

# Part 2

**RIVERDANCE:** LI hooper adds a new twist to Ireland's song and dance. **B3**

**FOOD:** If St. Patrick's Day calls for Irish fare, what's better than fish? **B19**



A simulated pearl necklace, left, like jewelry worn by Jacqueline Kennedy in Cap Lad in 1961, valued by auctioneers at \$500 to \$700.

Kennedy Photo by AP; Necklace Photo ©Caroline B. Kennedy, John F. Kennedy Jr., and the Estate of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, 1996.

## Camelot for Sale

Come April 23, someone will own Jackie's pearls. They're simulated — but so what. **B4-5**

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ENT



# A Very Private Person's Very Public Auction



The interest in Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' belongings has reached a frenzy — surpassing any auction that's gone before, say the folks at Sotheby's



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 1996

Auction Photos © Caroline D. Kennedy, John F. Kennedy Jr., and the Estate of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, 1996



On the block: a Victorian mahogany youth chair, an Elaine de Kooning portrait of JFK, gold and ruby "moon" earrings and JFK's Stetson hatbox



With Charles de Gaulle in Washington in 1960

AP Photo

By Karin Lipson  
STAFF WRITER

**M**OVE OVER, Andy Warhol. Grab a seat with the commoners, Duchess of Windsor. In the firmament of celebrity estate auctions, these past stars are being eclipsed by a name that has always radiated its own ethereal light: Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Still weeks away, the auction of the late, former first lady's estate has already created a fever pitch of interest from both the public and the media. Sotheby's auction house in Manhattan, which will hold the sale over a four-day period beginning April 23, has been flooded with calls from Beverly Hills to Buenos Aires. Anticipating record requests, it has ordered 100,000 copies of the tony auction catalog — selling at \$90 hard-bound, \$45 soft cover — making this the firm's largest catalog printing ever.

It's ironic, of course, that Jacqueline Onassis, in life the most private of people, should have occasioned this sort of frenzy nearly two years after her death in May, 1994. But the folks at Sotheby's — who shepherded both the \$25.3 million Warhol sale and the \$50.3 million Windsor auction to their highly successful conclusions — admit they've never seen the like of the presale interest in the Onassis auction.

Though Jackie stepped out of the public limelight more than 30 years ago, she

retained her star quality; to the last, heads swiveled and forks froze in midair when she entered a room. It seems as if everyone who knew her — and millions who didn't — kept a memory of her gracious elegance from the Camelot years, a memory never marred by the revisionist revelations that may have eventually sullied our image of Camelot itself.

"She was a beautiful young woman, very impressive," recalls New York theatrical producer Arthur Cantor. A Harvard classmate of John F. Kennedy's, Cantor met the youthful first lady during a White House dinner in 1962. "All I can say is, if she had been English, it would have been Buckingham Palace. She had that regal quality. She was American royalty."

And now, the availability of some royal treasures, or even royal cast-offs, has sparked this outpouring of international interest. Early on, the auction house announced it would use a lottery method to decide who will get to attend the five-day presale exhibition that starts April 19 and ends at noon on April 23, the day of the first evening sale session.

To keep the presale crowds to a manageable total of 30,000 visitors, only those who ordered an Onassis auction catalog by March 1 qualify to enter the lottery; each of the 15,000 people randomly selected from the lottery will be given two tickets to the exhibition. And even they will be limited to a specific day and time.

And then it gets really exclusive: Only 1,500 people will get to attend each auction session (nine sessions will be spread over the four sale days), with preference being given to long-term Sotheby's clients. But not to worry if you're not among the select: Absentee bid forms, available in the catalogs and from Sotheby's, will allow even the most humble among us to grab a chance for a Jackie memento.

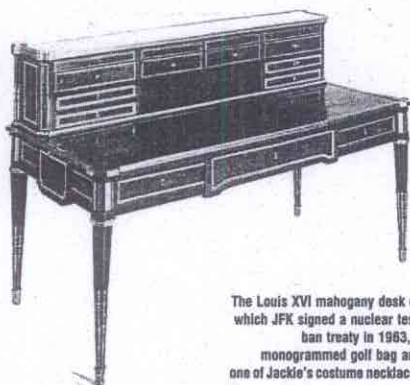
And just what sort of items



will be on the auction block? There are some 1,200 lots, or groupings, totaling upwards of 6,000 individual items. Among the furniture, you'll find everything from a Louis XVI mahogany desk to a faded yellow couch you might want to place discreetly in a back room. If this proves initially surprising, a touching (and copyrighted) catalog essay by Jackie's childhood friend and White House social secretary, Nancy Tuckerman, sets us straight: "Essentially, there was nothing grand or ostentatious about her apartment," Tuckerman writes about Onassis' Fifth Avenue digs. "It was inviting and comfortable, with a pleasing, lived-in feel to it. She was not in the habit of changing or rearranging furniture. Once everything was in place, she kept it that way, replacing worn upholstery or slipcovers with identical materials."

Moving right along, you'll find jewelry ranging from a 40.42-carat diamond that was a gift from Jackie's second husband, shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis, to batches of costume jewelry; art that includes some valuable paintings and watercolors (including a splendidly fierce "Head of an Arab" by John Singer Sargent), but also lots of little engravings, stage designs, architectural studies and caricatures; Hellenistic antiquities and contemporary hunting saddles, two early-20th-Century silver and enamel table clocks from Austria and a group of "miscellaneous woven baskets" from who-knows-where, and yes, a couple of JFK's rocking chairs.

What will all this cost? The point of an auction, of course, is that no one really knows in advance. Sotheby's has come up with a comparative conservative presale estimate of around \$5 million for the entire auction. But, acknowledges senior press spokesman Diana Phillips, "it is impossible to quantify provenance in a sale like



The Louis XVI mahogany desk on which JFK signed a nuclear test-ban treaty in 1963, a monogrammed golf bag and one of Jackie's costume necklaces

this." In other words, who knows how much someone will be willing to pay for a triple strand of simulated pearls — valued in the catalog at \$500 to \$700 — when it wasn't just anyone's strand of pearls, but Jackie's? In fact, when it was the very sort of reverse-snobbish costume jewelry that looked so elegant on the first lady in the early 1960s?

So the pearls, and indeed everything in the sale, could go for any price, perhaps many multiples of the demurely low estimates. Still, taking those presale estimates as a gauge, you could say that the auction as a whole is most notable for what it isn't: It isn't just a series of high-falutin', high-priced objets d'art. (But then, neither was the Warhol sale, with its cookie jars and flea-market goodies, or the Rudolph Nureyev auction last year at Christie's, with its worn-out ballet slippers among the Elizabethan furniture and Roman antiquities.)

Sure, you'll likely have to part with an estimated \$500,000 to \$600,000 for that mega-diamond from Ari, which is the most expensive

item in the sale. The wonderful Sargent watercolor will set you back at least \$100,000, according to estimates, while a gouache drawing of John and Jacqueline Kennedy done by Robert Rauschenberg during the 1960 presidential campaign is anticipated to sell for at least \$80,000. And that Louis XVI mahogany writing desk should sell for \$20,000 to \$30,000.

But for that, you also get a piece of history: The desk is the very one on which President Kennedy signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963. The personal property of the president, it was only used because a small desk was needed to allow all the dignitaries to crowd into the room for the signing.

And history, or at least the tangential reminders of history, can come a good deal cheaper, too. For an estimated \$700 to \$900, there's a set of golf clubs in a black leather bag inscribed "J.F.K. Washington, D.C." And for a relatively trifling \$200 to \$300, there's a Stetson brown leather hatbox, bearing a red tag marked "The President" — definitely not something you'd store in the closet with your fashion accessories. As for that faded yellow couch, well, an estimated \$500 to \$600 will get you a sofa on which some distinguished bottoms were, no doubt, parked.

And what you get with a Kenneth Jay Lane costume jewelry copy of a diamond, emerald and ruby necklace, with matching earrings (estimated at \$1,000 to \$1,500) is a charming story, related by Lane in the catalog. It seems that Jackie had asked him to make a "near replica of a wonderful Van Cleef and Arpels necklace Ari had given her." When the price of making the model proved prohibitive (prohibitive? To Jacqueline Onassis?) Lane suggested she allow him to include the necklace in his collection, to absorb the cost of the model. She agreed, and Lane used the model for 25

years: "One day Jackie said to me in her wonderful whisper,



Library Foundation in Boston. (Proceeds from the catalog sales will also be donated to charity.)

So we are really only seeing a cross-section, as it were, of her possessions. Among these, it may be the lesser things that are most poignant, or telling. Her schoolgirl French-verb conjugation book (estimate: \$500 to \$800) reminds us of how, years later, she dazzled the French with her charm and linguistic ability during a 1961 state visit to France. ("I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris," quipped the president, knowing when he had been upstaged.)

A specially bound edition of JFK's "Profiles in Courage" (estimate: \$3,000 to \$5,000) bears a calligraphic inscription "presented by the publisher to Mrs. John F. Kennedy"; it was published in 1964, we see, following the JFK assassination, and was a memorial edition. Two volumes on Russia, used by their owner in her research for "In the Russian Style," which she edited, remind us that she spent nearly two decades in her later years as an editor, first at Viking Press, then at Doubleday.

And more volumes on ballet, music, modern artists, photography, costumes and fashion suggest a restless intelligence, focused widely, if not, perhaps, in great depth, on the arts.

But in the end, the Irish ballad that was used for the title of a 1970 memoir of JFK — "Johnny We Hardly Knew Ye" — could serve, too, for his widow: Jackie, we hardly knew ye. That's how it was, and probably how it should have been. So what we ultimately get out of those nearly 1,200 lots may be exactly what we put into them: our memories, still cherished after all these years. ■



A valuable artwork: "Head of an Arab" by John Singer Sargent