

Georgetown Times

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Hobcaw reports \$1 million art theft

By Tommy Howard

STAFF WRITER

Baruch officials and county law enforcement officers are expected to meet today to discuss more than \$1 million in artwork reported missing from Bellefield House at Hobcaw Barony.

The missing artwork includes prints by John James Audubon. Other valuable pieces are also believed to have been taken from the Bellefield House.

Baruch Foundation board chairman Hugh Lane and Plantation Manager George W. Chastain are expected to discuss with investigators an inventory of the missing items, which was compiled after the report was first made to the Sheriff's Office on July 31. The sheriff's department then contacted the FBI.

That report was initially made by Sammy McIntosh, former curator for the Belle

W. Baruch Foundation, which owns Hobcaw Barony.

McIntosh told Georgetown County sheriff's deputies that someone stole an unspecified number of works of art on Thursday, July 31, between the hours of 3 and 9 a.m.

July 31 was the deadline for McIntosh to vacate the premises.

Chastain confirmed that McIntosh had left Hobcaw

Barony on that day.

"Sammy was on contract, and his contract was not renewed," Chastain said.

According to the incident report filed at the Sheriff's Office, McIntosh said someone came into the residence and stole several valuable antique oil paintings and Audubon large prints, appraised at more than \$1 million.

"Our goal is to recover this stuff," Chastain said.

"That's the most important thing to us."

The report said McIntosh told the deputies that while the doors to the residence were locked. The report also states there were no visible signs of forced entry.

Deputy Darryl Washington made the initial report, and then turned the matter over to investigator Tom Digsby.

Digsby and Capt. Harvey Knox drove out to Bellefield

House and processed the scene.

McIntosh was a longtime companion of the late Ella Severin — a close friend of Belle W. Baruch — and lived in Bellefield House for a number of years, serving as executive curator for the Foundation, which owns the 17,500-acre property.

Hobcaw Barony includes not only Belle Baruch's for-

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Theft

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mer home, but also Hobcaw House, which was owned by her father, wealthy financier and presidential adviser Bernard M. Baruch.

Severin met Belle Baruch prior to World War II, and came to Georgetown in 1951. When Belle Baruch died in 1965, she gave Severin a life estate in Bellefield House.

Severin died in January 2000. Her will requested that McIntosh be given a similar life estate in the house, named him as co-trustee and her primary beneficiary. She also asked that McIntosh be appointed to the board of trustees in her place.

That did not happen, but McIntosh was allowed to continue to live in the house and served as executive curator for the Baruch Foundation.

Following the July 24 meeting of the Baruch Foundation board of trustees, Chastain indicated that McIntosh no longer worked for the foundation. He also said that McIntosh had until July 31 to vacate the premises.

Exactly what was taken and the appraised value of the items has not been made

public, although it is believed to exceed \$1 million.

Following Severin's death in 2000, an inventory showed jewelry she left to McIntosh was worth about \$275,000.

Later, McIntosh put 18 pieces up for sale with Christie's Auction House in New York. Fifteen pieces sold in October 2000 for \$598,245.

That same year, McIntosh suggested that the Foundation have five of the seven original Audubon prints that Belle Baruch purchased for \$550 evaluated and restored. A showing of a portion of the Baruch art collection was held that October, and Dr. Tom Palmer of the College of Charleston told trustees and friends of the foundation he was impressed with the restoration work.

In the 1800s, John James Audubon captured and shot more than 500 birds so he could paint them life-sized. His set of 435 prints are literally worth millions today.

In October 2000, Palmer said, "The last time a single plate was sold, it brought \$145,000. An entire collection was last sold at Christie's Auction House in March (2000) for \$8.8 million."

"Some students today in

their lifetime may see a set sold for \$100 million," Palmer predicted.

There was no public indication of how many of the Audubon prints are missing.

Georgetown County Assistant Sheriff Carter Weaver said the property record was not being released because the investigation is continuing.

McIntosh was involved in a legal battle with the Williamsburg County Historical Society over a portion of the estate of Marie Nelson of Kingstree who died in January 1981.

In her will, Nelson named McIntosh as executor and trustee. He was also a significant beneficiary, receiving some \$200,000 in personal effects and property.

In an inventory he had prepared, McIntosh listed the value of Nelson's estate as being greater than \$1 million.

However, court papers filed after Nelson's death indicated the appraised value of her estate, including land, was in excess of \$4 million.

The Williamsburg County Historical Society argued it was entitled to a fair portion of the Nelson estate and sued McIntosh.

McIntosh, in the meantime, had pledged several properties and securities as

collateral, and when payments were not made the properties were seized and sold.

Later, the Historical Society reportedly settled its lawsuit after McIntosh gave the Society some of the items.

McIntosh has reportedly moved back to Kingstree. Efforts Tuesday to contact him for comment were unsuccessful.

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