

DR. BENJAMIN H. CALDWELL, JR. (1935-2017)

When Dr. Benjamin H. Caldwell Jr. died on May 8 of this year, many of us in the Decorative Arts world lost a teacher and a tastemaker. A distinguished collector and noted scholar, invited to lecture by organizations nationwide including Winterthur, Williamsburg, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Sotheby's, the Natchez Antiques Forum, and the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Dr. Caldwell will be especially remembered for his passion for the arts and history of Tennessee.

He was born in a small, West Tennessee farming town, and said he never saw a great museum painting until he was a teenager. Yet his eye was so naturally discerning that while in New York studying medicine, it impressed a prestigious antiques dealer, who offered him a job. Dr. Caldwell recalls he was tempted, but decided it would be better to make antiques his hobby and medicine his vocation rather than the other way around!



Later in his career, however, Dr. Caldwell turned his scholarly mind to the exploration of the South's early silver trade, publishing the landmark book *Tennessee Silversmiths* in 1988. The book was preceded by Dr. Caldwell's article on Tennessee silver in the September 1971 issue of *The Magazine Antiques*, which also showcased the Caldwell home (and pictured several of the objects in this auction). Pieces from the Caldwells' collection have since been exhibited in numerous museum settings and scholarly articles and books, including *The Art and Mystery of Tennessee Furniture*. The Caldwells lent and gave generously to museums, served on boards including Cheekwood and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, and consulted with numerous historic homes including Traveller's Rest, Belle Meade Plantation, and Cragfont. Dr. Caldwell was president of Historic Nashville Inc. and played key roles in the preservation of the Ryman Auditorium and Union Station. In the 1990s, the Caldwells embarked on a mission to make the visual arts accessible to rural, underserved areas in Tennessee. They donated hundreds of works of art to the West Tennessee Regional Arts Center in Dr. Caldwell's hometown of Humboldt, which earned them a Governor's Award in the Arts from the Tennessee Arts Commission. In 2006, Dr. Caldwell helped organize and co-authored the catalog for *The Art of Tennessee* exhibit at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, a comprehensive survey of the skill and genius of Tennessee's best artisans. The exhibit was much like the Caldwells' own collection: highlighting the best in the fine and decorative arts from Tennessee's statehood to the present day.

On a personal note, the groundwork laid by Dr. Caldwell is one of the reasons we at Case got into this business, and their research assistance, friendship, and encouragement are a big part of why we're still here. Ultimately, Dr. Caldwell understood these things we all love are really about *people*. It is our very great honor to present in this auction some of the pieces that formed the core of the Caldwells' collection, including some of his beloved Tennessee Silver.