

When History Goes To Auction

Queen Victoria instituted the Victoria Cross in 1856. Since then, it has been awarded for conspicuous bravery, a daring or pre-eminent act of valour, self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy. 1351 Victoria Crosses have been presented, 94 to Canadians. Only 16 Victoria Crosses were awarded to Canadians in World War II, only one of those awarded for the Battle of Normandy. Each medal displays the Royal Crown surmounted by a lion with the inscription *For Valour*. (Source: [The Vimy Foundation](#))

Recently the medals of a Canadian veteran and hero of World War II were auctioned by Dix Noonan Webb in London. There were nine medals in total, one of which was a Victoria Cross, awarded to the soldier for determination and heroism during the 1944 Normandy campaign in France.



Although the medals had passed from the hands of the family to a Canadian collector many years ago, the decision of the medals' current owner to auction them created a great deal of interest from collectors world-wide and the media.

The Canadian War Museum in Ottawa was reportedly interested, but was outbid by a UK collector. The winning bid was a staggering \$550,000 Cdn, *plus* a 20% buyer's premium.

The UK purchaser is required to apply under the *Cultural Property Export and Import Act* for a permit to export. The permit could be denied by the Department of Canadian Heritage if they deem this particular Victoria Cross of cultural significance and importance.

Are there lessons for an executor? Absolutely!

1. **There may be restrictions on who can purchase assets of cultural or historical significance**, should the deceased happen to have held such items. It is best to work with a reputable and experienced appraiser or auction house.
2. **Don't assume you know the value of an asset.** Although we all would recognize the historical importance of a Victoria Cross medal, how many of us would have realized the monetary value? What other items of value have been donated to charity? Working with professionals to ensure the estate is correctly valued is an important step in administering an estate.

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