

Antarctica in the Levinson Collection

It's a pleasure to be here this evening at Swann, to see a number of friends and fellow collectors and to be surrounded by John Levinson's great collection of polar books.

I'd like to start out by wishing Captain Dumont D'Urville a Happy Birthday. The great French explorer—sailing in Antarctic waters in 1838–1840—was born 218 years ago today in Normandy.

Back in the late 1960s I was in New York working for Columbia University. Somehow I got interested in book collecting and read a number of books on the subject. Common advice was to find a subject and specialize in it. I picked Antarctica as a geographic specialty thinking that I could pretty much collect everything ever written about it, pretty fast and pretty cheaply. Hah! At the moment I have 1,312 titles in my still-growing collection and may pick up one or two more tomorrow, and although I got some great bargains early on, the money continues to flow out. But I have no regrets and it's been and continues to be a lot of fun.

I know that John Levinson has had a good time at it, too. And a productive time as well. On these shelves sits a collection that includes just about every high point from Captain Cook through Admiral Byrd. Anyone in the room tonight contemplating Antarctica as a subject to collect could

bid often and high tomorrow, miss out on quite a few and still end up with a very good nucleus on which to build another great collection.

The Antarctic section of this handsome catalogue starts with John Marra's *Journal* of 1775, the first account of Cook's second voyage which is important in the history of Antarctica because on that voyage the Antarctic Circle was penetrated for the first time. Of course, if you have Marra, you'll need a full set of Cook's *Voyages* which is the very next lot.

Three of the five great voyages in the early and mid 1800s are here in fine first or early editions: James Weddell's *Voyage*, 1827. He discovered the Weddell Sea and has a seal named after him (the specimen he brought back can be seen today at the Royal Museum in Edinburgh). (This may be the only Antarctic book where the second edition is the desirable one to have.)

Charles Wilkes' *Narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition*, 1845, America's first government sponsored scientific expedition.

And James Clark Ross' *A Voyage of Discovery*, 1847. Just like Weddell, Ross has both a sea and a seal named after him. He was often described as the handsomest man in the Royal Navy, so handsome that he was in much demand for female roles in shipboard theatricals. This lot is estimated to fetch between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Although we may not readily admit to it, we collectors like to talk or at least think about prices and values. You know what I paid for my copy of Ross? \$22.40! It was back on October 14, 1971, right here at Swann

Galleries. Actually back then Swann was a block away at 117 East 24th Street. I would occasionally sneak out of work and come down for the Thursday sales. I recall Benjamin Swann conducting the auction with Edwin Halbmeier beside him. It was not as elegant a place as the present location: the floors were wood, the shelving utilitarian. Most of those attending were men and most in the book trade. And back then there was no buyer's premium. Here's the catalogue for that sale. Many of the same titles are here on the shelves tonight. The 1971 prices would make any collector cry; but then, perhaps, 35 years from now, tomorrow's prices will seem like bargains, too.

The core of any Antarctic collection has to center on books from the "Heroic Age of Exploration," the period from Bull's whaling and sealing expedition to the Ross Sea in 1893-95 during which the first confirmed landing on the continent occurred and which led to the Henryk Bull's book *The Cruise of the Antarctic* to the death of Shackleton in 1922. Virtually all the highlights of that era are in this sale:

Frederick Cook. *Through the First Antarctic Night*, 1900. The first expedition to winter over in the ship *Belgica* although not entirely on purpose. Among those on board: Ronald Amundsen, later to be first at the South Pole.

Otto Nordenskjöld. *Antarctica*, 1905. Both the first edition in Swedish and in German. (The latter is estimated at \$500 to \$750. At a Swann sale on February 2, 1972, I paid \$11 for my copy.)

Robert Scott. *Voyage of the Discovery*, 1905. A must for any Antarctic collector.

Sir Ernest Shackleton. *The Heart of the Antarctic*, 1909. John's copy is the Deluxe edition in vellum with the Antarctic Book as the third volume. This includes the signatures of all the shore party.

Jean-Baptiste Charcot, *Journal de l'Expedition Antarctique Française* 1906 and *The Voyage of the 'Why Not?'*, 1911. Accounts by the French explorer of his two Antarctic expeditions.

Roald Amundsen. *The South Pole*, 1912. The first Norwegian and English editions by the conqueror of the South Pole. The cover of the first Norwegian edition graces the cover of this sale's catalogue.

Robert Scott. *Scott's Last Expedition*, 1913. Again, an essential title prepared from the journals of Scott that were found with his body 11 miles from the food depot he never reached.

Apsley Cherry-Garrard. *The Worst Journey in the World*, 1922. The classic Antarctic book and probably the only one never to be out-of-print. This is an important title for me because it was the first Antarctic book I ever bought. That was on May 22, 1969. Total cost 30 shillings! This copy is estimated at \$1,500-\$2,500.

Sir Douglas Mawson. *The Home of the Blizzard*, 1915. The great Australian explorer who on Shackleton's Nimrod expedition was in the party that first reached the South Magnetic Pole.

Sir Ernest Shackleton. *South*, 1919. Recounts Shackleton's famous third expedition aboard the *Endurance*.

And to close out the Heroic Era, Frank Wild's *Shackleton's Last Voyage*, 1923. Shackleton died as the expedition was just getting underway.

Three books in the Antarctic section of this sale that are particularly special and desired by every collector all have "Heroic Age" connections:

The first is the *South Polar Times*, a typed and illustrated newsletter a single copy of which was issued during Scott's two expeditions. The copy was handed from man-to-man for their entertainment during the long Antarctic night. Shackleton, Bernacchi and Cherry-Garrard each took a hand in its editing. The first 3 volumes of 4 were published in facsimile and in limited editions (volume 4 has never appeared). It is a set of these which is in tomorrow's sale and is estimated to bring between \$15,000 and \$20,000. (The original survives at the Royal Geographical Society [vols I and II], the British Library [vol III] and the Scott Polar Research Institute [vol IV])

The second special book is William Lashly's *Diary*. Printed by students at the University of Reading in an edition of 75, it is exceedingly scarce, particularly with the glassine dustwrapper. This slim volume is expected to sell at between \$8,000 to \$12,000.

And the last of the special Antarctic lots, is the fabled *Aurora Australis*. The first and probably only book written, illustrated, printed, bound and issued in the Antarctic. This feat was accomplished under the most trying of conditions in Shackleton's Cape Royds' hut. It was cold, dirty and dark and yet this masterpiece was turned out for a lucky few to enjoy. The "boards" of the books are literally boards, made from the expedition's packing cases. Each copy is known by what was stenciled on the wood. Thus this copy is known as the "Veal" copy. The estimate is \$50,000 to \$75,000, making it the most expensive offering in tomorrow's sale.

Many thanks, and for those who will be at the sale tomorrow, good luck and good bidding.