

ANTIQUE TOY WORLD

The Curtis and Linda Smith Collection

One of the worlds greatest pre-1900 toy collections ever assembled

Part I | March Sixteenth Twenty Twenty Four




Bertolia
auctions



Bertoia's announces March Signature Sale showcasing the sensational antique toy collection of Linda Smith and the late Curtis Smith

50-year collection includes pre-1900 American tin clockwork toys, many boxed; plus early cast-iron toys, mechanical banks, Marklin and other German toys, with provenance from pioneer toy collectors



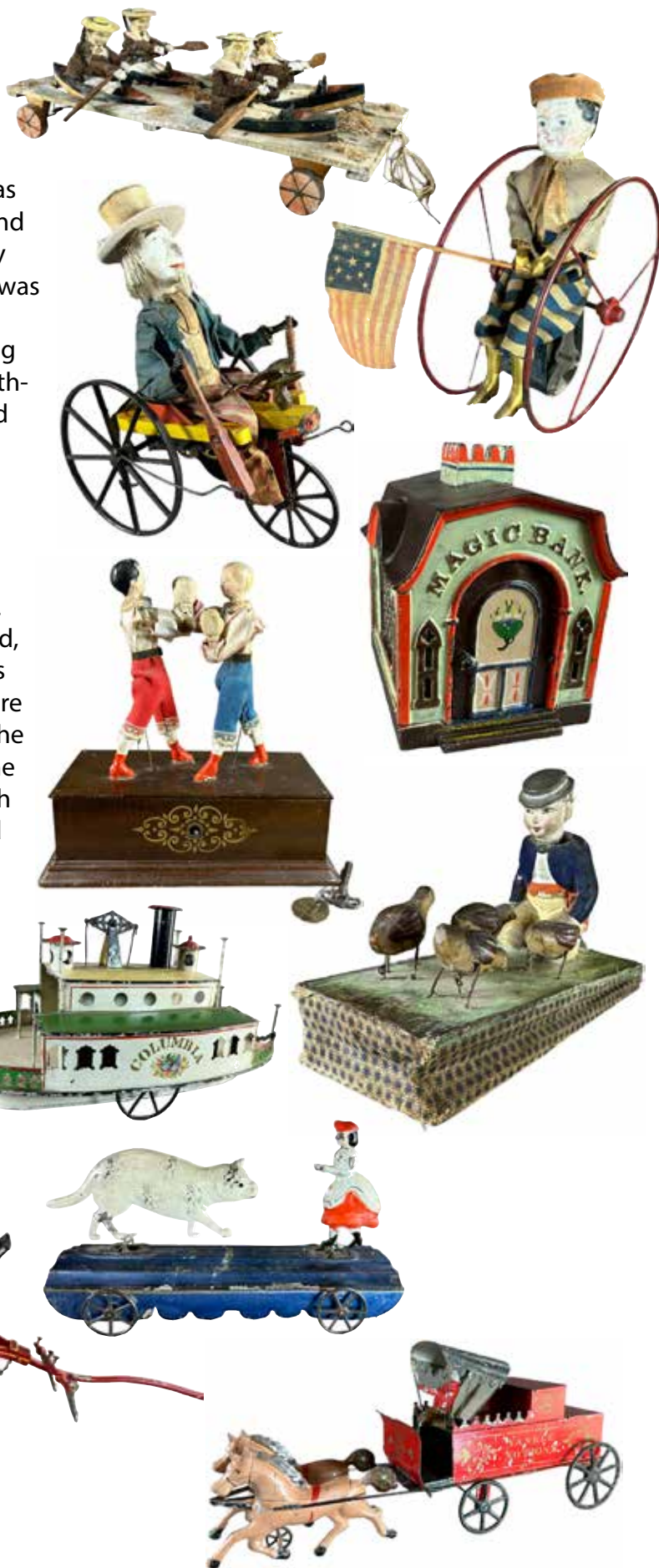
VINELAND, N.J. – Imagine being able to board a time machine and traveling back to the 1970s and '80s when the now-legendary antique toy shows and auctions took place. You can bet there would be quite a wait list for a journey of that type. We can muse about time-travel, which might be possible centuries from now, but it probably won't be happening soon enough for today's collectors to book a seat. However, there's good news: what would you say if we told you some of the finest toys from those landmark events of 50 years ago will be available to bid on in March? They're in one breathtaking collection that was loved and displayed for decades by Linda Smith and her late husband Curtis Smith, and it's going to be featured in a single-owner auction in March at Bertoia's.

ATW: How and when did you and Curt decide to start an antique toy collection?

LS: I don't know what the first toy was that we bought, but the first one we had was one that was given to me as a child – a Unique Art Li'l Abner and His Dogpatch Band. It turned up in 1973 in family stuff that was shipped from Iowa to California. It was fun, and we played with it. At the time, Curt and I had bought our first house, and we were prowling through antique shops for furniture. We saw another toy, and one thing led to another. Soon we had the foundation of a collection.

ATW: You said that for years you felt you were 'by yourselves' as collectors. What changed that?

LS: We met Al Marwick on a trip to Carmel (Calif.). He's the one who told us about Antique Toy World, and all of a sudden, we discovered that there was this whole other world out there. We realized there were other collectors, and shows and auctions. The first auction we attended was in Kansas City in the late 1970s, the Jerry Smith collection. (Jerry Smith was a high-profile Kansas City philanthropist and owner of an automobile dealership.)



By the time of the Jerry Smith auction, we had met Bob and Marianne Schneider, Frank Whitson, Athel Spilhaus and a number of others. We met people we otherwise never would have known. Our group had so much fun when we got together. We would stay at each other's houses. Curt and I also became friends with Lloyd Ralston. Once, when Curt was traveling to Washington, DC on business, Lloyd insisted that we go up to Connecticut and stay at his house before driving to the auction with him. We stayed with him several times. To us, Lloyd's catalog was like a Christmas catalog. It contained all these things we didn't know existed.

ATW: Was your primary interest always early American toys?

LS: In the beginning we bought Lehmanns, Martins, Schoenhut toys, and racers. But for both of us, it was love at first sight when we saw our first American tin. It has such a folk-art quality, which we both loved, and Curt was fascinated by the clockwork mechanisms.



ATW: In addition to Antique Toy World and auction catalogs, how did you educate yourselves about antique toys?

LS: We joined the ATCA around 1980. We were sponsored by Donal Markey, and maybe also Lloyd (Ralston). That gave us access to visit many of the best toy collections.

ATW: Visiting Barney Barenholtz's house in your earlier years of collecting must have been memorable.

LS: Yes, we were at Brimfield and Barney invited us to his house in New Hampshire, where we got to look through his cupboards. He said, 'Pick a toy.' I picked the Columbia Ferry Boat, and he said, 'I'll remember.' Years later we were with our good friend Tom Anderson at a toy show where Barney was speaking. Barney asked, 'Do you still want the ferry boat, Linda?' I said, 'Yes,' and he said, 'It's yours. This is the price.' We actually attended the 1989 Barenholtz tag sale (produced by Alex Acevedo and Bill Bertoia) at the Mark Hotel in New York. That event was similar to the 1988 Perelman sale in Philadelphia (produced by Acevedo, Bertoia and Markey), which was known as the "Great Grab."



ATW: Did you attend the Great Grab?

LS: Yes, I remember standing next to Bill Weart on the starting line. When the sale began, we both raced toward the fire toys, but fortunately we wanted different things.

Another event where we were able to buy wonderful things was the Atlanta Toy Museum auction in 1986.

ATW: Who are some of the other toy-hobby legends you knew?

LS: We were lucky. We were there for the old-time collections and met some of the most influential collectors, who became our friends. When we started out, Barney Barenholtz, Lillian Gottschalk, and Bill Holland were still alive. Blair Whitton would come to shows and he'd bring us a couple of pieces. I remember that on one of Curt's frequent trips to Washington, he planned to drive to Lillian's house in Maryland to visit with her and view her collection. She told him, 'Oh, don't do that. I'll just send the Rolls to pick you up.'

We were also good friends with Athel and Kathy Spilhaus. (Athel, who died in 1998, was a renowned engineer, inventor and oceanographer.) They lived in Middleburg, Virginia, about an hour outside Washington, DC, and their neighbors were Elizabeth Taylor and her then-husband Senator John Warner. Athel operated at the highest echelons of federal government. One time Athel and Kathy were in the Caribbean, relaxing on the beach. A call came through from President Kennedy and it was patched to Athel, who took the call on the beach. All of a sudden, people started gathering around him to try to hear the conversation.



ATW: What were some of your European adventures?

LS: We traveled to Europe multiple times with the ATCA. Anthea Knowles' London show was so much fun. That's where we bought a Santa car from a Paris dealer. We also loved the Paris shows, where we would see things we normally wouldn't encounter and meet new friends, like David Pressland. I remember that one time we went to the Paris show with the Schneiders and ran out of French francs. Tom Sage was there and had brought along lots of cash, so we got some francs from him. Later on, he joked, "Now I need some cash, but I gave it all to you!"

ATW: Let's talk about some of the highlights of your collection. What are some of the toys you feel are special?

LS: The Althof Bergmann Santa in a Sleigh is one of the finest of all pieces of American tin. Not only is it a spectacular toy in all-original condition, it also has impeccable provenance. It came out of the Barenholtz collection and is well documented. It's also a crossover toy that Christmas collectors would want even if they didn't collect toys.



The large-size hose reel from the Perelman collection is another favorite. Curt loved the fire pieces. They're exquisite.

I like the hand-lever velocipedes. Our Uncle Sam velocipede previously belonged to Barney Barenholtz, then it was purchased by Covert Hegarty and eventually by us.

Another absolutely spectacular toy is the cast-iron horse-drawn cutter sleigh that we purchased from Don Markey, who never entertained a flaw on anything. It's similar to a big one that was sold at the Hegarty auction. Our cast-iron Tally-Ho has all its original figures. It is from the Bob & Jackie Stewart collection and is believed to be the finest example known.

Our American tin roundabout is the only one known, and it's in fabulous condition. It turned up on eBay, and Steven Weiss (Gemini Antiques Ltd) bought it. It was a very expensive toy, so before buying it, we wanted to know if any work had been done on it. Steven showed us photos that had been taken by the picker who found a Pennsylvania attic, then listed it on eBay. The picker had been told he could clear out the attic and keep everything. It's a big toy, gorgeous, with so much character. All it needed was to have a flag replaced.

I also like some of the European toys we bought, especially the little balancing toys, for example a boy or girl holding a hoop or sitting on a hobby horse. They're sweet little pieces and very hard to find.



ATW: Your collection includes early American clock-work toys that have their original boxes, which are so rare. Could you tell us about a few that have their boxes?

LS: In our collection there's a boxed toy made either by Ives or American Automatic Toy Works that depicts two cobblers on a wood trunk working on little lead shoes. It turned up in a general antiques auction in Santa Cruz, California, in the late 1980s or maybe 1990. We spotted it in an ad promoting the auction and drove up to bid on it. It's the only one I know of, and I've never seen it pictured in any book.

There's also a boxed Ives Double Oarsmen toy (ex Louis Hertz collection) and a boxed Ives Lady of the Regiment, which portrays a female figure dancing on a drum. Another very rare boxed toy, which we obtained from Blair Whitton, is an Ives, Blakeslee 'Cuzner' Trotter. Blair bought many toys from Lloyd Ralston in the late 1970s, and Lloyd is known to have bought many toys from Louis Hertz, so it's possible that the Cuzner Trotter was once part of the Hertz collection.

ATW: How would you summarize the way in which antique toys have enriched your life?

LS: Through the years I've met such fun people and had so many wonderful times that the items become almost secondary after a while. Now, it's time to look ahead.



An observation from Michael Bertoia, president of Bertoia Auctions:

“The Curtis and Linda collection is a classic, and the March auction – part one of a two-part series – is an event the world will want to watch. The high condition that distinguishes the entire collection is unrivaled. Many of the best of all known examples, whether tin or cast iron, are included in the Smith collection. Some of the primitive American tin pieces, which are so desired by collectors, have thick, bright, original paint. These are the types of toys you just never see. They were acquired by collectors 40 to 50 years ago, and unless a collection is auctioned as a whole, there aren’t many opportunities to buy toys of this caliber.”

Bertoia’s Signature Auction exclusively featuring the Curtis and Linda Smith antique toy collection will be held March 16, 2024 at Bertoia’s gallery located at 2141 DeMarco Drive, Vineland, NJ 08360. Live attendance is by reservation only. Preview the week before the auction by appointment only. Remote-bidding options include absentee, by phone, or live online through Bertoia Live or LiveAuctioneers. For additional information on any item, to leave an absentee bid, to make a private-preview appointment, or to reserve a gallery seat or telephone line for bidding, please call 856-692-1881, email toys@bertoiiauctions.com. Updates will be posted to Bertoia’s website: www.bertoiaauctions.com.





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Auction details at
BertoiaAuctions.com

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