



Newsstand Rate \$1.50  
Outside CT \$1.75

Published by The Bee Publishing Company, Newtown, Connecticut

INDEXES ON  
PAGES 66 & 67



Albert M. Sack, 1915–2011.

## The Fine Points Of Albert Sack

BY LAURA BEACH

DURHAM, N.C. — Albert M. Sack, the prominent author, lecturer and antiques dealer, died on May 29. He was 96.

In a career spanning much of the Twentieth Century, Sack, in partnership with his late brothers, Harold and Robert, defined the market for early American furniture, from its resurgence after World War II to its zenith at century's end. The firm founded in 1905 by their father, the redoubtable Lithuanian immigrant Israel Sack, prospered in part because each brother performed his role brilliantly. As the Sack brothers themselves liked to say, "Albert buys, Harold sells and Robert delivers."

Middle brother Albert was the company's "bird dog," as his friend Arthur Liverant called him. It was Albert who was most often in the field — making house calls, lecturing to an avid public and networking with the trade. His extensive contacts with dealers and auctioneers nationwide ultimately made him the best known and most influential of the three.

Albert Sack was born in Lynn, Mass., in 1915. After his college education was cut short by the Depression, he joined older brother Harold at Israel Sack, Inc, in 1934 when it relocated from Boston to New York City. He returned to Manhattan ready to make his mark after serving in the US Army between 1942 and 1946.

In a detail now largely forgotten, Alice Winchester, herself a great popularizer of antiques at midcentury and *The Magazine Antiques'* durable editor, urged Albert to expand an article that he had written for her into his first book, *Fine Points of Furniture*. Filled with black and white photographs, the volume recommended a straightforward approach to evaluating furniture based on its formal appeal. Unusual for its time, it also included notes on condition.

Originally published in 1950, the best-seller was reprinted 24 times before Albert's protégée, Atlanta, Ga., dealer Deanne Levison, helped him produce *The New Fine Points of Furniture*. Published in 1993, the updated guide added "superior" and "masterpiece" categories to Albert's original "good," "better" and "best." It is among these "masterpieces" that one finds some of the great objects that Albert Sack turned up during his years on the road.

Beginning with Israel Sack, the family stood for professional excellence and integrity, so much so that a Sack provenance remains an enticement to buy. Ever loyal to their father and his principles, the Sack brothers named the Israel Sack Galleries, which opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing in 1981-82, in his honor.

The brothers' contributions were acknowledged in their later years. In 1996, Winterthur Muse-

um presented the Henry F. du Pont Award to Harold, Albert and Robert Sack and posthumously to Israel Sack. The Antiques Dealers Association of America (ADA) lauded Albert Sack with its first Award of Merit in 2002. In between, Israel Sack, Inc, closed, a victim, like many Manhattan galleries, of skyrocketing costs.

In a career comeback, Albert joined Northeast Auctions in 2002 when he was 87, working there until 2005. He continued representing private clients after he moved to North Carolina, where he had family, making a splash in 2005 when he purchased Nicholas Brown's mahogany scalloped-top tea table for \$8.4 million and, in 2008, when he successfully bid \$5.2 million for a Philadelphia Queen Anne compass-seat stool, both at Sotheby's. His latest venture was a line of reproduction furniture produced in collaboration with the Hickory Chair Company.

Albert Sack is survived by his wife, Shirley; his son, Donald; and by his daughters Deborah, Donna and Rena. A memorial service was conducted in North Carolina on Friday, June 3.

In declining health in the past two years and no longer able to travel as much as he once did, Albert Sack nevertheless remained an assertive presence in the field of American antiques.

(continued on page 40)



"My brother Leslie and I visited Albert and Shirley in North Carolina just a few weeks ago. Albert still had that sparkle in his eye. I gave him a big hug and told him that he, above all others, was a role model for so many people, including me," said Leigh Keno, right.



Albert with Morrison and Fenella Heckscher at the sale of the Cora and Benjamin Ginsburg collection in 2003.

## The Fine Points Of Albert Sack



Albert signs copies of his book *The New Fine Points of Furniture*, published by Crown in 1993.



"But I'm a Mets fan," Albert whispered to John Hays after Christie's deputy chairman presented him with this Yankees cap at the 2002 ADA Award dinner honoring Sack. The tongue-in-cheek gift was a going away present to Sack, shown here holding his ADA Award finial, who was leaving New York for New England and Northeast Auctions.

(continued from page 1)

### Remembering Albert Sack

"It was always a pleasure to be with Albie, for he was a fount of information about antiques and such fun to joke with, as his humor was witty and dry. Albie was one of the foundations of the business and a staunch supporter of the antiques world. He will be sorely missed."

—R. Scudder Smith,  
Editor and Publisher, *Antiques*  
and *The Arts Weekly*

"Albert first made his mark back in 1950, with the publication of *Fine Points of Furniture: Early American* — an unabashed paean to connoisseurship by an unbridled and highly opinionated apologist for American furniture. May his enthusiasm influence us all long into the future!"

—Morrison H. Heckscher, Lawrence A. Fleischman  
Chairman of the American Wing,  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

"We are sorry to see another passing of the 'old guard.' Albert was dedicated to the American antiques field. He left it better than when he started."

—Bernard, Dean and Frank Levy,  
Bernard & S. Dean Levy, Inc

"The amazing thing about my father was his ability to absorb knowledge about American furniture. He started when they didn't have all the books, the microanalysis, the array of resources



Albert M. Sack

that we have today. His computer was his brain. Like his father before him, he had the ability to absorb all of the information that he acquired over a lifetime by trial and error. The antiques field was his life. He loved it, I believe, and lived for it until the day he died."

—Donald Sack

"I thought the world of Albert. He was an honest, caring person and a wonderful teacher. He shared his knowledge and didn't have an arrogant bone in his body. He had a passion for objects. We teased him that he could remember every corner block he ever saw, but not what he had for lunch. I went to work for Israel Sack, Inc, in 1987 and feel incredibly blessed and privileged to have been a part of the firm. It was an icon in our field."

—Deanne Levison,  
Atlanta, Ga., dealer

"I was very fortunate to have my father, Zeke Liverant, and his good friend Albert Sack as my mentors. They were alike in so many ways. It was uncanny that they found each other after World War II when each was trying to scratch out a living in the world of American antiques, perhaps on different levels.

"They were men of the big picture who had a great natural eye, but who cared little about the incidentals. They knew what to go after, but they weren't necessarily interested in the nuts and bolts of running a business.

"When Gigi and I married in 1974, Albert gave



Sack conferring with Milly McGehee and Deanne Levison, right, on the finer points of this Pembroke table.



Still going strong into his mid-90s, Albert was 87 when he joined Northeast Auctions, where this photo was taken.



Albert at the Antiques Week in New Hampshire, 2003.



Albert Sack selected this image of himself for his website, [albertsack.com](http://albertsack.com). Photo courtesy of Margie Fishman, *The News & Observer*.



Albert Sack with then-Sack associate Deanne Levison, left, and Gail Serfaty, then curator of the Diplomatic Reception Rooms, US Department of State.



Arthur Liverant presents his good friend with the ADA's first Award of Merit in Philadelphia in 2002.



Albert and his wife, Shirley, with Christie's Deputy Chairman John Hays, center.



The famous front door to Israel Sack, Inc, is now at Winterthur Museum.



Albert Sack enjoyed his association with Barbra Streisand, who acquired major pieces in several fields, including American furniture.



Robert, Harold and Albert Sack in 1989, at a party celebrating their purchase of the Nicholas Brown desk and bookcase for \$12.1 million, a record still unbroken.



Albert with Deanne Levison and Bill Stahl, then an active specialist/auctioneer at Sotheby's.



This undated photograph shows Albert, left, at an antiques show with his son Donald Sack, who rejoined the firm in 1998 after an 11-year absence. Israel Sack, Inc, closed in 2002.

## Albert Sack 1915–2011



Arthur Liverant and Albert Sack, Delaware, 1997.



"Albert never ran out of gas," said Ron Bourgeault of Sack, here in a rare moment of repose.



Albert Sack joined Ron Bourgeault at Northeast Auctions in New Hampshire between 2002 and 2005.

us what I thought was an antique. I realized after short examination that it was not what it purported to be. Albert kept asking me what I thought of his gift. I finally told him that I didn't think it was original. Albert said, 'Keep it in your house and know that there are many potholes you can fall into out there. Don't get the attitude that you can't be fooled. You've got a reputation to maintain. Don't take it lightly. Work hard every day. Be a great teacher. Don't hold grudges. Stay close to others because you can learn from everybody.' I frequently think about what Albert told me. I learned so much from him.

"The three Sack brothers worked well together because they each had talents. Harold was the financial man. Robert took care of a million nuts and bolts. Albert was the bird dog."

—Arthur Liverant,  
Nathan Liverant and Son

"Albert Sack did more than anyone to educate the public about American furniture. A friend gave me a copy of *Fine Points of Furniture* when I was very young. I, like tens of thousands of other novices, studied the pictures and text to learn how to judge the quality of pieces. At 16, I met Mr Sack and our friendship grew over time.

"In 2002, when Israel Sack, Inc, closed, Albert said to me, 'I don't know what I am going to do. I am too young to retire.' I suggested that he come to New Hampshire to help me for a while. While reinventing himself, he worked with me at Northeast Auctions between 2002 and 2005 before moving to North Carolina. Having found a new niche in the business, he became a major consultant to collectors and museum curators.

"In 2008, when he purchased the Philadelphia Queen Anne compass-seat stool at the Moore sale at Sotheby's for \$5.2 million, he passed me as he was leaving the room, smiled and said, 'I'm still the King.'

"I never tired of Albert's stories about the antiques trade. Driving home one day, I was so glued to his every word that I ran out of gas. Albert said, 'Put the car in neutral and I'll push.' Albert never ran out of gas. He also never gave up. He has earned his place in the hearts and minds of all who ever had the pleasure of knowing him."

—Ron Bourgeault,  
President, Northeast Auctions

"I think of Albert Sack as the consummate dealer's dealer. He had a great impact on the trade. Albert was really the everyman for peo-



**Harvey and Isobel Kahn with Albert Sack.**

ple in the field. He recognized exceptional pieces when he saw them and had an extraordinary network of friends. People liked working with him because when he got something great, he knew what to do with it.

“Albert was a man of his time. He loved the Mets and was proud that Barbra Streisand was his customer. He knew exactly where he stood. In our profession, we are always looking for authenticity. Albert was authentic. He loved his field and he obviously adored his father. The Sacks were passionate about America. *Fine Points of Furniture*, known as *Good, Better, Best*, was Albert’s way of coding it.

“Imagine what Albert did into his 90s. What an inspiration. It was endless. Albert liked the next thing. He loved seeing new pieces and wanted to be a part of the deals.”

—John Hays,  
Deputy Chairman, Christie’s

“I met Albert in my early twenties, soon after I arrived at Sotheby’s. I asked him to show me some pieces. He said, ‘What you want to know is what makes them original.’ To the end, Albert was kind and patient. He always had that smile and a twinkle in his eye. I go back through the Sack volumes and am in awe of the number of masterpieces that he handled. He remembered every detail of what he saw. Just an amazing man and a great storyteller. I’m going to miss him.”

—Leslie Keno,  
Senior Vice President, Sotheby’s

“Three things stand out in my mind about Albert: his enthusiasm, his knowledge and his memory. He always greeted me with a wide grin and a warm welcome. His enthusiasm for antiques, especially antique furniture, was contagious. His knowledge was second to none. He had a connoisseur’s eye for quality. And with that marvelous memory of his, Albert could recall at a moment’s notice some wonderfully odd and curious fact about nearly every piece of early American furniture that has come on the market over the past 70 years.

“He loved the antiques field; I remember this passion most vividly through the colorful stories he liked to tell — sometimes again and again. I never tired of the stories. They brought the past to life in a unique and unforgettable way. There are no more Albert Sacks in our field and all of us are the lesser for it. Albert will be much missed.”

—Brock Jobe,  
Professor of American Decorative Arts,  
Winterthur Museum

“My brother Leslie and I visited Albert and Shirley just a few weeks ago. Albert still had that sparkle in his eye. I gave him a big hug. I wanted him to know that he, above all others, was a role model for so many people, including me. No one had higher standards or such a passion for the chase and for the objects.”

—Leigh Keno,  
Leigh Keno American Antiques  
and Keno Auctions

“I probably met Albert around 1970. Early on and thereafter, if he came to an auction it was a major event. He occasionally bought, but he was always accessible, friendly and easy to talk to. He was very opinionated, but happy to share his opinions. He was the kind of person who commanded respect and it was well earned. He was impeccable, always wore that double-breasted

jacket and a tie. He was both old school but young at heart. He was never snobbish. He once told me a story about a guy coming in the gallery in the Crown Building. The man had tennis shoes with holes in them, but Albert was courteous. ‘Are you a collector?’ Albert asked. ‘No, but my grandfather was. Will you honor your guarantee to repurchase what you sold him at the original price?’ asked the man. ‘Of course,’ said Albert. I imagine that everyone won. I thought Albert would be with us forever.”

—Stephen Fletcher,  
Executive Vice President, Skinner, Inc

“Like so many others, I was personally introduced to Albert when I was a Winterthur fellow and Charles Montgomery brought us on a field trip to Israel Sack, Inc, in New York. Albert was in full form. He liked nothing better than to educate. He was a showman.

“I got to know Albert very quickly in my first job as curator at Bayou Bend in Texas. The Sacks, along with the Levys and John Walton, were crucial in helping Miss Hogg put her collection together. When Bayou Bend became a unit of Houston’s Museum of Fine Arts, Albert came down to review the collection. The dealer code at the time was that you could raise your eyebrow but you were very careful about making an outright statement if you suspected that a piece might have a problem. But Miss Hogg was very smart and persistent. She said, ‘Now, Albert, I want to know the truth.’ Albert’s word was always golden with Miss Hogg and with the buying public, as well. As an auctioneer, you don’t hesitate to use a Sack provenance.”

—Dean Failey,  
consultant, Christie’s

“The Hickory Chair Company started working with Albert several years ago after our president, Jay Reardon, struck up a conversation with him and was fascinated by his expertise. After meeting with us a few times, Albert brought us the most beautiful examples of traditional American furniture and allowed us to go through his archives to find other examples to reproduce and adapt for our customers. He reviewed prototypes for us and even got down on the factory floor to show us how pieces could be refined and perfected. It is Hickory Chair’s 100th anniversary. At the Highpoint market in October, we will have a new sofa and chair that Albert worked on with us.”

—Cathy Mitchell Parker,  
Vice President-Merchandising,  
Hickory Chair Co.

“Albert’s passion was unrivaled, whether he was teaching you about patina and form or sharing the history of a beloved object. He cared deeply about the Sack Archives, which include photographs from Israel Sack, Inc, as well as from his personal collection. Albert left us his library, lectures, letters and poetry. I know that he would wish them to inspire a new generation of collectors by providing an invaluable resource for research.”

—Deborah Friedman

—“I got to know Albert when I was at the Rhode Island Historical Society working for John Kirk. Albert was so ebullient about objects. By his own admission, he loved to buy. He also loved to talk about objects. He rhapsodized about them in a way that was very persuasive.”

—Wendy Cooper,  
Curator of Furniture, Winterthur



**Albert made a splash in 2005 when he purchased Nicholas Brown’s mahogany scalloped-top tea table for \$8.4 million at Sotheby’s.**



**Leigh Keno, Albert Sack and Atlanta attorney S. Jarvin Levinson.**



**Sack set popular standards for collecting early American furniture when he identified good, better and best examples in *Fine Points of Furniture*, published in 1950.**