

Patriotic Antiques

By Ken Farmer

Americans love patriotic-themed antiques, primarily when the objects feature iconic images from our past: flags such as Old Glory and her variants, eagles, shields, Lady Liberty, Uncle Sam, and soldiers. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, and the Centennial and Bicentennial are also

popular themes.

How many of us have been to Colonial Williamsburg as children and come home with a tricorn hat or a wooden practice musket? Maybe we went to Philadelphia and got a Liberty Bell paperweight or a small American flag. The great thing about patriotic antiques is the vast range of quantity and quality that is available. Everything from an inexpensive 1950s vintage desk flag to an original document signed by Washington that is worth six figures are patriotic antiques sought after by the collector.

As you set out in the market, you will find that historical items from the eight-

teenth and nineteenth centuries can be expensive. When you collect, be aware that anything valuable is worth faking. Document, textile, and furniture fakes are readily available. If it is too good to be true, it likely is just that. Make sure to buy from reputable sellers and get a provenance or letter of authenticity, if possible.

My favorite patriotic pieces are folk art with brilliant color and exceptional detail. These characteristics can undoubtedly be found on canvas or paper but are especially visible in statuary and other three-dimensional pieces, such as those you can see in the collection of items shown here.



Andrew Clemens sand bottle

Andrew Clemens sand bottle. Circa 1887. Clemens (1857–1894) became famous for the fine detail in his inverted bottles created with colored sand that he collected along the Mississippi River. Clemens' sand paintings often displayed patriotic motifs, such as the eagle shown here, which have made them popular among modern collectors.

8 1/2" H. Sold in 2019 by Cowan's Auctions for \$102,000, Lot 815. Credit Cowan's Auctions.



Embossed and lithographed German post card

Embossed and lithographed German post card. This circa 1900 postcard was made for the American market. The printing on cards from this era can be very finely detailed.



"Liberty or Death" patriotic wood Civil War pipe

"Liberty or Death" patriotic wood Civil War pipe. Circa 1862. Shows carved eagle with banner reading "Liberty or Death." 3.5" H. Sold in 2013 by Cowan's Auctions for \$9,000, Lot 123. Credit Cowan's Auctions.



Thomas Jefferson Craddock carved cane.

Late nineteenth—early twentieth century. This example has many relief-carved phrases—details shown here—including "Cane was cut near Jefferson's tomb/wrote Declaration of Independence/founder of the University, VA, 1819/Thos. Jefferson of VA born Apr. 2 1743/ was President of USA 1801 to 1809." All of Craddock's canes are different, and though the phrases are often repeated the layout, style, and details vary. Craddock was born in 1845 in Albemarle County, Virginia and his canes focus on topics related to that area. He was a prolific carver who made canes to sell to tourists. From the author's personal collection.



"Lady Columbia"

"Lady Columbia." Signed on plaque, marked "Wm. Demuth and Co., 507 & 509 Broadway, New York". Cast zinc retaining its original painted surface. Circa 1876. 38" H. This is the only example known to exist. It strongly resembles the statue of "Freedom" by Thomas Crawford (1814–1857) which sat atop the United States Capital in Washington DC since 1863. Credit Allan Katz.



Carved folk art Lady Liberty plaque

Carved folk art Lady Liberty plaque. Signed "F. Carsten." Carved and painted polychrome paint decorated wood. Circa 1915. Measures: 30.5"H x 18" W x 2.5" D. A true expression of American patriotism, this image of Miss Liberty holding her torch while embracing the globe is a clear message of democracy and freedom for all. Created at a time when WWI brought American patriotism to a peak. Credit Allan Katz.



Trial proof woodblock print, "July 4th" by Ted Turner

Trial proof woodblock print, "July 4th" by Ted Turner (1922–2002). Turner taught at the University of Virginia and was a noted and prolific Virginia artist who still has many admirers to this day.

Ken Farmer is a lifelong resident of Virginia and currently resides in Charlottesville. He and his wife Jane have been avid students and collectors of Americana and Southern material culture since they married in 1974. Since his teenage years Ken has been a musician and singer of traditional Appalachian and American Roots music. As a performer he became interested in the songs, history, objects and stories of his native Southwest Virginia, which led to him the antique business where he has worked for over 40 years. Ken has also appeared on *Antiques Roadshow* since its inception in 1996, as a specialist in folk art, decorative arts, and musical instruments. Ken runs an antique and fine art appraisal and consulting business that serves collectors, estates, and individuals throughout the mid-Atlantic.

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