

Everard Auctions, Savannah, Georgia

Savannah on Sale: The John and Virginia Duncan Collection

by Marty Steiner

Photos courtesy Everard Auctions

Communities that were part of England's early settlements along the Atlantic coast developed unique cultures and styles. This was particularly true in England's southern colonies of Georgia and South Carolina. Savannah epitomizes this with the merging of English and Continental styles and goods along with the local, rustic, and sometimes primitive items. The collection of John and Virginia "Ginger" Duncan provides a representation of the rich history and culture of Savannah and the surrounding area.

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Many collectors become historians of sorts out of necessity to bring a focus and direction to their collecting. This is unlike historians, who generally collect information but rarely the artifacts and examples of their subject. A notable exception was Dr. John Duncan, a history professor and Savannah author and historian, who not only studied and wrote about the area's history and culture but also, along with his wife, Ginger, collected relevant examples. These included furnishings, accessories, silver, art, documents, and photographs as well as folk art.

The Georgia Historical Society presented its lifetime achievement award to John in May 2021. This award was presented with these words: "As a scholar, educator, collector, and leading authority on the history of Savannah, John has devoted his professional career to teaching and using the power of history to make the world a better place!"

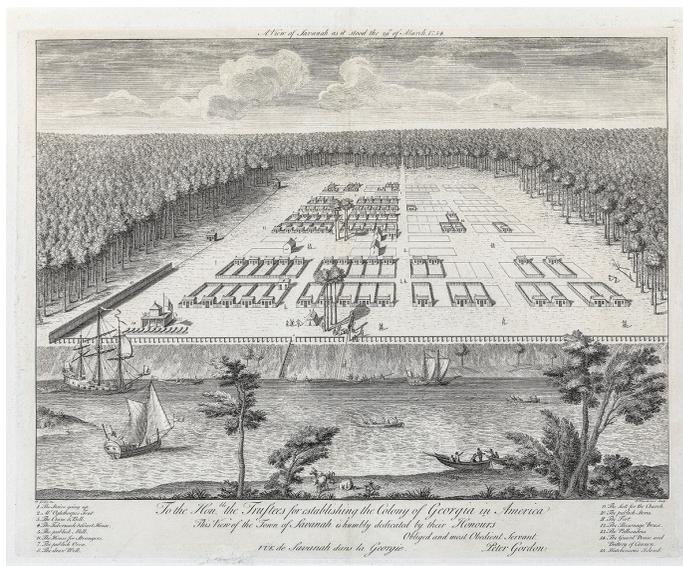
After 41 years of marriage and furnishing their four-story historic home while also operating V & J Antique Maps, Prints, and Books, the couple decided to begin downsizing. Then John passed away in September 2022. Ginger noted that "many of the items in our collection came from Everard Auctions. Also, we had known Amanda [Everard]'s family before the auction house even opened." She went on to add, "There never was any question about where we would entrust an auction of our lifetime collection."

The most historically important item offered October 19 and 20 at Everard Auctions was a 1734 map or plan of Savannah, "A View of Savannah..." with a dedication, "To the Hon.ble the Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America." While images of this view are found in countless publications, it is believed that only 12 originals exist, with only three in private hands. With a starting bid of \$75,000 and an estimate of \$100,000/150,000, the plan sold to a Savannah collector for \$109,375 (includes buyer's premium).

Savannah was America's first planned city. Its unique location near the border with the Spanish colony of Florida forced James Edward Oglethorpe to address this fact with a defensible design. Protection from possible hostile natives inland was needed. Peter Gordon developed this detailed graphic to be presented to the trustees who had funded the Oglethorpe Georgia settlement.

A much later plan from 1818, "Plan of the City & Harbour of Savannah..." sold for \$16,250. Altogether 28 examples of maps and plans, most of Savannah or Georgia, were sold in this sale, including eight of the top dozen lots.

The Duncans became both source and inspiration to John Berendt as he wrote *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994). This relationship was why the Duncans owned a limited-edition silver gelatin print (one of 250) of the iconic cover image of the book signed by Berendt and by the photographer, Jack Leigh. It sold for \$7500 (est. \$7000/10,000), placing sixth in this sale.



The Georgia Trustees were the overseeing and governing body for the establishment of a colony as a buffer for English South Carolina from the Spanish in Florida and from the Creek Indians. Peter Gordon prepared the original plan to be presented as a progress report to these trustees in 1734. One of few original copies, this plan of Savannah sold to a local collector for \$109,375 (est. \$100,000/150,000).

The Duncans' home was furnished with many of the items sold in this sale. A seldom-seen Waldorf Astoria mahogany telephone cabinet long-distanced itself from an estimate of \$200/300 and sold for \$15,000, the third-highest price in the sale. The stamped shelf identified it as "Made for the American Bell Telephone Co. and licensed to be used only with its telephones." With a last patent date of 1891, this cabinet was originally sold by the Waldorf Astoria Hotel during a 1920s renovation. Furniture, in general, was somewhat soft because of current tastes and shipping costs.

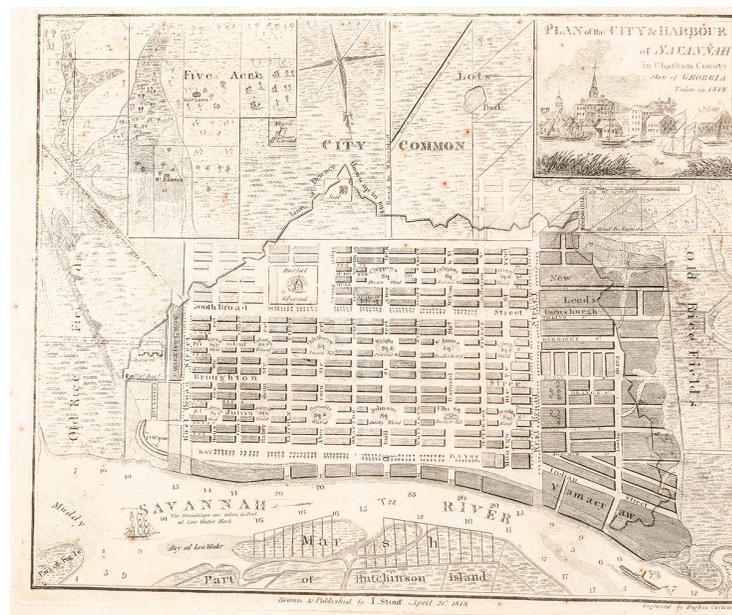
Four lots of Heriz carpets drew strong bidding. A 9'7" x 11'5" example from the 1890s with condition problems sold for \$5625 (est. \$1000/1500).

Among the five Tiffany Studios accessories sold were a bronze candlestick on three leaf-shaped feet accompanied by an additional unmarked bronze candlestick that brought \$2500 and a bronze lamp with a Quezal shade that made \$1625. A Tiffany Studios desk set of glass and bronze in the Grape Leaf pattern with a letter holder and pen tray sold for \$1500. Each of these lots had estimates of \$400/600.

Savannah sets the mood for mint juleps. A set of 13 sterling mint julep cups by various silversmiths satisfied the winning bidder's taste at \$2750 (est. \$1200/1800). Another bidder's afternoon tea will be served from an 1820s coin silver tea set that sold for \$2000 (est. \$1000/1500). The teapot, creamer, and sugar bowl were each marked "C Forbes" for Colin Forbes, and the lot came with an unmarked silver-plate tray.

The Duncans recognized various historical characters in Savannah's history by collecting engravings and ceramic figures. John Wesley and George Whitefield stirred the spiritual world of the time, leading to the establishment of the Methodist church. A matching pair of Staffordshire bust representations of Wesley and Whitefield sold within the \$800/1200 estimate for \$1187.50. Whitefield is known in Savannah for his founding of the Bethesda Orphanage in 1740, which continues to operate today as Bethesda Academy, making it the oldest child-caring facility in the country. A Parian marble bust of Whitefield brought \$1125 (est. \$150/250). Four lots of portrait engravings rounded out the Whitefield offerings.

Other early American historical figures represented in the sale included George Washington and Lafayette, each of whom had visited Savannah. Washington visited in May 1791 as part of his tour to unify the new 13 United States. Lafayette visited in March 1825 as part



This extraordinarily detailed plan of Savannah includes everything from the burying ground and an old rice field to an image of an early steam side-wheeler. With only minor toning and foxing, this framed 1818 engraved plan drew \$16,250 (est. \$2000/3000).

of his farewell tour of the then 24 states. Staffordshire figures depicting Washington and Benjamin Franklin drew \$812.50 for the pair, while an N. Currier color lithograph of Washington sold for only \$250. A 1901 framed tribute to Herman Myers, mayor of Savannah, featured his photograph with a patriotic needlepoint mat. It drew a \$937.50 salute (est. \$600/800).

Savannah has long been a mecca for travelers and tourists. This created a market for artists to paint and sell local scenes. Among the local art collected by the Duncans and sold in this sale was a 1948 watercolor by Leonora Quarterman, *Savannah City Market*. At \$11,250 (est. \$2000/3000), it not only topped the art offerings but ranked fourth in the entire sale. Savannah artist Myrtle Jones (1913-2005) was known for her local streetscapes, architectural images, and portraits of locals. Her 1965 oil and polymer on board *Joan and Jim* sold at \$4375, which crushed the \$500/700 estimate and placed it in the top-ten lots. Jones's 1962 oil on board *Green-Meldrim House* drew \$3125, well over the high estimate of \$1200. *Sailboats*, a "poetically softened realism" example by listed artist William Harold Smith (1900-1951), sold for \$3125 (est. \$1000/1500).

As part of their V & J Antique Maps, Prints and Books business, the Duncans had access to nature prints, including botanicals and Audubons. An 1800

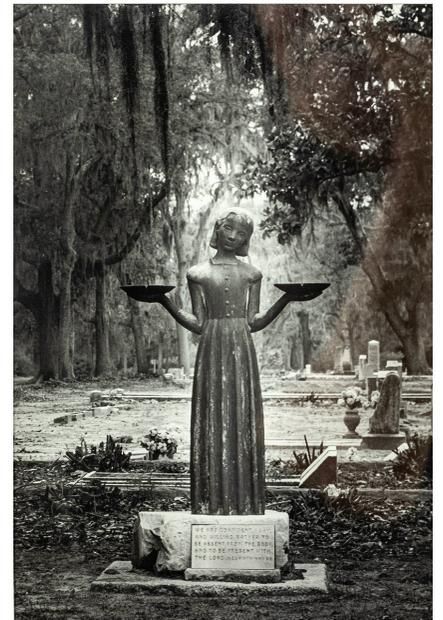


One of the most unusual furniture items to cross an auction block, this mahogany telephone cabinet with a labeled shelf once graced New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel. It dialed up a \$15,000 winning call. The \$200/300 estimate was a wrong number.

In spite of wear, this 9'7" x 11'5" circa 1890 Heriz carpet sold for \$5625, exceeding the \$1000/1500 estimate and placing fifth overall in this sale.



This watercolor by Leonora Quarterman (1911-1979), *Savannah City Market*, 1948, 18½" x 22", shows the historic market structure, a local produce source, with its jumble of boxes, baskets, and sellers. It brought \$11,250, topping the \$2000/3000 estimate. It was the highest priced of the art lots.



Mention Savannah, and to many the book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and its cover illustration of the *Bird Girl* statue come to mind. This limited-edition (55/250) silver-gelatin print signed by Savannah native photographer Jack Leigh and also by author John Berendt sold to a local for \$7500 (est. \$7000/10,000).

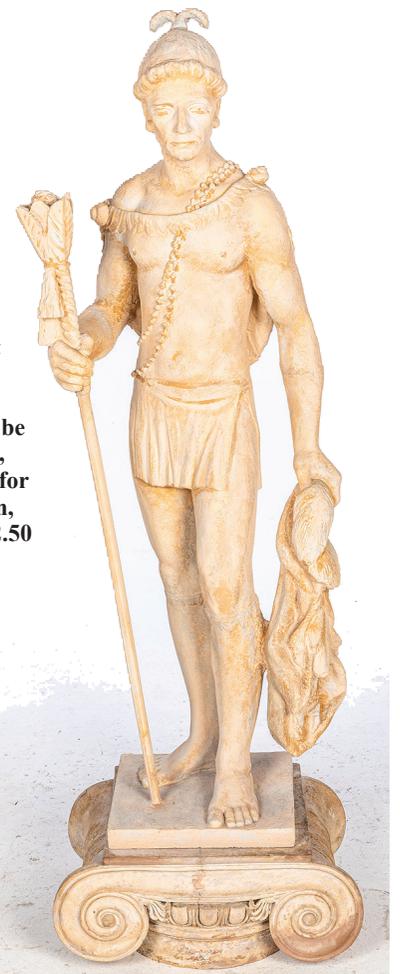


Even the earliest homes in Savannah would be furnished with the best of Continental and English furnishings, including the household clock. This circa 1810 mahogany-cased tall clock, with its dial made by Osborne's Manufactory works (1778-1812) of Birmingham, England, and classic inlays, including a bird on the bonnet, sang a sweet \$5937.50 winning tune, drowning out the \$1000/1500 estimate.



A pair of Staffordshire figures of founding fathers Benjamin Franklin and George Washington won attention because the Franklin statue is mislabeled "G. Washington." The Duncans owned a few examples of Washington items because of Washington's direct link to Savannah history. Condition problems led to a disappointing \$812.50 (est. \$1200/1800) for the lot.

The combination of a Native American image with an attribution to a southern artist brought this plaster sculpture, *Cassique of the Kiawah*, to the Duncan collection. Believed to be by Willard Hirsch (1905-1982), the nearly 5' tall plaster study for the bronze statue in Charleston, South Carolina, reached \$5312.50 (est. \$2000/4000).



third-edition Mark Catesby hand-colored engraving of a bird and branch drew \$3750 (est. \$400/600). Altogether, five lots of Catesby botanical engravings were sold. Three Audubon prints were sold, topped by a Bowen 1842 edition of *Rocky Mountain Hare* for \$2375 (est. \$2000/3000).

John Duncan was a professor of history at Armstrong College in Savannah. Savannah is also home to Savannah State University, the oldest public historically black college or university (HBCU) in Georgia. Out of strong personal interest, the Duncans also collected items that represented black culture in the area. Among these items were folk art, especially carved walking canes and Gullah baskets. Folk canes created by Willis Hakim Jones Jr. and Vernon Edwards made up 11 lots in this sale.

The Gullah communities call the coastal and barrier

islands along the southeastern Atlantic, from Florida through North Carolina, home. A skill that followed them from West Africa, especially Sierra Leone, was a coiled basket form used for winnowing grain and more general purposes. Making use of the marsh grasses between the islands and the mainland they produce a variety of basket forms. Five lots of Gullah sweet grass baskets were topped by a group of three by Caesar "Old Caesar" Johnson that sold for \$1875 (est. \$600/800).

The Duncans' collection could have easily qualified for sale by a larger, out-of-town auction house, but it remained in Savannah. Amanda Everard and the Duncans had a long relationship and shared a passion for Savannah and its history. Everard brought her degree in art history and 11 years at Sotheby's in New York City to open Everard Auctions and Appraisals in 2003 after a visit to Savannah.

The importance of the material in this collection to Savannah and the surrounding area was evidenced by the fact that more than half of the lots (55%) sold to local area buyers. This sale was highly successful—it grossed over \$530,000 with a 92% sell-through rate.

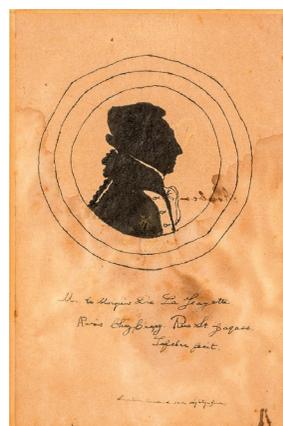
"The Duncans were longtime clients and friends, and we were honored to handle their collection. It was particularly nice to see the significant participation and interest from local collectors. We tried to order the sale so that if you knew the Duncan house you felt like you were walking through it," said Everard.

Everard added, "A collection like this comes around once in a lifetime. We were thrilled with the results."

For more information, see the Everard Auctions website (www.everard.com) or call (912) 231-1376.



The Duncans collected examples of folk-art carved canes by Savannah father-and-son carvers Willis Hakim Jones Sr. (1928-2001) and Willis Hakim Jones Jr. (b. 1953). This carved and painted example by Willis Hakim Jones Jr., inscribed "...for J. D. 1994," made \$437.50 (est. \$400/600).



This signed and dated 1784 pen-and-ink silhouette of the Marquis de Lafayette, honoring his role in the American Revolution, brought \$875 (est. \$150/250) in spite of nominal condition problems.



Not your usual high-dollar furnishing, but this 7' tall Victorian six-shelf revolving bookcase was exactly what one Savannah book owner wanted. It brought \$4375 (est. \$800/1200).



Three traditional Gullah sweet grass winnowing-style baskets by Caesar Johnson (1872-1960), known as "Old Caesar," brought \$1875 (est. \$600/800).



The religious life of Savannah was influenced by John Wesley and especially George Whitefield. The matched pair of Staffordshire busts sold for \$1187.50 (est. \$800/1200).



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