

December 18th, 2012

First of Multi-Part Single-Owner-Historical Documents Sale Achieves \$6 Million

by Jeanne Schinto

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Profiles in History, Calabasas, California

Photos courtesy Profiles in History

What was arguably the most exciting of the several end-of-year auctions of historical documents in 2012 did not take place in New York City. It happened on the West Coast, the so-called left coast, the one that some East-Coasters tend to dismiss or even malign. The venue was Profiles in History, Calabasas, California.

Surprised? If so, bear in mind the old joke about the Boston matrons who, when asked about their trip to California, said it was OK except they found it hard to get used to the ocean being 3000 miles away.

"People told me, 'Oh, you should have had the sale in New York,'" said Marsha Malinowski, Profiles in History's senior consultant in charge of books and manuscripts, and author of the extraordinarily good catalog for the December 18, 2012, sale. "But it really didn't matter. When there's great quality, great manuscripts, people will come, no matter where it is."

Actually most didn't bid in person at this sale of 299 lots, 86% of which sold for slightly more than \$6 million (including buyers' premiums). By Malinowski's count, only a dozen of the people present were not auction house staff.

"The room was filled, more than anything, with people on the phone," she said. "It was incredible how many phones there were. And over two hundred forty people registered and bid on line, so that was another unbelievable dimension to the sale. It's also what slowed it down."

Indeed, it took five hours for auctioneer Stacey Roman to get through everything.

As we watched the sale unfold on the Internet, the camera showed only Roman—he of the enviable stamina and easy-listening style—but we could hear the phone-bid takers applaud often. They had good reason to do so, considering the prices attained.

They clapped most frequently when the artists' letters went up, most of which burst the seams of their reasonable estimates. The group of 13 included the sale's top lot, a four-page autograph letter signed by Vincent van Gogh that fetched \$336,000. He wrote it in Saint-Remy de Provence on January 20, 1890, less than seven months before his death. It was addressed to "M. & Mme. Ginoux," proprietors of the Café de la Gare in Arles.

Madame Ginoux was ill, and the artist offered touching words of consolation, encouragement, and friendship even in the face of his own illness.

Both the content and the extreme rarity of van Gogh letters in the marketplace were the reason it went so high, said Malinowski. She added, "I've always thought artists' letters were the unsung heroes of manuscript collecting. And I've made it my business to make that a collecting area over the last twenty-five years."

This was Malinowski's first major sale for Profiles in History. (Her dress rehearsal, so to speak, took place on November 15, 2012. "It was a small sale, [for] dipping our toe into the water, and getting our ducks racked up for this big sale," Malinowski said. On estimates of \$400,000/600,000, it made over \$813,000.)

Malinowski is well known and highly respected in the field, having been for nearly three decades at Sotheby's, where she rose to the position of senior vice president in charge of manuscripts and enjoyed many a championship season. During her tenure there she was involved with such auction-history-making moments as the sale of the Magna Carta for over \$21 million and the dispersal of Barry Halper's collection of baseball memorabilia, which achieved more than \$24 million.

As for Profiles in History, it was founded in 1985 by Joseph M. Maddalena, who is its president and chief executive officer.

Malinowski filled in his background for us: "He was a dealer who began his career in historical documents. As time went on, because he was based in the Beverly Hills area, he morphed into doing Hollywood memorabilia as well. He did that especially when the market for Americana manuscripts had a little bit of a dip. He never let it go but decided he'd better multitask."

Doing live auctions is a fairly new venture for Profiles in History. Its first big sale on June 18, 2011, was the Debbie Reynolds movie-costumes collection, which included the iconic white cocktail dress that flew up as Marilyn Monroe stood over a subway grate in *The Seven Year Itch*. The top lot of that \$22.8 million sale, the dress fetched \$5.52 million.

"That put him on the radar for auction sales," Malinowski said. He had not forgotten his roots in historical paper, however. And when Malinowski left Sotheby's in May 2012 to start her own business—Marsha Malinowski Fine Books and Manuscripts—it was what she called "just the perfect moment" for her to accept Maddalena's invitation to lead his books and manuscripts auctions.

The December 18 sale consisted of items from an anonymous single-owner's collection. Three, possibly four, more sales will come from it. And what a collection it is! In it are manuscripts from John Adams, wondering who will be his successor as president; Jefferson Davis, reflecting on the Confederacy's imminent defeat; Declaration of Independence signer Gerry Elbridge's eyewitness account of the Battle of Bunker Hill; Thomas Jefferson on states' rights. In American literature are Louisa May Alcott on women's rights; F. Scott Fitzgerald to a young novelist on how to succeed; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Nathaniel Hawthorne on writerly matters and on some of their fellow writers, too; a major cache of Edgar Allan Poe memorabilia, including a lock of hair and an engagement ring; a Henry David Thoreau poem manuscript. And these are highlights only from the Americana section!

There were letters and manuscripts by giants of English and European history, literature, medicine, science, politics, the arts, entertainment, and sports, including Karl Marx, Carl Jung, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Ludwig van Beethoven, and John Lennon. "Property of a distinguished American private collector" also had letters by Mahatma Gandhi, Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Hector Berlioz, Giacomo Puccini, and Sigmund Freud.

Asked if many people know or have figured out who the consignors is, Malinowski said: "Just a handful. This gent has been collecting for over thirty years. I don't think anyone knew the depth and breadth of his collecting. Even after all my years at Sotheby's, I knew he collected some material, but I had no idea that he was collecting over just about every category."

How he made his choices, Malinowski said, was by focusing on "manuscripts from the great people that formed this world." He always sought good content, she added, and loved to find meaningful associations. "Those kinds of connections always turned a light on for this collector and made him want to buy."

One item that fits the profile is a two-page autograph letter signed (twice) by George Washington as president to Thomas Paine that sold for \$132,000. Writing on May 6, 1792, Washington was expected to comment on Paine's recently published *Rights of Man*. Paine had sent him multiple copies and an acknowledgment was long overdue. Yet all Washington could muster was a polite, but cold, thank-you and an excuse about how busy he had been.

The description in the catalog noted a plausible reason why this snub occurred. "In agreement with the French Revolution, Paine opposed aristocratic government, and contended that freedom of action and thought were natural rights and should not be interfered with by civil authority," it said. "In the pamphlet, he called upon the English people to overthrow their monarchy and set up a republic. Viewed in this light, Paine's tract may have been viewed by Washington as an assault upon his own authority as President."

Malinowski is the one who wrote those words, and every other catalog entry, doing all but one of the foreign translations as well. She also chose the material. "It was truly a labor of love," she said of her tasks. "I felt like to pick out those first lots. It was so wonderful, so much fun. And then to go into the bunker and catalog it was a little intense but absolutely pure enjoyment."

One strategic decision she made was to go for an international audience. To do that, she knew she needed to show the collection's whole range rather than only one aspect of it. "I just kept hanging steady with the idea that we were going to have a balance," she said. "So yes, the sale was very strong in Americana, but in order for it to be a success, I felt I had to make sure that the rest of it would ring to non-Americans as well as Americans." That was "the secret to this sale," she said. "We really spread a wide net. I had so many great clients and connections in Europe, and they loved the quality. That was very gratifying. I can't imagine how many hours they spent on the phone [waiting to bid], but as passionate as I was about the material, so were they."

For this sale, previews, both public and private, took place in New York City as well as California. Malinowski said the same will likely occur for the next sale of this collector's material, which is scheduled for May. When we playfully noted that people may now be saying, "Well, she did it once, but can she do it again?" Malinowski laughed. "I'm going to work on it. You can rest assured there's some really good property to come."

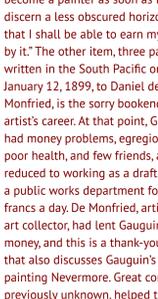
For more information, contact Profiles in History at (310) 859-7701 or see the Web site (www.profilesinhistory.com).



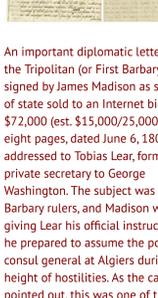
The sale's top lot, going at \$336,000 (est. \$200,000/300,000), was this four-page autograph letter in French signed by Vincent van Gogh. Written in Saint-Remy de Provence on January 20, 1890, to "M. & Mme. Ginoux," the letter discusses illness, the artist's and Madame Ginoux's. "Less than seven months before his tragic death, van Gogh could not be more lucid and reflective on the subject of illness," the catalog states. "An astonishing letter clearly revealing van Gogh's awareness of his own illness as he attempts to console another."



Two autograph letters in French signed by Paul Gauguin made \$108,000 and \$90,000, respectively, on the same \$20,000/30,000 estimate. Each went to European collections, Malinowski said. One was three pages that Gauguin wrote to Camille Pissarro in 1882 while in the throes of deciding to leave his life as a banker and become a full-time painter. "I cannot resign myself to remain all my life in finance and as an amateur painter," he declared. "I have got it into my head that I shall become a painter as soon as I can discern a less obscured horizon and that I shall be able to earn my living by it." The other item, three pages written in the South Pacific on January 12, 1899, to Daniel de Monfried, is the sorry bookend to the artist's career. At that point, Gauguin had money problems, egregiously poor health, and few friends, and was reduced to working as a draftsman in a public works department for six francs a day. De Monfried, artist and art collector, had lent Gauguin money, and this is a thank-you note that also discusses Gauguin's 1897 painting *Nevermore*. Great content, previously unknown, helped these letters soar.



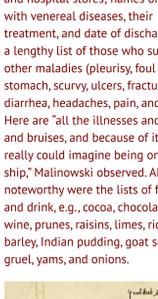
An important diplomatic letter on the Tripolitan (or First Barbary) War signed by James Madison as secretary of state sold to an Internet bidder for \$72,000 (est. \$15,000/25,000). The eight pages, dated June 6, 1804, were addressed to Tobias Lear, former private secretary to George Washington. The subject was the Barbary rulers, and Madison was giving Lear his official instructions as he prepared to assume the post of consul general at Algiers during the height of hostilities. As the catalog pointed out, this was one of the first international tests of American nationhood. It was a success. After meetings with Lear, the pasha of Tripoli dropped his demand for payment of American tribute and accepted \$60,000, about half the amount he had previously demanded, as a ransom for the crew of the Philadelphia. Coincidentally, the ransom equaled the letter's hammer price.



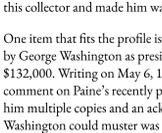
A 163-page manuscript medical log book for the United States frigate *Constitution*, dating from July 18, 1799, to July 31, 1800, fetched \$42,000 (est. \$15,000/25,000). Malinowski called it a "remarkable record of quotidian realities" aboard one of the most beloved shipping vessels in America. It includes itemized expenditures for medicines and hospital stores; names of those with venereal diseases, their treatment, and date of discharge; and a lengthy list of those who suffered other maladies (pleurisy, foul stomach, scurvy, ulcers, fractures, diarrhea, headaches, pain, and fever). Here are "all the illnesses and bumps and bruises, and because of it you really could imagine being on that ship," Malinowski observed. Also noteworthy were the lists of food and drink, e.g., cocoa, chocolate, tea, wine, prunes, raisins, limes, rice, barley, Indian pudding, goat soup gruel, yams, and onions.



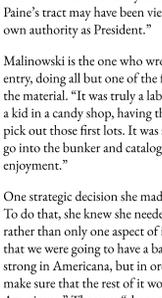
This autograph letter signed by F. Scott Fitzgerald is brief but poignant. Writing to Horace Wade, a child who would publish his first novel, *In the Shadow of the Great Peril*, at age 11, Fitzgerald advised: "A confidence in your own supreme ability in some one field, however limited, and an always untiring and always experimental interest in that field—this, it seems to me, lies at the root of all success. If you use this please don't add to it or change anything in it." The undated letter fetched \$15,600 (est. \$4000/6000).



As bidding progressed for this lot, auctioneer Stacey Roman quipped to the phone bid takers: "It's not a Kindle. They know that, right?" Going at \$72,000 (est. \$15,000/25,000) the item was William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, excerpted from a copy of the full first folio published in 1623.



A collection of Edgar Allan Poe memorabilia including his fiancée's engagement ring, a lock of his hair, family correspondence, photographic portraits, and a silver spoon, sold to preeminent Poe collector Susan Tane for \$96,000 (est. \$30,000/50,000). This cache came directly from Poe descendants, i.e., his aunt Eliza Poe Herring (1792-1822) and her daughter Emily V. Herring Chapman Beacham (1822-1908). Malinowski said, "I knew this would do well—Poe is so rare and those who collect him are so passionate—but I never could have predicted it would do that well." Tane was thrilled. A generous lender to exhibitions, she is involved with several upcoming in the next couple of years. Poe to Pop, which consists of her collection alone, will open at the Grolier Club in New York City in September 2014. This ring, hair lock, etc., will be a part of it, she said.



Perhaps the most unusual lot in the sale was this collection of 21 original wooden tally sticks, dating from 1250-60, that sold for \$168,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). According to the catalog, they represent "perhaps the rarest and most unusual class of English medieval manuscript." Talties are royal receipts used from the 12th century onward. The modern word "stock," meaning financial certificate, came from tally sticks. Each of these is about 7½" long. Once they numbered in the millions; today, only a few hundred tally sticks are believed to survive, and examples rarely come to market.



An autograph letter in German signed by Ludwig van Beethoven realized \$132,000 (est. \$40,000/60,000). The three undated pages were addressed to Tobias Haslinger, a friend and business partner of Beethoven's publisher, Sigmund A. Steiner. His concern was the second performance of his Symphony No. 9 and *Missa Solemnis*, and he was characteristically disgruntled. The letter's condition "was not quite as wonderful" as most other lots, Malinowski said, not because of bad handling, but because it was "written on very crummy paper." It was, however, conserved, and the content—a discussion of Beethoven's two greatest works—obviously made bidders overlook its physical shortcomings.



A first edition of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* sold for \$144,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). "There have been more beautiful copies on the market this year," said Malinowski, but this one came with a bonus: an 11-page autograph manuscript. Written circa 1846, it is an extensive description of trees, plants, orchards, and gardens at Darwin's residence, Down House, southeast of London. "That manuscript, which is unpublished, shows a personal side of Darwin, [who is] taking full responsibility for the plantings on his own home territory. This is what he loved to do in his own back yard."

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