

John Quincy Adams letter brings \$555,750 at Sotheby's

Antiques and the Arts

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NEW YORK CITY - A document written by John Quincy Adams in 1837 to his "fellow citizens" of "the 12th Congressional District of Massachusetts," via his local newspaper, The Quincy Patriot, sold at Sotheby's in New York for \$555,750 to **Seth Kaller of Kaller's America Gallery, Inc.** It had been rediscovered in a cardboard box in a store room in the newspaper's offices along with a covering letter to its editors, Messrs. Green and Osborne.

Passionately defending his efforts to secure the right of petition to slaves and antislavery groups, the 11 page document was written from Washington on March 20, 1837, and along with the letter to the editors requesting that it be published, it had been expected to sell for between \$200/300,000. The new price far exceeded the auction record for a manuscript by John Quincy Adams which had stood at \$32,200.

Selby Kiffer, Sotheby's senior vice president, said: "This address is a remarkable benchmark in the history of civil rights in the United States. While largely a formal argument, the manuscript reveals Adams' personal commitment to the issue by his reference to slaves as 'fellow citizens.'"

Written after his Presidential term when he was serving as a Congressman for Massachusetts - the only former president to return to Washington as federal representative - Adams defends himself against the charge of his being a radical abolitionist, but demands that slaves be given the absolute right to petition the US government.

In conclusion, Adams attacks the institution of slavery directly: "Slavery has already had too deep and too baleful an influence upon the affairs and upon the History of this Union. It can never operate but as a slow poison to the morals of any community infected with it. Ours is infected with it to the vitals." His addresses were printed in the paper, the first on April 1 and the second on April 15, 1837.

Adams's vision of the separation of the Union was postponed for more than two decades, but he was correct in seeing it as an inevitable result of the continuance of slavery. While Adams did see the right of petition restored while he was still serving in the House, it was not until long after his death in 1848 that the "slow poison" of slavery was eradicated from our nation by a bloody Civil War.

Another highlight of the sale was a teletype document with hand written annotations announcing the bombing of Pearl Harbor which sold for \$10,800. The tattered document, which begins "Flash / While House says Japs attack Pearl Harbor," was read over Minneapolis airwaves by local personality Roger Krupp and is one of the first broadcasts of President Roosevelt's statement from the White House. With more than four bidders

competing on the phone and in the salesroom, the notification that the United States had entered World War II surpassed its pre-sale estimate of \$3/5,000.