



Auction bidding pushes past \$1.5 million on July 21, 2017, for a bag used by Neil Armstrong to collect rock samples on the moon in 1969. The final price of \$1.8 million was actually lower than the pre-auction estimate of \$2 million to \$4 million. Seven-figure prices for space artifacts are increasingly common, collectors say. DENNIS VAN TINE, SIPA USA, VIA AP

# UP, UP AND AWAY ... GOING, GOING, GONE

**Matt Alderton**  
Special to USA TODAY

**W**hen Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed safely on the moon on July 20, 1969, some attributed their achievement to God. Others, to luck. As a practical matter, though, their success was the result a 44-page instruction manual that outlined — step by step — how to undock the lunar module

*Eagle* from command module *Columbia*, land it on the lunar surface, then rendezvous once again with *Columbia* for the return trip home.

The ring-bound manual, known as the Apollo 11 Lunar Module Timeline Book, was the astronauts' saving grace. Now, 50 years later, it's poised to become a private citizen's prized possession thanks to British auction house Christie's, which will sell it to the highest bidder during its upcoming auction, "One Giant Leap: Celebrating Space Exploration 50 Years After Apollo 11," taking place July 18 in New

York. Christie's estimates that the item could sell for as much as \$9 million.

Although that kind of money in the auction world is typically reserved for fine art, rare antiques and precious gemstones, that someone would spend seven figures on a piece of space history doesn't surprise Bobby Livingston, executive vice president of public relations for RR Auction, a Boston-based auction house that began organizing space-themed auctions in 2011.

"Since that time, we've sold over \$25 million in space-related artifacts



and autographs,” he says. “The hobby is growing, and prices are going up. We’re selling six-figure items consistently now when we never used to before.”

Collectors began snapping up space memorabilia in the 1960s at the dawn of manned spaceflight. But the collector community has grown in recent years thanks to a perfect storm of demographics and economics.

“The people of my generation who loved the moon landing and were inspired by it grew up to become internet entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists, and they now have enough disposable income that they’re buying these materials and starting collections,” says Livingston, who is 65. “They’re not doing it for the investment; they’re passionate, emotional collectors who are doing it because they relate to the items.”

That’s certainly true of 65-year-old space collector and appraiser Lawrence McGlynn, one of the stars of the Netflix reality TV show *Space Dealers*. “I’m a child of Apollo,” says McGlynn, who began collecting space-themed items in his youth, then rediscovered the hobby in his 40s. “I’ve always been interested in human exploration, and the 1960s to me was a golden era of human exploration ... I’ll never go to the moon, but I can bring the moon to me. And that’s what I’m trying to do with my collection.”

Robert Pearlman may be younger, at 43, but he can relate to McGlynn. Although he doesn’t recall what initially sparked his interest in space, he remembers what amplified it: the 1986 film *Space Camp*, which was inspired by the U.S. Space Camp in Huntsville, Ala. — which he subsequently attended six times. He’s been a space nut ever since.

“I missed the Apollo program, so collecting for me is a way to connect to that history that I became so passionate about,” says Pearlman, who runs the website collectSPACE, an online community for space historians and collectors. “You could watch a video or read a magazine, but humanity is a tactile species and I think we learn best when we come into contact with real things. That’s why museums exist, and it’s what brought me to the hobby.”

The desire to connect tangibly with history attracts international collectors, too. “There are many space collectors in Britain, Germany and beyond,” British collector Chris Spain, 50, who resides in Paris and runs the space collectibles website Space Flown Artifacts. “Prior to the internet, the possibilities for these collectors were pretty limited. However, once eBay took off and U.S.-based auction houses realized that the internet allowed them to sell worldwide, the possibilities expanded dramatically.”



Space Camp at Huntsville, Ala., has helped fire the imaginations of those too young to remember Apollo, including some who became avid collectors of space memorabilia. Above, astronaut Kate Rubins talks to campers. CHARLES BEASON, NASA

**“I missed the Apollo program, so collecting for me is a way to connect to that history that I became so passionate about. You could watch a video or read a magazine, but humanity is a tactile species and I think we learn best when we come into contact with real things. That’s why museums exist, and it’s what brought me to the hobby.”**

**Robert Pearlman**

The objects that fuel collectors’ interests are as diverse as the collectors themselves. Among the items they pursue: astronaut autographs; contemporaneous posters, pamphlets, newspapers and magazines; vintage NASA-issued glossy photographs; space-themed pop art; objects that astronauts carried into orbit with them, from mundane items like pencils to symbolic treasures like flags; spacesuits; and hardware or other components from flown and never-flown spacecraft.

“The highest-priced items we’ve seen to date are usually one-of-a-kind pieces carried on the Apollo missions,” Spain says. They include aviation relics from the Wright Brothers. “A (May 2019) auction by Dallas-based Heritage Auctions included small swatches of fabric from the wing of the Wright Flyer carried by Armstrong on Apollo 11, one of which sold for \$175,000, and a small fragment of propeller, also from the Wright Flyer, which sold for the same sum. Their previous Armstrong auction ... brought in

some even higher sums, including \$468,500 for a metal spacecraft identification plate flown on the Apollo 11 lunar module, and \$275,000 for a small gold Fliteline medallion originally intended to be flown on Apollo 1 but subsequently carried on Apollo 11 by Armstrong.”

Fortunately for less-flush collectors, not everything comes at an astronomical price. At the May Heritage auction, for example, McGlynn acquired for \$400 a Thai tektite tie tack given to Armstrong by the people of Thailand during a promotional world tour for Apollo 11.

“I liked the (Thai/tie) word play,” muses McGlynn, whose most memorable possession is a bedazzled jockstrap — the last jockstrap ever worn on the moon — given to him as a gag gift by friend and astronaut Gene Cernan, who wore it in 1972 during the Apollo 17 moon landing. “If you’re going to pee in your spacesuit, you’ve got to pee into a bag. So the astronauts had a catheter and a jockstrap with a hole in it, and the techs would jazz them up with little decorations as a joke.”

Therein lies the beating heart of space collecting. As McGlynn explains, “It’s all about great stories.”