chairs routine held sway, much as it had for the Colonel at times and for Paul's more dynamic brother. Thus in 1928 did the ads disclose a newly named Curtis Galleries, with Paul back on Sutter Street. He sought book sales as much as art sales. In June of that year he sold the library of E. L. G. Steele, a man who'd once helped Ambrose Bierce get published when his chances were poor. Right before that sale, Paul Curtis sold Early

American items from “Down-Peninsula,” said his notices. A year later, in June 1929, came a “Book Auction Extraordinary” in two sessions, held at the same address on Sutter where Paul had been of late. Robert Cowan, the frowning bibliographer, described most of the books as being “of ordinary variety and frequent occurrence.” He cited a facsimile of a Bret Harte poem, “The Heathen Chinee,” for having brought the best price the Curtis Galleries could then muster, in Cowan’s view a tepid \$22.50 (despite its equivalence today of close to \$300).

It’s more important at this late-twenties juncture to find that Paul Curtis was still active. In fact, at this mid-point in 1929 he was wearing two hats. He got retained to stage a pre-sale exhibition at Butterfield Studios for the Jules Ratzkowski Collection; there may have been other pre-sales like it requiring Paul’s skills. From sometime in 1927, post-Rudolph Valentino, Butterfield’s was occupying the desirable 575 building on Sutter Street, the same space where Edward Curtis held forth from 1919 until earlier in 1927. Butterfield’s began calling itself “The Finest Gallery West of New York.” To thicken the plot, Butterfield’s was now jointly named Curtis Studio as part of its new presence at 575 Sutter.

But with change being constant, Butterfield’s reverted in 1928 to its own name alone, well before the Ratzkowski sale in 1929. That house described Jules Ratzkowski as an “eminent connoisseur,” a dealer who was “retiring from the field and returning to France.” Other French consignors were included in the booking; their objects and furnishings had arrived in San Francisco from abroad to pad the list. Ratzkowski’s past was atypical. In 1915 he’d consigned a sale in Ottawa, Quebec. He did the same at the Anderson Galleries in 1916, his only traceable presence in the New York salesrooms. Much later, as recently as 1928, he’d been active with auctions in Australia that featured French art. His experiences in Canada and in much less-familiar places like Sydney and Adelaide (by the usual New York-dominated norms) are reminiscent of Sidky Bey and the Oriental carpets he sent to San

Francisco in 1911, preceded by Bey's appearances in Montreal and Winnipeg. The connoisseur Fernande de Conde had a globe-trotting résumé much like Jules Ratzkowski's. His also included Australia, a place with decades-old, trans-Pacific ties to San Francisco.

The Ratzkowski sale at Butterfield's in 1929 was drawn out over extra days, beyond the extension of the Tolentino sale at Curtis Studio in 1923. More than a week after the first session of the Ratzkowski, Butterfield's announced a final two sessions, to be held that very afternoon and evening. Besides Fred R. Butterfield as crier—son of the founding William Butterfield—Paul Curtis was named as fellow auctioneer in closing things out. Paul would be back in his own Curtis Galleries rostrum the next day for the sake of a defunct local trader in Chinese art, the Poo Jan Co.

Paul was about to vanish from the San Francisco annals, a man not quite forty. There's no further sign of him as of the 1929-30 season. Many other auction hopefuls had preceded him in the bay city; several others would follow. The Great Crash on Wall Street in October may have been a decisive factor. He headed south, it seems. And then his name turned up in a most unexpected way—almost a Curtisian way, if such a term is fitting. To wit: in May 1931, A. H. Weil (the same wily Weil as before) held a sale at The Hall of Art (misspelling it Hall of Arts, as many others have—unless the name had actually changed). Weil advertised the event as a "Public Auction," presented "Under Direction of Mr. Paul E. Curtis."

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**XII** WITH EYES AGAIN on 1927, we should note that the brief Butterfield-Curtis merger hosted a sale that year recalling the Nakamura of 1926 under Edward Curtis. In both cases these were events like those that Kano Oshima and other Asian specialists were known for in the east. In this later instance the Butterfield-Curtis firm

on Sutter Street acted in behalf of George Hosokawa, trumpeting his consignment as “The Most Important Sale of Fine Arts Held in This City in Many Years.” Hosokawa would be back much later for another round at Butterfield’s, staged in 1934, by then an auction house several blocks west on Sutter Street (and one that had long since abandoned the name Curtis Studio). Butterfield’s announced its “New Location” in ’34 at 1244 Sutter (a former Basch Co. address) while saying that Hosokawa had been gathering things in the Far East “over a period of two years.” But try finding that Asian importer’s name in Harold Lancour’s *American Art Auction Catalogues*. It doesn’t exist. Not a hint, not a clue. Nonetheless, life in the far western world of public sales and private collecting had been going on, no matter the exact timing or other specifics, and with or without the east’s recognition of these things in the standard annals—which contain so little of the foregoing kind.

How best to appraise, then, what San Franciscans beheld on a Saturday back in December 1927, the very month Edward Curtis died? He’d recently retired, true—at long last. Yet his old rivals on Sutter Street were as active as ever. One of them, Joseph Basch, had been around for years. Events like “Greatest Upholstered Furniture Sale Ever Held in the West” had often been his speed. That example was from 1912, when “Nearly 20 Carloads” were boringly dispersed, its notice appearing next to “58 Horses and Mares,” among other criers’ display ads. Nonetheless, in 1916 Basch hammered down Prince Mohamed Kaby’s collection of rugs and carpets within the Concert Room of the Palace Hotel. So he had his high moments now and then, in spite of the drudgery. Much earlier, in the late 1800s, an auctioneer named S. Basch appeared in the local papers; presumably he was Joseph Basch’s father or someone closely related. The auctioneering life seemed deep-seated, something handed down in the younger man’s case.

And thus as of 1927, did a mostly second-stringer like Basch have enough clout, enough means and charisma to gather a collection in Europe—of choice and stylish goods befitting those heady times? He must have, in spite of his complete absence from the Lancour bible of 1944.

In a potent, highly graphic ad, the very kind Edward Curtis used to run, the Basch Co. spoke from 1244 Sutter (the later Butterfield space) of an “Important Sale of a Superb Collection,” one consisting of “Antique and Decorative French, Italian and Spanish Furniture and Works of Art, Tapestries, Brocades, etc.” The things had “just arrived from the art centers of Europe” and would be sold in three sessions—Monday through Wednesday, December 5-7, 1927—at two o’clock each day (often the sign of a more prestigious sale, a cut above those held at ten or eleven in the morning, as noted before). The ad further said:

This concluding sale of the year offers the last arrivals of the valuable collection recently selected abroad by Mr. Joseph Basch. We again want to impress upon our clients the difficulty of securing art objects of the highest order in Europe, and it was with much difficulty and labor that we were able to secure what we consider an assemblage of rare and interesting objects.

How much truth, how much depth was there to what the House of Basch was claiming? What would A. Livingston Gump, the head of the famous company on Post Street, have thought? Or seasoned importers like Pietro Cattadori or Raoul Tolentino (or even the now-defunct Leone Ricci) had such a pitch reached that far? And how would the picky, unpredictable Hearst have reacted? With a frown, a grin, perhaps a dismissive wave of the hand? It can’t be known without records—of the kind so sorely lacking on the history of the San Francisco market. In any case, the Basch notice got down to serious business. The transcription that follows is true to the original:

The collection includes Gothic, Aubusson and Flemish Tapestries, Savonnerie Carpets, Forged Iron Garden and Automobile Gates, Torchères, Balconies, Candelabra, Grills, Andirons, Lanterns, lovely Old Spanish Tables, Desks, Refectory Tables, Benches, Italian Walnut Credenzas, Priedieu, Love Seat covered in old green damask, Sgabello type Chairs, many types low chairs, important Doors from old churches and castles, Choir Stalls, Tables of beautiful proportion, some with wrought iron stretchers; Venetian Painted Bed with commodes to match, Venetian Armchairs.

Good heavens. A veritable Louvre in the making! Mr. Basch had gone cultural; no question. Here was everything a place like San Simeon could ever need. Or was that in fact so? Were these bona fide treasures? Or were they just dregs, akin to the “shiploads of junk imported from Europe” that the withering Upton Sinclair would sneer at in 1935, while lampooning Hearst, Miss Davies, and their Enchanted Hill? Chances are, an assessment like Sinclair’s was spot-on for some of the Basch trove of 1927, if not for the entire load. The retailing and decorating firm in Los Angeles mentioned in Part XI—Cannell & Chaffin—had made a similar foray overseas in 1925, unwisely splurging on a Spanish pile called Granada Castle. Hearst, a good customer, came to the grateful aid of that otherwise prudent company, mostly in search of architectural items that, by San Simeon’s standards, proved of lower rank than what other purveyors were steering his and Julia Morgan’s way (thus assuring extra work for the skilled craftsmen she used). But Hearst did nothing of the kind for Joseph Basch in 1927 with this jumble of God-knows-what. The big December ad finally concluded:

The French furniture is very lovely, featuring an Aubusson Drawing Room Suite, an antique gold Drawing Room Suite that is a gem, many Marquetry Commodes, Buhl Cabinets and Tables that are very fine, many models Chairs, both antique and modern; a very handsome Burl Walnut Louis XV Table with drop leaves, Sewing Tables, Bookcases, Andirons, three-fold Painted Screen, exquisite Dresden Plates, many Majolicas in plaques, Candlesticks, Plates, Cups, etc.; a few Brocades,

Copes, etc.; very unusual set of Empire Chairs inlaid with bronze, Girandoles, Mirrors in Florentine, Venetian and French type, Crystal Fixtures, four lovely Treumeau [columns], Normandie Quilts and many, many other things of value.

Oh, but to see the catalogue of these rarities, French or other kinds, sewing tables and all. Alas, there *wasn't* a catalogue. Just the ads, the daily ads, akin to what Kemp & Ball had done for the William Selig sale in 1923. "Every piece [sold] by request," the Basch notice said in signing off. Plus the blunt disclaimer: "No catalogue." Basch's wasn't alone on that score. Even in New York at least one of the secondary houses held sessions for which "no catalogue" was the stated rule. As for once-sacred Sunday in San Francisco: not any longer, not at Basch's anyway. The imported collection would be available for viewing that day throughout the afternoon, as it had been on Saturday, right before the first session of selling began on Monday.

That extravaganza on Sutter Street must have met with success, Hearst or no Hearst, catalogue or none. And forget having a real consignor. It was reminiscent of Edward Curtis's buying trip to Paris after the great quake and fire. So what if classic, reputable auctioneering called for an impartial and disinterested house, a midwife for the owner of record, whether that party was named or not? The Basch venture in 1927 was old-style, brass-knuckles action, like something out of J. D. Borthwick's *Three Years in California*. The timid or skeptical needn't watch. The Colonel himself, renowned for his daring bet in the Fitzsimmons-Corbett heavyweight boxing match, fought in Nevada in 1897, would have nodded approvingly. These had often been his kind of manly stakes, at least in the dreamy past.

Still on a solid roll, the Basch Co. was back at it in June 1928 with another nameless sale, perfectly suiting the late part of that decade in San Francisco, when things were at their most spirited, their most upbeat and headstrong before Wall Street laid an egg (as *Variety* famously headlined it)—a sale resembling the Jules Ratzkowski at

Butterfield's in 1929 itself. A typically rousing ad for the 1928 event was worded as if for a circus poster:

The greatest exposition of European Decorative Furniture and Objects of Art attempted in our city for a long time. Many of the pieces were personally selected by Mr. Basch in his travels abroad and obtained through channels not open to most dealers or tourists.

Those greased skids, those inside connections bring Carol Green Wilson's book to mind again, with her accounts of how the Gump's buyers had dues to pay and customs to learn before the best wares would be shown them, both in Asia and in Europe. The thought of someone like Joseph Basch quickly mastering those arcane rules is hard to imagine; instead, might he not have been the proverbial rube, a fish out of accustomed waters? Mixed metaphors aside, he'd picked a good crier for the coming sale. Mr. Basch wouldn't be wielding the hammer this time. A man named C. Chiosso (he sounded enticingly foreign) would be at the rostrum.

Would there be a catalogue? The ad didn't specify. Probably not. Of greater moment, Basch's firm would be holding court for the sale at 314 Sutter Street (within the World Affairs Center building), an address "especially secured for the occasion," much as A. H. Weil had used The Hall of Art Studios for his headliner sales down south. So typically, that very space for Basch's at 314 Sutter was once home to the old Curtis Studio under Colonel Edward Curtis, from back in 1914 through 1919.

More barking, more horn blowing by San Francisco's hopeful auctioneers can be cited for 1928—even in regard to a minor house on Mission Street. The bottom-feeding H. Roth & Sons didn't bother to recite consignment details any more than Joseph Basch's had. Improbably, Roth's had been entrusted in June that year with "the princely possessions of an oil magnate," along with "importations of Italian and French antiques." A sale of auto tires and radio equipment, an example

from the previous year, 1927, was far more typical of Roth & Sons. Hear ye, hear ye! Come one, come all was the snake-oil cry, regardless of the menu. *Caveat emptor* . . .

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**XIII** FOR THOSE IN THE CITY who preferred their culture in calmer doses, decorum had by no means gone missing, not with high moments like the tapestries show of 1922 to the city's credit. Besides, Prohibition had dominated for even longer—theoretically. The auctioneers could tout and bluster. They always had; they always would. Cooler heads, and no doubt fairly sober ones, prevailed a few miles away, at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. There on Inspiration Point in Lincoln Park, west of downtown San Francisco, Carl W. Hamilton of New York had come to town in 1927. He'd done so with what was unquestionably a fine collection in tow, put on altruistic exhibition the same as the tapestries had been, not offered for gainful sale. The Hamilton show lasted two months, September 1 to November 1. (In the midst of it Babe Ruth hit his sixtieth homer during that '27 season in Yankee Stadium; and then a week later the Al Jolson movie *The Jazz Singer* premiered nearby to a spellbound public.) In quiet contrast to those famous turns, a detailed booklet exists on the Carl Hamilton exhibit, easier to find than anything from The Curtis Studio. Entitled *Catalogue of a Group of "Old Masters," Renaissance Italian Furniture, Majolica Vases and Other Art Objects*, its seventy pages are like a Cattadori or Tolentino catalogue in miniature but with an intricate text (recalling the Anderson Galleries at its most bookish, Robert Cowan notwithstanding). Again, though, the Hamilton items were to be gazed at and admired, not fought over in Fifth Avenue or Sutter Street style, not saluted with Gatsby-like high jinks.

A well-heeled industrialist in his early forties, Carl Hamilton had been collecting on an exalted level since the 1910s. His name crops up amid New York's vibrant Italian sales—trend-setting auctions like the

Emil Pares and the Leone Ricci, both of 1915; the Volpi-Davanzatti of 1916; the Volpi again of 1917; and of course the Bardini of 1918. Hamilton covered those bases and more. He also bought from leading dealers, such as Duveen Brothers, a company name mostly synonymous with Joseph Duveen. The result was a bounty of gilt-edged provenances, Italian Renaissance being Hamilton's greatest passion, his strongest suit. Such wares and furnishings, plus choice paintings, are what he brought to San Francisco in 1927. What he offered and what Joseph Basch had "recently selected abroad" were frankly from different worlds. Hamilton's pedigrees included J. Pierpont Morgan (d. 1913), good for some rare Italian maiolica (the right spelling). One of the Hamilton paintings had been Bernard Berenson's, another Jerome Bonaparte's; two more had been shown in Manchester, England, in 1857 at the Art Treasures Exhibition, an event preceding Hearst's birth by six years and the Hamilton show by seventy. The Manchester Exhibition was an early landmark in art history that only now, in the twenty-first century, is getting its proper due.

Late in 1925 Hamilton had mounted a show similar to his newer outing in San Francisco. He'd done so closer to home, for the Montclair Art Museum in New Jersey; about that same time he did likewise in Toronto, Canada. In Montclair's case another petite catalogue resulted. Its foreword said:

The collection of which the present exhibition forms a part was made by Mr. Hamilton during the past twelve years [since about 1913] and with the exception of a few of the pictures has never before been shown publicly. Many of the pictures formerly were part of the most celebrated European collections. The furniture came from the famous Davanzati Palace and the Bardine [Bardini] collections in Florence.

True enough, despite the implication that Hamilton had done his buying abroad. He certainly had at times. Yet the auction rooms and dealers' galleries in New York were his usual sources. The San Francisco catalogue of 1927 took a different tack, saying nothing in its pref-

ace about Hamilton's modes of acquisition. Nonetheless, the first few lines were well stated:

The Italian Renaissance was an epoch-making development in the world of art as well as an event of great importance in the history of human intellect. Architecture, sculpture, and painting all felt the new impulse, and flowered into masterpieces which had not been equalled since the days of classical Greece.

Such thoughts may have gone without saying to certain San Franciscans, to those who'd traveled or studied, or both—people sharp enough to know that the Basch Company's latest promotion was apt to be doubtful. Besides, there'd been the great fair of 1915, fully a dozen years before. But higher attainments took time. So did anything like achieving a consensus in connoisseurship. The Hamilton approach was an acquired taste, gradually obtained. Oft-derided Los Angeles wasn't the only place that was still "developing sophistication." (Indeed, as Malcolm Goldstein dryly said in the context of 1913, New York was a city "that for at least half a century had imagined itself endowed with a degree of sophistication not to be found anywhere else in the United States.") Of the leading books about Italian furniture, duly noted in the second Carl Hamilton catalogue—the one for 1927—all were fairly recent publications. The oldest had appeared in the same year as the AAA's Bardini sale, 1918. Some earlier works had been issued abroad. A majestic, two-volume set like William M. Odom's *History of Italian Furniture* was as current, though, and as definitive as any New York publisher had splurged on thus far. And splurge they did, continuing into the 1920s.

Hamilton had been preceded by San Francisco's own Alma de Bretteville Spreckels. She was the co-founder of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, a woman born in 1881 to Hamilton's 1885; she mounted her own exhibition in 1926, tied to a lasting bestowal (not just a loan like Hamilton's) for the Legion's future. Hence another cata-

logue, likewise a modest one, much worth tracking down today. Simply called *Art Collection* along with stating its patron's name, the Alma Spreckels booklet included these lines:

The existing great debt of gratitude owed by the people of San Francisco and all art lovers of the world to the late Adolph B. Spreckels [d. 1924] and his wife, Alma de Bretteville Spreckels, for their magnificent gift to the city of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, has recently been augmented by an important loan of art objects.

Mrs. Spreckels, who has been for years one of the most discriminating collectors of the beautiful in art, principally that of France and this country, generously has lent her entire collection . . . .

The exhibition consists of paintings, drawings, sculptures, bas-reliefs, glass, pottery, tapestries, textiles, and furniture. The collection occupies the left wing of the Palace [of the Legion of Honor] and Galleries 13 and 14 on the right. Part of the Rodin sculpture [suite] lent by Mrs. Spreckels is also placed in the Tapestry Court and the Vestibule.

The Rodin sculpture? That was a novelty. Its thirty or more examples were a sure departure from what Hamilton and other Renaissance savants had been favoring since the Great War—the very war that had prompted Adolph and Alma Spreckels to act in “memory of the California soldiers who fell upon the field of honor.” Ah, but Auguste Rodin. His presence in San Francisco spelled culture again with a capital C, much as the grand tapestries show had done in 1922. In contrast, this later event dated 1926 was couched in the *avant-garde*. And with Rodin and Mrs. Spreckels in the limelight now, an Inaugural Exposition that had featured their names and had been held at the Legion in 1924-1925 was strongly reinforced. Those twin events had parallels in Los Angeles as well. It was all a far cry at any rate—the Inaugural and its successor—from business as usual on Sutter Street. The Spreckels *Art Collection* catalogue of 1926 had more to tell:

Many of the works of art were selected by Mrs. Spreckels under the guidance of the most eminent art critics in France or of the artists

themselves, all of whom are her great personal friends. The notable group of sculpture[s] by Rodin, selected by the master himself, is the most important assembled outside of the Musee Rodin in Paris.

Edward Curtis had been quick to make claims like that in his years of crying sales—but naturally he had. However, his was a much different purpose, a different search for the good life, the better life. As to the connoisseur Carl Hamilton, some parallels in spirit can be drawn from the Spreckels catalogue:

Mrs. Spreckels' furniture comprises exquisite examples of that epoch of greatest glory in the history of furniture—the eighteenth century. Beautiful little sets of chairs and canapés, one of which belonged to Marie Antoinette, are seen here. There are numerous consoles, jewel cabinets, secretaries, and writing-tables, which were so dear to the hearts of the nobility of that period.

French culture had a long history in San Francisco, as we've already seen. It was a legacy preceding Alma Spreckels by many years. The immortal J. D. Borthwick had set the tone as far back as 1857, in describing certain businesses in the city during the first part of that decade—settings he deliciously called “places of public resort.” They were “decorated in a style of most barbaric splendour,” he said, and were “filled with the costliest French furniture.” Their “luxurious refinement” was in odd contrast to the “appearance and occupations of the people by whom they were frequented.” That in part, and perhaps more than just partly, underscored the French heritage in San Francisco, an uncommon past well known to many latter-day citizens.

But it's a safe bet that much of Joseph's Basch's “very lovely” French furniture in 1927 was of lesser grade than what Mrs. Spreckels had gathered. It may have been Borthwickian. And yet treasures-or-trash questions are of small importance all these decades later. What if a good item, even a real prize, passed through Basch's or another second-tier auction hall, or even through a lesser house? What if the item's provenance were that common? Would its pedigree be tainted?

Would that part of its ancestry matter? This has surely happened in the past and will happen again, for as long as art or books or other fine things are bought and sold. Ponder that: the diamond-in-the-rough that a gallery or salesroom was offering, perhaps in innocence, a piece waiting to be discovered by a spotter or scout or a shrewd dealer—or by a keen-eyed, resourceful collector who wasn't afraid to take chances or think independently.

The Alma Spreckels catalogue of 1926, meanwhile, had more for its Bay Area readers and other aficionados to savor:

The collection of bronzes, paintings and furniture is diversified, and made doubly interesting by the introduction of several small but important groups comprising glass, pottery, and bas-reliefs.

One of those groups featured “Greek Vases Presented by the Queen of Greece.” Hearst was also fond of ancient pottery. He'd been collecting the Greek version since he was in his thirties at least, since the 1890s. Carl Hamilton had also matured as a collector by that age. And thus for Alma Spreckels—a woman of forty-five in 1926—to have done this convincing a job was fully credible, provided the means were at hand. They were, of course, through her wealthy husband, Adolph, who'd left her well off before his recent death.

Far more striking than those Greek objects in the exhibit, more boldly appealing was the Louis XV sedan chair. A photograph of it filled a page in the Spreckels catalogue. Carved, gilded, and painted, the chair was much like a Venetian Doge's example in the first Cattadori sale, the one held in New York in April 1921. Back then that Doge's chair, more than six feet high, was described by the AAA as being “admirably suited for conversion into a telephone booth.” That's what was done by the tall, full-figured Big Alma as she was called, a name implying no disrespect. She put a phone inside her French sedan chair, an ingenious touch for her home on Washington Street in Pacific

Heights; today the regilded chair is on permanent display at the Legion of Honor.

However, no such humor marked the Spreckels catalogue of 1926. It was all seriousness and sobriety, with its long preface closing on this regal note:

It is eminently fitting that these beautiful works of art which Mrs. Spreckels, with great thought and care, has gathered together should be seen in their present setting in the building which the same vision and purpose made possible.

A bit of such drum-rolling was called for. "There are few monuments in history which have sites equal to this." The California Palace of the Legion of Honor stood "in its majesty on a hill," the catalogue also said. Its front matter was written by Cornelia and William Quinton, the couple in charge at Lincoln Park. Their portion of the text went on to say:

On one side far, far below lie the blue waters of the Pacific. In the middle distance [to the north] one sees the Golden Gate. To the right San Francisco, shimmering in the sunlight, has the appearance of an Italian or a Spanish city.

Much the same had been said back in 1915, of course, when the Panama-Pacific Exposition was staged. And a year later, in 1916, French art from the Exposition was shown at the Detroit Museum of Art, accompanied by these dignified, almost holy words in the catalogue that was issued:

Unlike other European countries that have been content to live in the halo of reflected glory of past accomplishment, France has set the pace in art for the modern world for decade after decade. Her art has been vital for three centuries. It is eternally in search of something new. . . .

Undying loyalty to an idea backed by alluring devices of craftsmanship has kept French art ever in the forefront, and [made it] an eternal well-spring from which the world might draw.

Edward Curtis was still at Plum's Old Stand on Sutter Street (his address before he moved to 575) when that introduction was intoned. He may well have agreed implicitly. But he'd never been one to present his thoughts that soberly, with such solemn grace. For her part a younger Alma Spreckels had surely seen the Detroit catalogue of 1916; it may have helped shape her tastes, her passions, her unfolding vision. As for the great fair that was being extolled, it had been meant for the short term only, despite its beauty and grandeur. That spectacle was fleeting, transitory, earmarked for impermanence except for Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts. In contrast, the new Legion of Honor, with its Rodins and other works from Mrs. Spreckels in 1926, was meant for the long haul. The two months that hosted Carl Hamilton's exhibition a year later were also in keeping with that higher purpose.

Indeed, it was a time of higher purposes on other fronts as well. Early in 1927, about when the Rudolph Valentino "souvenirs" appeared at The Curtis Studio, W. R. Hearst made what amounted to a solemn pledge. He put it in writing to Julia Morgan. San Simeon was to be a bona fide museum, his letter said, meaning not just a home, not just an exotic pleasure dome. He'd already touched on that theme in 1925. Now, two years later, he'd given the idea further thought and was restating it for his architect in fuller terms and with deeper conviction; he also said they'd be parting with lesser items, some of them inferior things that had crept into the scheme. Hearst's words in 1927 stand as a credo that his and Morgan's performance at San Simeon needs to be judged by today, almost a century later. They succeeded hugely in many respects but fell somewhat short in others. Ultimately, they were only human, mortals to the end.

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## **XIV**

PROPHETIC IT MAY have been that Edward Curtis died as 1927 ended. The Great Crash of '29 was still almost two

years ahead. Certain changes, though, were already affecting the world of collecting—that is, its greater western world that remained dominated by the New York market. Wesley Towner made this memorable point in *The Elegant Auctioneers*, the book he left unfinished at his death in 1968; thus did Stephen Varble face the thankless task of completing it for publication in 1970. The Towner-Varble book remains a stellar work, despite how it took form. No other portrayal of dealing, auctioneering, and collecting among wealthy Americans has surpassed it. Among the devoted buyers decades ago was, without question, W. R. Hearst (although Alma Spreckels went unmentioned). Towner, in his part of the text, had fun with Hearst. Ultimately he understood the man better than most writers have, in any capacity; in the end he liked Hearst, couldn't help but admire him. On the debit side, Towner and Varble left no trail, no notes or references to follow. Those who've tried to pin down many a statement by them have failed. The book has to be taken at face value, much like the entries in an old sales catalogue.

Thus warned, we can size up those authors' assessment (mostly Towner's) of the late 1920s, while remembering that no more plausible account is at hand, more than forty years after *The Elegant Auctioneers* got into print. Towner thought the twenties boom—as typified by the Spanish-Italian or Mediterranean side of the market—began crumbling well before the Crash. It did so, he said, by 1927. In his view an importation like Joseph Basch's of that very year (it's unlikely, of course, that Towner knew of it) was too little, too late. The party had been thrown, as if by Gatsby himself. The guests had drunk their fill. And they'd already begun staggering home.

History is seldom that simple, that clear-cut. As recently as December 1925 the Associated Press had reported "Huge Sales Bring Art World Center to Shores of America," to which headline it added "English Resent Invasion." Either the AP was out of touch or things really were a good deal better off than Wesley Towner would later portray them. Towner had Signora Tolentino (the Chevalier's wife)

wringing her hands with “I’m ruined, ruined!”—an allusion to the sale of December 1926 in Raoul Tolentino’s name or perhaps to the one in April 1927. Both were held at the AAA in New York. Together, those auctions fell within the 1926-27 season and were their importers’ last hurrah. That detail resonates credibly enough in the Tolentinos’ case (for the Cattadoris in 1927, January marked their swan song at the AAA; its sessions coincided with the Fernande de Conde sale at The Hall of Art Studios in Hollywood). And yet words like Signora Tolentino’s can’t be confirmed, can’t easily be built upon. Harold Lancour’s *American Art Auction Catalogues* gives a different impression: not only the 1926-27 season in New York but also its successor, 1927-28, kept offering good Mediterranean prospects. Maybe it was because sales had to be booked far in advance; plus there was all the cataloguing to do, unlike with Kemp & Ball or other frowsy outfits.

The pace in New York began slowing a bit more during the 1928-29 season. But even 1929-30, on through the months after the Crash, held the line surprisingly well. By then several “returns” began appearing: much like today’s shoppers who watch for helpful terms like those that Nordstrom offers. As long as enough lead time was allotted, a recycling of goods through the salesrooms was always encouraged. The newly merged American Art Association-Anderson Galleries, doing business as of October 1929—since right before the Wall Street debacle, uncannily so—remained on top of the heap.

Overall in the late twenties, as gauged by the New York scene, the well-established Spanish influx outperformed its old accomplice, the Italian. Luis Ruiz consigned sales in 1927 and 1929. His brother, Raimundo, did the same. Luis, in fact, appeared at the AAA-AG as late as 1936, though by then neither of the Ruizes had consigned a sale since '29. (In San Francisco the Spanish never seemed to have much of an impact, with minor exceptions; few of the Ruizes’ fellow Iberians took their wares west, à la Cattadori or Ricci or Tolentino on the Italian side; French imports aimed cross-country were a bit more of a factor

than the Spanish, although they too were limited overall.) In New York the name Benzaria is another exotic one, although it's absent from Hearst's files. Auctions in behalf of that trader's Spanish and Persian wares took place in Manhattan repeatedly from 1924 through 1930.

Also in 1930, twice in fact, the New York dealer Francisca Reyes consigned a Spanish sale to Elliott Haase's rooms—which were among the local halls never patronized by Hearst, as noted in Part VI. Madame Reyes, active in Manhattan since 1918, died in 1946; her post-mortem at Parke-Bernet Galleries in 1948 was pure nostalgia, a single session of Ruiz-quality Spanish antiques that got Hearst inspired, even if he was almost eighty-five by then. The “Bronze Monastery Bell of S. Simeon” and several other things, all chosen by the Chief from his new vantage point in Beverly Hills, were sent directly to San Simeon, as if he'd be returning there and would be using them, as if the golden twenties had never died. Hearst never made it back to his Enchanted Hill. Declining health had forced him to leave for good, not long after World War II ended.

All the while, between the wars, estate sales came and went as they always had, oblivious of fad, fashion, or the stock market. Mortality often had a bearing. The death of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer in 1929 brought more than 2,500 lots to the AAA-AG, divided among five bookings in April 1930. Later that year some historically obscure relatives of Alma Spreckels—Claus and Oroville Spreckels, quasi-expatriates who were still alive and well but who now needed funds—consigned two sessions to the AAA-AG from their Villa Baratier near Monte Carlo. Their French and Asian collection had sensual, indulgent tones, at times almost decadent ones, much like certain things in the Adolfo Alberto di Segni sale in 1924 at Curtis Studio or in Big Alma's exhibit of 1926 at the Legion of Honor. The goods from the Villa Baratier nonetheless included “View Near Monterey,” a painting by a Bay Area hero whom Mr. Spreckels (Gus informally) called a “close compatriot,” the ever-sanctified William Keith.

A sure sign that the Italian influx was in fact drying up—more on par with what Wesley Towner spoke of—was the consignment of Joseph Dabissi's, made late in 1931. An auction in his name was held not in New York but rather an entire world away, at the Galleria Ciardiello in Florence. Dabissi, originally aligned in Manhattan with the high-caliber Luigi Orselli (who'd secured Dabissi's "active co-operation," said the AAA back in 1921), had dropped from local view in New York after 1928 and was never seen there again. But it's fascinating to note that this diligent consignor, whose auction-room offerings typically took "months of painstaking effort to assemble" (the AAA again), was in Hollywood toward the end of his stateside years—at The Hall of Art Studios in Hollywood, no less. He appeared there in 1927, a mere three weeks after consigning a sale to the New York market. Thus was the well-stocked, energetic Joseph Dabissi following a West Coast path trailblazed by the Cattadoris and Leone Ricci in 1922 and then by Raoul Tolentino in 1923. Dabissi's presence at The Hall in 1927 is even further off the charts than those earlier bookings in San Francisco. For good measure, A. H. Weil cried the sale in Hollywood, an event that Harold Lancour knew nothing about, much less Wesley Towner or anyone else in their East Coast ranks. Dabissi figures once more in the worldwide auction annals, this time in Rome in 1932, greatly removed from New York or any place else on this side of the Atlantic.

Life went on in San Francisco, meanwhile, entirely apart from such matters in the east or farther afield. Following its Old World larks of 1927 and 1928, the Joseph Basch Co. regained much of its former identity. October 1930 found it selling what Borax Smith of Death Valley fame had salted away in his mansion in Oakland, known as Arbor Villa (part of the "final blow," said his biographer of the hard times he'd fallen on). Then in 1931 a Bay Area standard came to Basch's rooms: a group of William Keith paintings. Purely at random, an on-site sale in Hillsborough can be cited for 1932. And yet even that year Basch was offering "Attractive Spanish and Italian Works of Art,"

no doubt recycled goods from the halcyon days—of Lord only knows what provenance. Then in 1933, besides the Basch sale noted in Part XI that lured a fleeting bit of Hearst support, that house got another premises booking, close by on Sutter Street itself. The art dealers Vickery, Atkins & Torrey (“Torry” in the hasty ads) had finally gone under; the Depression was taking its grim and certain toll, much as it had on Borax Smith.

Later in 1933 the library and paintings of the departed Edward Hamilton found new homes through Basch. Pop Hamilton, as he was widely called, had been in the Bohemian and the Family Clubs. More notably, he’d been “a leading journalist of the W. R. Hearst newspapers” since the late 1800s, when their proprietor was still a San Franciscan. A man of seventy now and newly returned to San Simeon from a long trip to Europe, Hearst bought numerous Hamilton books through Basch’s, his only known purchase from that source besides the Early American tables he’d recently sent to Wyntoon.

By then, by 1933, H. Taylor Curtis was back in the city. A man of fifty-two, he had nearly half that many years of art dealing and auctioneering behind him. After leaving San Francisco in 1921, he’d been in Los Angeles as we’ve seen, then in Santa Barbara, and after that in Beverly Hills; much later he would be in Pasadena (and would eventually be buried in nearby Monrovia). His return to the Sutter Street wars in the Depression-harried San Francisco of 1933 was short-lived. He was gone again by 1935, maybe sooner. Before that there’d been the historic general strike in July 1934, in the vicinity of which Butterfield’s alone seemed to be crying sales. Whenever it was exactly that H. Taylor Curtis returned to the Southland, he did so for keeps, leaving little trace of himself—no catalogues, for instance.

There’s one catalogue of that period, however—one only—that bears his son’s name, that of H. Taylor Curtis, Jr. The latter went simply by Taylor Curtis and very briefly followed his father, his grandfather (the Colonel), and also his uncle Paul as a crier. Taylor did so in

1939 in distant Chicago. It was the sole attempt he seems to have made, the solitary trace he left in the sales or collecting annals. The young man wasn't quite twenty-five that year; his Taylor Curtis Auction and Appraisal Co. on North Michigan Avenue offered "Beautiful and Valuable Paintings" from two sources, one of them a lordly sounding Baron Serge de Henning of Poland. All such pomp aside, it was a class act, reminiscent of H. Taylor Curtis's best efforts in the 1910s with sales like the Mary Danesi of 1914. His son's 121 lots in 1939 claimed Murillo among the artists and even Gainsborough, whose entry in the catalogue included "Documents will be given Purchaser." This rare booklet of twenty-eight pages, said by Harold Lancour to exist only at the Art Institute of Chicago, had a noble, serious air about it, never mind what may have been some inflated attributions. H. Taylor Curtis had taught his son well. Still, the younger Taylor dropped entirely from view, perhaps having staked too much on that one sale. He died long afterward in Santa Barbara.

Apart from the Gump's sale that H. Taylor Curtis cried in 1933, as noted in Part IV, his Curtis Studios, its name pluralized now by that older son of Edward Curtis, had only one other booking of note; meanwhile, lesser sales remain hidden in the newspapers. The "Art Collection of the Late Mrs. Julia K. Duff, Berkeley" was the other readily traceable event, held six months before the Gump's sale. Still another Curtis Studios sale (of the utmost obscurity, but held during that same period as the Julia Duff, summer of '33) managed to win Hearst's attention. The Chief bought some Early American furniture on that occasion, well suited to his new efforts at Wynton.

By 1933 as well, Joseph Basch made a strategic move. He now proudly occupied 575 Sutter, the best space in the neighborhood. It was the same address that Colonel Curtis had presided over in his final years of auctioneering, the very place where the Cattadori, the Ricci, the Tolentino, and the di Segni sales had been memorably held, plus the studious Boutwell Dunlap book sales. Basch's still had competition,

although the Depression had reduced it. January 1934 saw a desperate Butterfield Studios holding a “Restaurant Auction,” a premises sale of bar stools and other humdrum wares on New Montgomery Street. Besides Butterfield’s and Goodman’s and some other stubborn players, a San Francisco Art Gallery arose mushroom-like in this dour period on Sutter Street—a new auction house, not a retailer. Diagonally, farther out on Post Street (in its 1800 block), a Post Street Auction Studio appeared as well. These minor examples date from the mid- and late 1930s. They’re traceable right up to the 1940s and perhaps a ways beyond. They left little to remember themselves by, as little as Taylor Curtis did through his appearance in 1939 in faraway Chicago.

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**XV** IT CAME TIME, shortly before World War II, for one of the city’s best writers, Evelyn Wells, to spin a rare tale of the place she loved. Born in 1899, she was forty when *Champagne Days of San Francisco* appeared in 1939. She could have been twice that age, in the best, most respectful sense. That’s how informed her book was, how insightful and fluent. *Champagne Days* was half fiction, half its opposite. Miss Wells changed names freely and also took other liberties, always with skill and command. She spoke of auctions more than once. Better yet, she closed with a priceless chapter featuring Charley Curtis. She *had* to have meant Edward Curtis, that “square” sales crier as he’d been called in one of his obituaries, a man who’d “gained a nation-wide reputation” for his fairness, and, when it was all said and done, for his sheer effectiveness. The auction-room story in *Champagne Days* was set in the early 1930s, shortly before the Colonel’s older son came back to town from points south. The Curtis patriarch was dead then—had been, of course, since 1927. Yet such were the jugglings of history that Evelyn Wells had mastered, skilled puppeteer that she was. Those variations were all for the good. They made for the

“deliciously humorous” book she wrote, as her close friend Cora Older (Mrs. Fremont Older by pen name) said of *Champagne Days of San Francisco*, with firm conviction.

To Evelyn Wells, auctions were the province of criers like Joseph Basch, if not lower sorts. She mentioned the city’s cheap “palmistry booths, and shooting galleries and auction places,” the latter being “where jewels of incredible worth—so the salesman said—could be bought for a song.” Her words applied to the 1890s. Herbert Asbury had preceded her with his equally classic work of 1933, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld*. For the 1860s and ’70s he spoke of “auction places where goods of all sorts were disposed of at public outcry,” the prices they brought being “far above their actual worth.” Some of what those books tell could be applied to a later day, even after the fateful 1906. *Champagne Days* by Miss Wells also described “the fakirs, vendors, and pitch-men, shouting their wares under flaring torches.” Could the goateed Colonel from New Orleans ever have been among them? Earlier still in its focus was John Bruce’s mention of “the low-grade advertisements of social-disease medicine, cheap auctions, [and] gold-brick raffles” found in the old newspapers of the 1850s that he was combing—as part of his efforts for *Gaudy Century: The Story of San Francisco’s Hundred Years of Robust Journalism* (1948). The highly animated Stanton A. Coblenz, while touching on that same early period in *Villains and Vigilantes* (1936), recounted the old city’s “auctioneers bawling out their wares, which they sell not for coin, but for gold dust at \$16 an ounce.” Amazing to think that those ounces would each be worth almost \$500 now! In all, it was a cultural legacy without compare, always full of wonder as these authors portrayed it. And surely nothing meant for the faint-hearted.

In the Wells book of 1939, one of its vivid personalities was Bessie Hall, based on the famous madam Tessie Wall. Since Tessie is known to have died on April 28, 1932, just shy of age sixty-three, the account

of her in the final pages of *Champagne Days* is datable, never mind the fictional aspects. What's soon to follow pertains to "a few months" before Tessie passed on. First, however, some words about Bessie (or Tessie) from earlier in the book. Their inspiration recalls a famous collector—none other than Hearst—known to the *Champagne* author through Mrs. Older (whose husband, Fremont, had been portrayed by the same Evelyn Wells in a rousing biography in 1936). Three years later, in her factual-fictional book of 1939, Miss Wells said of the character Bessie Hall:

She had developed a hero-worship of Napoleon. Interspersed with the paintings, images, statuary, mottoes, and souvenirs that brightened Bessie's maison de joie, were more than twenty busts of Bonaparte bought at auction. Gloomily the marble counterparts of the great conqueror stared over scenes of revelry. One bust in Bessie's boudoir scowled at her massive gold bed, also purchased at auction.

What was it about auctions? Were they strictly for palming off kitsch on unsuspecting types like Bessie . . . or Tessie? That must have been what Evelyn Wells believed, implicitly. She never let up on this theme, never relented. Auction rooms were clip joints, plain and simple; anyone with a speck of class in San Francisco knew it and steered clear. Lord only knows what New York or other places were like; probably just as vile.

Miss Wells saved the best for last in such matters, for her Chapter XIV and her final scenes in the book:

Bessie Hall sat in Curtis' auction rooms on Sutter Street on an afternoon in the early nineteen-thirties. The gilt had faded from Bessie's hair and the scarlet from her life. Not another woman in the place looked half so respectable. She wore the good raiment that had been fashionable in a past decade. . . . Atop her faded haystack pompadour was perched the demurest Queen Mary type of hat.

That hat was an anachronism in modern San Francisco, as was Bessie herself.

The fire and earthquake of April 18, 1906, had blotted out forever “the city that was.” Will Irwin called it that in a moment of tragic inspiration, after hearing of his city ravaged with flame from Van Ness Avenue to the Embarcadero. . . .

In the ruins had vanished the great restaurants and mansions and hotels, the foreign quarters, the bazaars, Chinatown and the Barbary Coast, the home of the great and the houses of the infamous. The Palace, the partly completed Fairmont Hotel, built on [James] Fair’s Nob Hill property, had been gutted by fire. In the Grand Opera House, where Caruso had sung the night before, the “largest chandelier in America crashed amid falling tiers [rows of seats]. Mechanics’ Pavilion was destroyed.

In flames vanished the French restaurants, Blanco’s, Marchand’s, the Poodle Dog and the others, and with them perished the days of champagne.

It was the final voicing of the Champagne Age, time-frontier of the Argonauts, ending forever this day in ’06.

Now, [in] these nineteen-thirties, nearly all the sensational figures of champagne days were gone. All the Railroad Kings, all the Comstock Kings, Ward McAllister, Jr., Ned Greenway, and many others were dead. . . . No driveway opened to carriages in the Palace [Hotel] now. . . .

And Bessie Hall, these days, was living in a flat in the Mission [district], eking out an embarrassed existence selling bootleg to a few other survivors of the Champagne Age. The outwardly modest flat was crammed with the furnishings of her once famous bagnio, mostly bought at auctions, the imported furniture, bronzes, statuary, paintings that reached from ceiling to floor, images, framed mottoes, paper fans, souvenirs, her collection of cut-glass, and busts of Napoleon.

There it was again. Auctions: those lowbrow affairs for which the Wells book had no patience, no regard. And soon, as that ingenious author further said, Bessie herself would be no more, “would die in that crowded flat, and her beloved possessions be put up at auction.” It would happen within two months of her demise, at Butterfield Studios on Mission and Van Ness. “Palatial Furnishings and Personal Effects,”

the pre-sale ads would announce—with Tessie’s last name spelled “Wahl,” though soon to be corrected. Butterfield’s couldn’t be faulted, at any rate, for predicting a “sale of compelling interest, the closing of the career of one of old San Francisco’s famous characters.” If only *that* catalogue could be found, especially a priced-and-named copy. A catalogue was in fact at hand for that rare event, a sale held in the same Depression year that saw the Democrats nominate Franklin D. Roosevelt, their Great White Hope in those fractious, troubled times. It was “the largest auction crowd ever assembled in San Francisco,” recalled Fred Butterfield, the head sales crier. “It exceeded the throng that came to see Rudolph Valentino’s treasures sold.” He meant the sale staged by Curtis Studio in February 1927—the more renowned auction house soon absorbed by Butterfield’s for a short time.

The post-merger Butterfield’s noted, right after things started in Tessie’s memory on Monday, June 6, 1932, that the Mrs. Frank Daroux dispersal (her second married name) would remain a “Sale by Catalog,” thereby allowing “No Deviation.” So much for the “request” approach that other auctioneers might favor. Those points aside, Evelyn Wells had this to say in *Champagne* about the “Queen of the Underworld” and her treasures that got sold:

The gilded bed would go under the hammer for twenty dollars, and a painting that had cost Bessie \$1500, for \$25.

That seems extreme, an exaggeration, poetic license on Wells’s part. Then again, the auction market *had* changed since October 1929. It wasn’t long before the ads for Joseph Basch and his rivals almost disappeared from the papers. When they showed up, almost meekly, they hugged the bottom of the page, often next to notices for funeral parlors. In their heyday the boldly graphic posters from Sutter Street had usually run higher up, not to mention larger. Even the Butterfield’s ads for the Tessie Wall sale were bottom-pagers.

The Wells book further recounted that, in happier, bygone times, “Bessie seldom missed an auction.” Another writer imbued with local color, Curt Gentry, reinforced that point in 1964, saying that the real-life Tessie “avidly attended the auctions and shopped the city’s best art stores.” One of those places was Gump’s. So recounted Gentry, who like many of us had read about Tessie in Carol Green Wilson’s book. Mrs. Wilson told how Tessie cast covetous eyes on a painting; she learned it would cost a cool thousand. If she did well at the races, she pledged, she’d be quick to buy it. “Sure enough, her horse won,” went the anecdote in *Gump’s Treasure Trade*. Tessie happily followed through on the painting of “a seventeenth-century salon with gorgeously gowned women under crystal chandeliers”—paying for it entirely in gold pieces.

Back to Evelyn Wells, though, and her matchless tale of Tessie Wall, couched in the person of Bessie Hall, the auction devotee:

Bidding was her only remaining vice. She liked auctions even better than funerals, and she attended the burial of every “old timer.”

Now, in Curtis’s hall, the plumes on her hat quivered with emotion as that inimitable auctioneer, Charley Curtis, auctioned off the furnishings of a French restaurant that had been glamorous when Bessie had been glamorous and young [she was born in 1869].

Sofas, tables, chairs, beds, curtains, pictures, piano, linens, were from the Poodle Dog, that had been rebuilt since the Fire and failed.

Tears shown in Bessie’s dimming blue eyes. It was like having one’s youth die again to see the furnishings of the Poodle Dog scattered under an auctioneer’s hammer.

Out of all those items she named, Miss Wells focused on the “battered piano.” Its turn had come, and it was “now being extolled by the agile-tongued Curtis”:

“How much for memories?” Curtis called craftily, pointing to the scarred piano.

A tear splashed in Bessie’s ample lap.

“Twenty dollars!” called out a hesitating voice in her ear.

Bessie, turning her bonneted head, recognized the Senator’s widow [both were portrayed in *Champagne Days*, the Senator having played the lead].

The adamant Louella [the widow], still wearing her mourning, had attended the auction to find a practice piano for her small grandson.

Curtis sold it to that solitary bidder, without a single contesting bid—a technicality required by some houses in making their sales, though perhaps not in easier-going San Francisco. However, a mere \$20, even in that worst part of the Depression, is hard to believe, unless the piano were nothing but a wreck. In any case, the widow was pleased. It was certainly “foolish,” Bessie heard her say, “to buy a new piano for a small boy.” An old Steinway bought for a rock-bottom price would do just fine:

“I buy all my stuff at auction,” Bessie Hall agreed happily. “I used to play the horses, but auctions are better because when you bid you always get sump’n, and who ever heard of coming home from the tracks with a horse!”

When the sale at the Curtis rooms ended, Bessie and Louella parted outside. The widow “walked slowly up Sutter Street in her fine and sober black . . . walked on in loneliness and pride.” After all, *she* had been the carousing Senator’s wife, not Bessie. The widow had been the one who’d always waited up for him, almost till the morning dawned.

Bessie went the other way, downhill toward Market. She crossed it in front of traffic “while a policeman blew his whistle frantically.” This isn’t to say she was mortally struck, as Colonel Curtis had been on a fall evening in 1927 near San Mateo. And yet “the torrent of motor cars bewildered her”:

More than six hundred and sixty-six thousand people were living in San Francisco now, and a motor vehicle of some sort was registered to one person out of every six. She could remember when there wasn’t an

automobile in the entire city, and a nostalgia swept her thick body for the clatter of horses' hooves on cobblestone—only there were no cobblestones on Market Street.

Worse, there wasn't "a saloon running, openly at least, in the city of champagne." Prohibition had long since been the law of the land—and had overstayed whatever welcome it once had:

Dodging automobiles and the four tracks of street cars, Bessie succeeded in jay-walking Market Street. Her feet hurt. "God damn 'em," she cursed wistfully. She wasn't so young any more.

And all that talk about days past with the Senator's widow had made her feel funny. She found herself thinking of old times and folks—of Sunday nights at the Orpheum, the Poodle Dog, election nights, fun at the Chutes [an amusement park].

No, Bessie the former madam certainly wasn't young any more, even if she was only sixty-two. And yet Bessie Hall, or rather Tessie Wall, still had her memories of auctions old and new, after the time she'd just spent on Sutter Street. She'd been too poor to buy, even at the deflated prices the hard times had brought. But she could still hear Charley Curtis—Edward Curtis, by rights—and his entrancing Southern voice, the one the Colonel used when the widow bought the piano that afternoon, as Evelyn Wells alone could tell it:

"Going! Going!" cried Curtis, "Gone!"

Gone, indeed, along with all the riveting moments that would never be again.

# **Afterword**

## **Hearst as Museum Maker**

W.R. Hearst has been in and out of these pages. Edward Curtis has been more prominent, and H. Taylor Curtis and even Joseph Basch have also figured importantly. But Hearst is the one who led me to Curtis Studio to start with; besides, he's been my main focus for more than forty years. In all that I've learned about the storied Colonel and his auctioneering in San Francisco, plus all that's come from my delving into the art and book markets in the city of decades past, the stature of Hearst as a big-league collector is what has kept me challenged the most, has made me want to keep learning more. In turn, Hearst's belief that San Simeon—"the ranch"—was destined for cultural greatness, not just meant to be a temporary showplace, sticks in my mind and begs to be assessed. February 1927 found him making his noble pledge to Julia Morgan: "I see no reason why the ranch should not be a museum of the best things that I can secure."

What became of Hearst's credo? Did he prove to be a man of his word? Did his vision come to pass, embodying what he foresaw in the rosier part of the 1920s?

His pledge to Morgan included his saying that they would "probably weed out" certain things that were "less desirable." The allusion was to a good many so-so or even inferior items that had been part of the San Simeon mix from early on, from back about 1920, when Hearst had yet to grasp in full measure where his and Morgan's efforts were heading. A good thought, an inspired thought, his plan of eliminating the Basch-like dregs, the items that often had little business playing a lasting role on The Enchanted Hill. Alas, plenty of those things remain there today. They weren't pruned or weeded, were never moved or replaced in any serious way. Did Hearst lose direction? Did he weaken his grand vision by such indifferent means? To some degree, yes. However, the place was always the ranch, right to the end in 1947, the

last year he and Marion Davies lived there. If every art work, every furnishing or other object had to be exhibit-worthy to pass muster, the hilltop would have been humorless and oppressive, much too high-minded and self-important for anyone's cheerful good. Hearst instinctively realized that. Such matters were better left to . . . *museums* in the usual sense. Whether he ever reflected later upon what he'd said to Morgan in 1927, twenty years before his final year in residence, is something to weigh forever more.

But Hearst did in fact get into a museum mode in his decorating and embellishment of San Simeon in the 1930s, also in part of the 1940s. The hundreds of ancient Greek vases he moved out from New York, many of them placed side by side in the great Library of Casa Grande, went far beyond what can be seen in that same room today, as impressive as it still is. Upstairs, in his Gothic Study, he put large numbers of rare Hispano-Moresque ceramics in display niches; nary an example remained to be seen after 1956, shortly before the California State Parks took over Hearst Castle. So the man achieved some distinct museum-making in his time, post-1927, after his pronouncement to Julia Morgan. Vintage photographs of the Library and the Gothic Study alone are jaw-dropping in the grandeur they convey.

Other settings were also royally enhanced in Hearst's twilight years, beyond what endure as the backdrops we're familiar with all these decades later. Surprisingly little of this upgrading affected the weeds that had yet to be pulled, the lower-grade items that hung on from the old days and that in many instances are still on hand. Instead, the interiors and the outdoor settings tended to become chock-full of objects, enough of which were distinguished that, ruffraff aside, they resulted in kingly grandeur to some eyes, even if overwrought clutter to others.

The "royal mind" Hearst was once said to have was something that never left him, never came fully down to earth as long as he was still living and directing the show that San Simeon always was.