

Profiles in History, Calabasas, California

Bidders Spend Big for Einstein, Lincoln, Jefferson, & JFK

by Jeanne Schinto

Photos courtesy Profiles in History

Eight lots of Albert Einstein material sold for a total of \$239,720 (including buyers' premiums) at a sale conducted by Profiles in History in Calabasas, California, on December 16, 2014. The sum represents a significant percentage of the firm's historical auction that realized a total of \$1,030,785.

Five of the Einstein lots went to Asia, showing that the deep-pocketed Far East continues to extend its auction participation to all sorts of collecting fields. Americans were the Asians' fiercest competitors. Of the three lots that went to bidders in the States, one was the top-valued Einstein. It was also the top lot of the whole 252-lot sale. Selling for its high estimate, \$180,000, it was a circa 1930 eight-page manuscript draft for a scientific paper on the development of Einstein's unified field study.

Only two of the Einstein lots were related to scientific research. The others were such things as a letter from Einstein to Jane Adams concerning her support for fellow pacifist and Nazi prisoner Carl von Ossietzky; a letter Einstein wrote to his first wife, Mileva Maric, making provisions for financial support of their children; and a letter he wrote to Ethel Michanowski, describing his life among scholars at Oxford University. In addition, a little unexpected gem of a non-scientific item was an autograph poem by Einstein on a postcard photograph of him. The verses, written in German, were translated into English in the catalog to read: "Ms. Inge quickly hurries by/ What gentle breeze, what clear blue sky/ Gaze without horror, without fear/ Upon the landscape you hold so dear." It was signed, "As a souvenir, A. Einstein." Ms. Inge most likely was Inge Stern, a German émigrée to Los Angeles. I found that there are extant at least a couple of other letters from Einstein to a woman by that name. The image shows the scientist engaged in one of his favorite pastimes, sailing. Both the poem and the image were unpublished. It sold for \$10,800 (est. \$2500/3500). The buyer was one of the Asians.

"The Einstein material was an interesting conglomeration, showing different dimensions of his life and personality," said Marsha Malinowski, the auction house's historical consultant, who is president of her own business—Marsha Malinowski Fine Books and Manuscripts. "The photo postcard shows a wonderful, whimsical side of him. How much would you like to have received a poem like that from Einstein?"

A piece of furniture was the second-to-top lot—a desk used by Abraham Lincoln when he was in the Illinois state House of Representatives. The future president served four terms, from 1834 to 1842. The desk dates from 1840, when a new state house was constructed in Springfield. According to the voluminous documentation that came with the desk, it was owned at the tail end of the 19th century by a Mr. C.E. Kuhlthau. He eventually donated it to the Delaware (Ohio) public library for its collection of Lincoln souvenirs. From that library, it appears to have gone to the Illinois state historical library. It eventually went into the private hands that consigned it to this sale. Its new owner is another private collector, who bought it for \$144,000 (est. \$100,000/150,000).

A total of seven Lincoln items realized even more than the Einstein lots—\$269,750. After the desk, the second most expensive piece was an autograph letter signed, one of the best in Lincoln's hand on the market in a while. The presidential candidate wrote the two pages in Springfield on August 17, 1860. Their recipient was Thurlow Weed, a New York newspaper publisher who was a supporter of the Whigs and then the Republican party. Lincoln was worried about carrying New York, which,

as it turned out, was unfounded. The letter, which essentially encapsulated his thought process as he went into the election, sold to an Internet bidder for \$87,500 (est. \$60,000/80,000).

"The Einstein material was an interesting conglomeration."

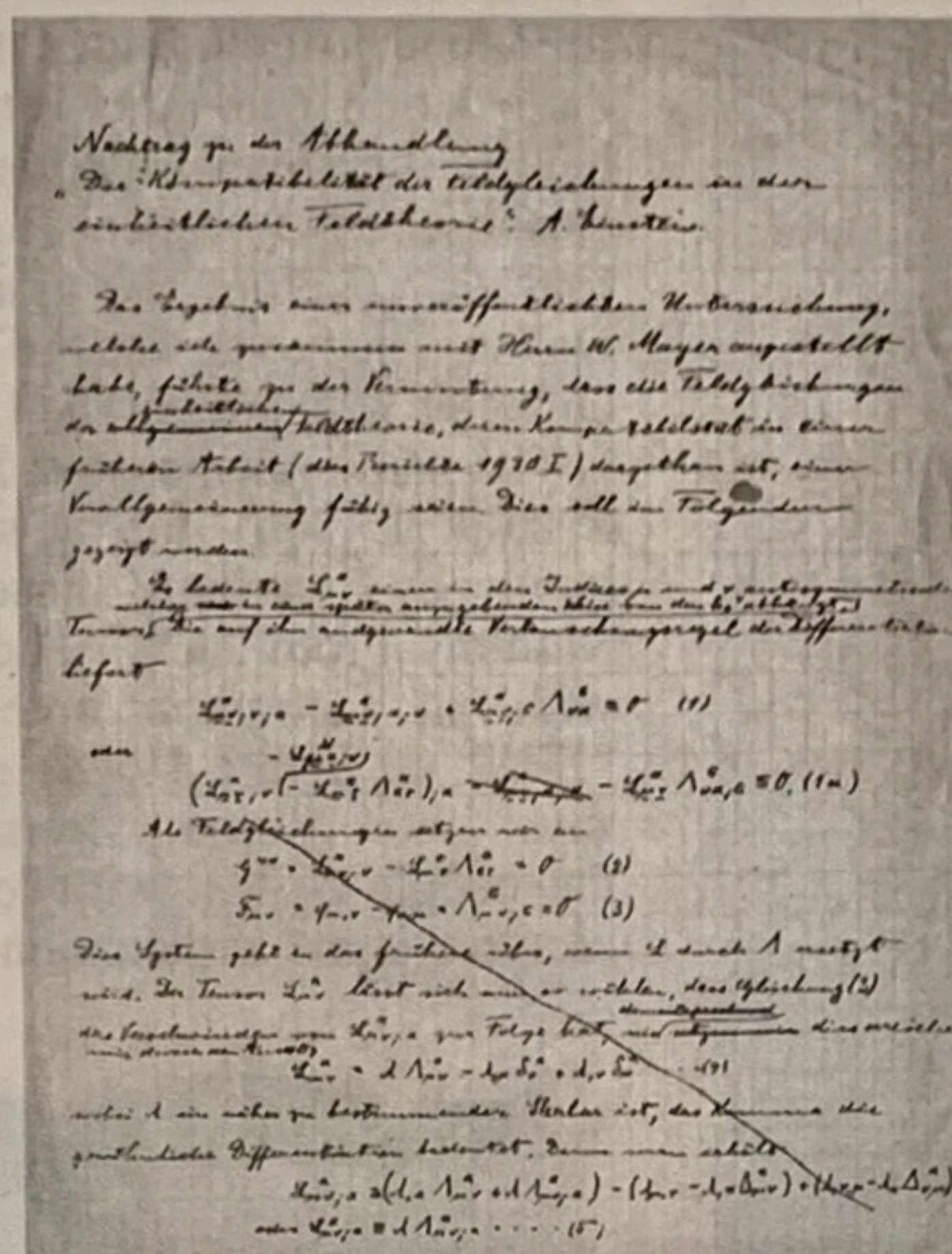
A painted plaster cast of Lincoln as depicted on Mount Rushmore by Gutzon Borglum fetched \$16,800 (est. \$12,000/15,000). Just 6" x 3" x 3", it can be held in the hand. The lot included an even smaller (3" x 1 1/4" x 1/2") plaster cast of Lincoln and one about the same size depicting Thomas Jefferson as he appears on the South Dakota monument. According to the catalog, plaster casts like these were always available on site for drillers and carvers to reference while working on the mountain. In addition, Borglum made and signed miniatures for prospective donors to the project. The casts in this sale originated with Camille Yuill, city editor of the *Deadwood Pioneer-Times*, who befriended Borglum as he began work on the monument in the 1930s.

The success of the Einstein and Lincoln material notwithstanding, this sale had its substantial disappointments, with 146 lots unsold, including a major letter by John Adams (est. \$30,000/50,000), one by John Quincy Adams (est. \$40,000/60,000), a rare variant of the John Wilkes Booth "Reward" broadside poster (est. \$125,000/150,000), and 14 lots of American Revolutionary War material. I asked Malinowski if she thought that result was a reflection of the present state of the market in general. She said yes, characterizing the market as "tightening" and noting the irony that the situation was at least partially the result of Profiles in History's own barn-burning sales of historical documents from a single owner in 2012, 2013, and earlier in 2014.

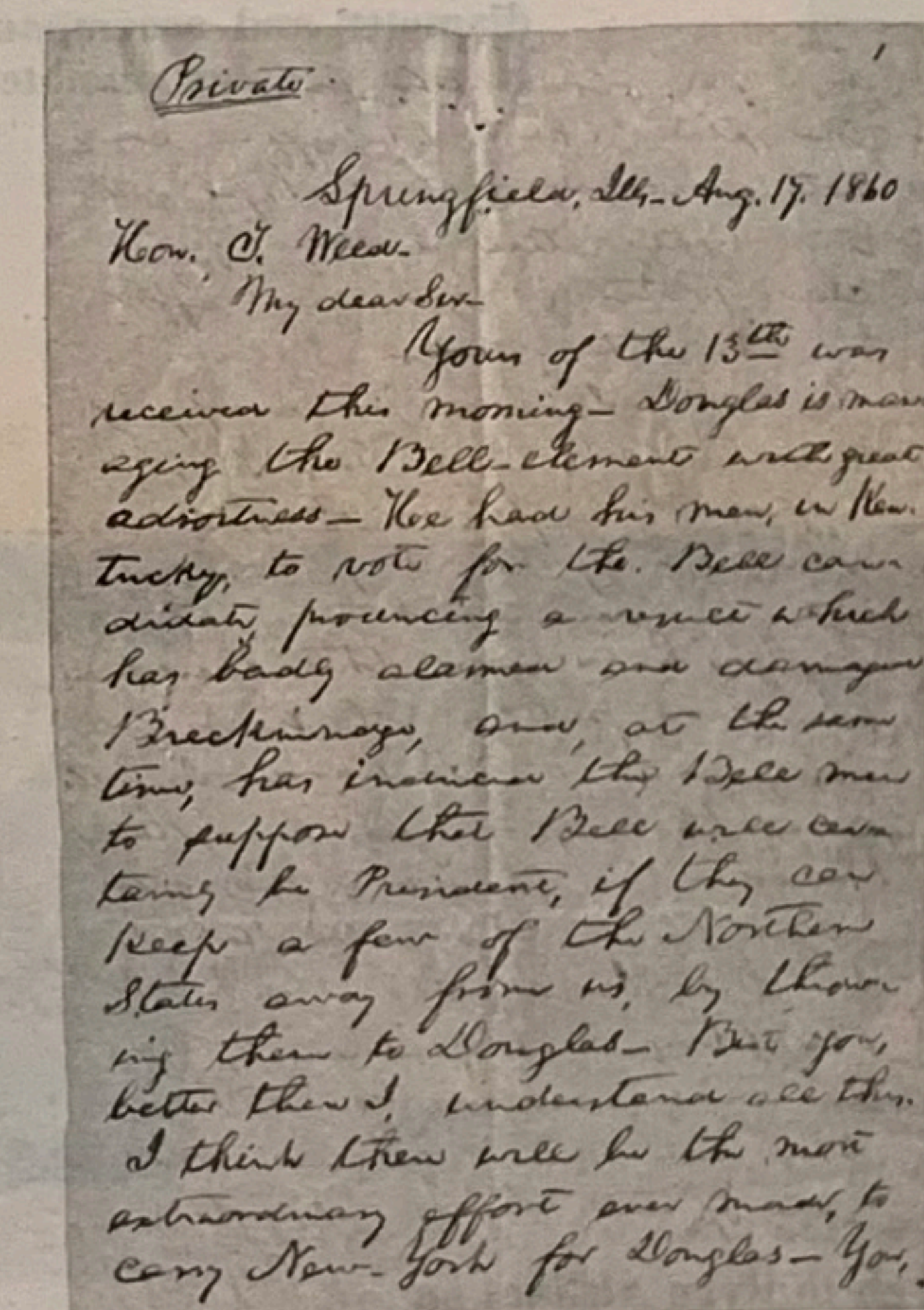
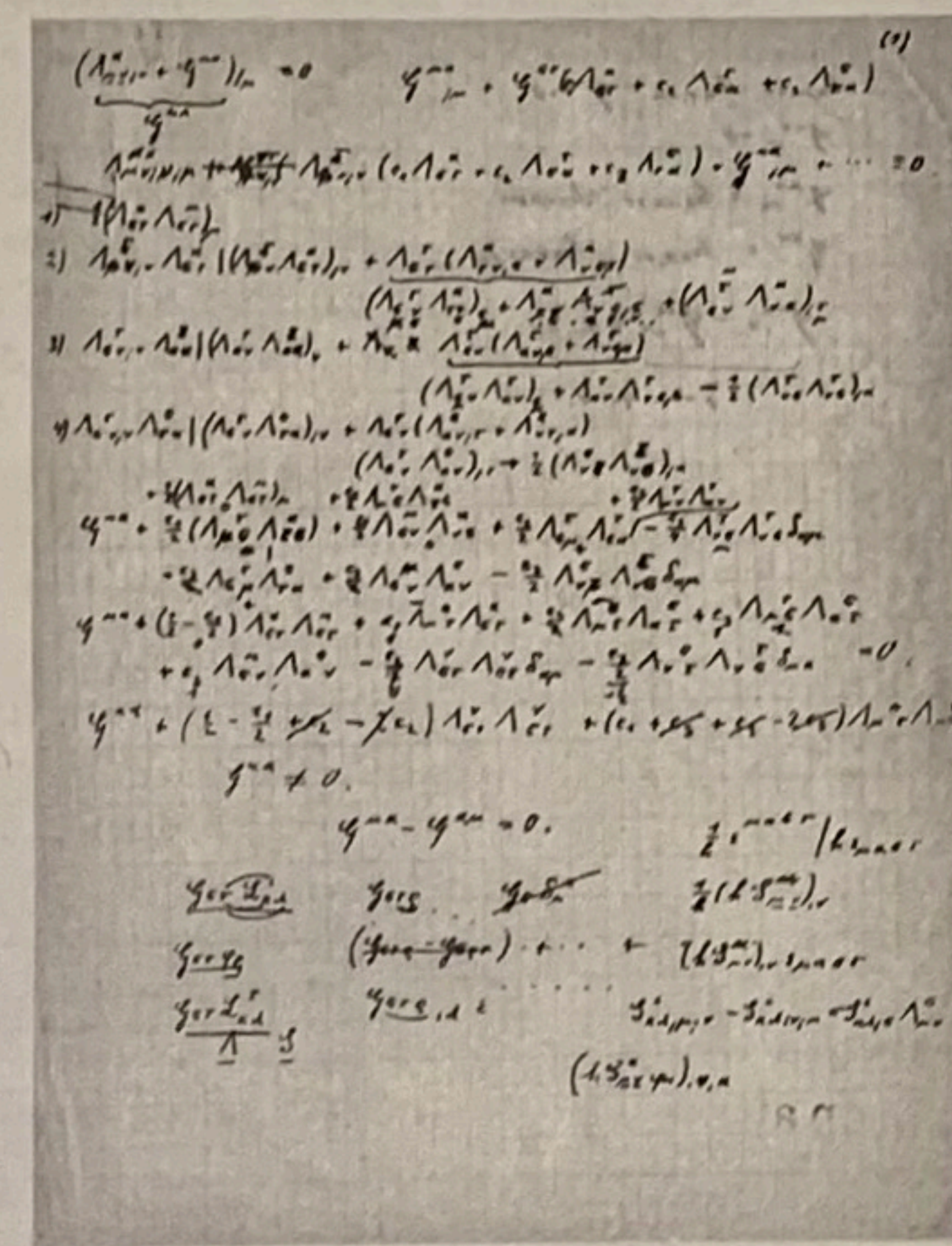
"One of the big factors that affected these results was, due to the sales of the property of the distinguished American collector, there has been so much fabulous material on the market—material that hadn't been seen since the late seventies and early eighties," she said. "By the end of the day [for example], we sold something like thirty-six George Washington letters." In order to catch bidders' attention now, she observed, "It's got to be something spectacular. We flooded that market a little bit, and I think it's going to be somewhat harder since all that material has been disseminated. There's probably going to be a need for a little breathing room. So we have to be a little more selective going forward."

The manuscripts that do best in such times must have great content and good provenance, be in excellent condition, and be fresh to the market—all at once. The most successful lots in this sale exhibited all four attributes. If an item lacked one or more, there was bidder hesitation.

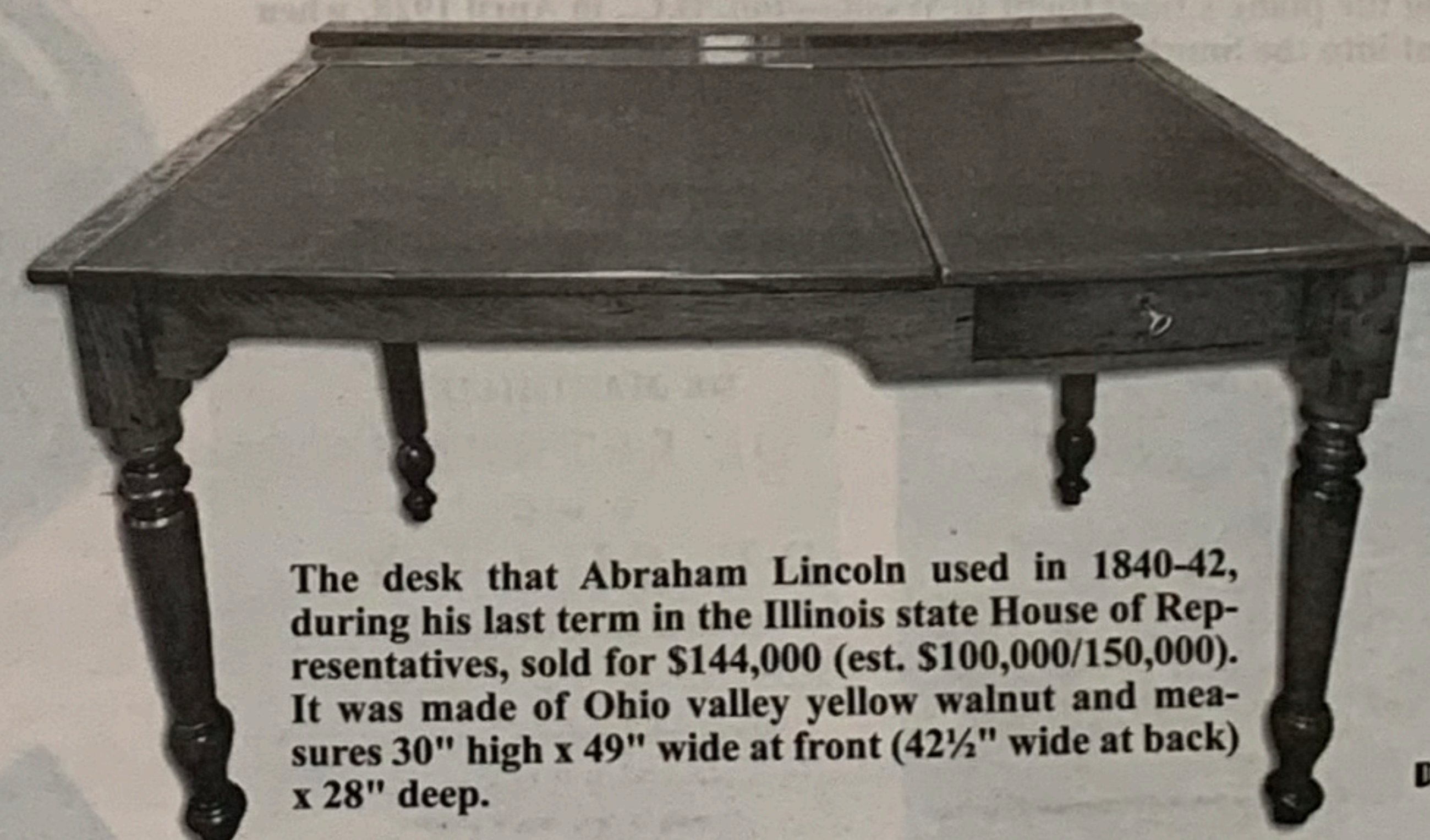
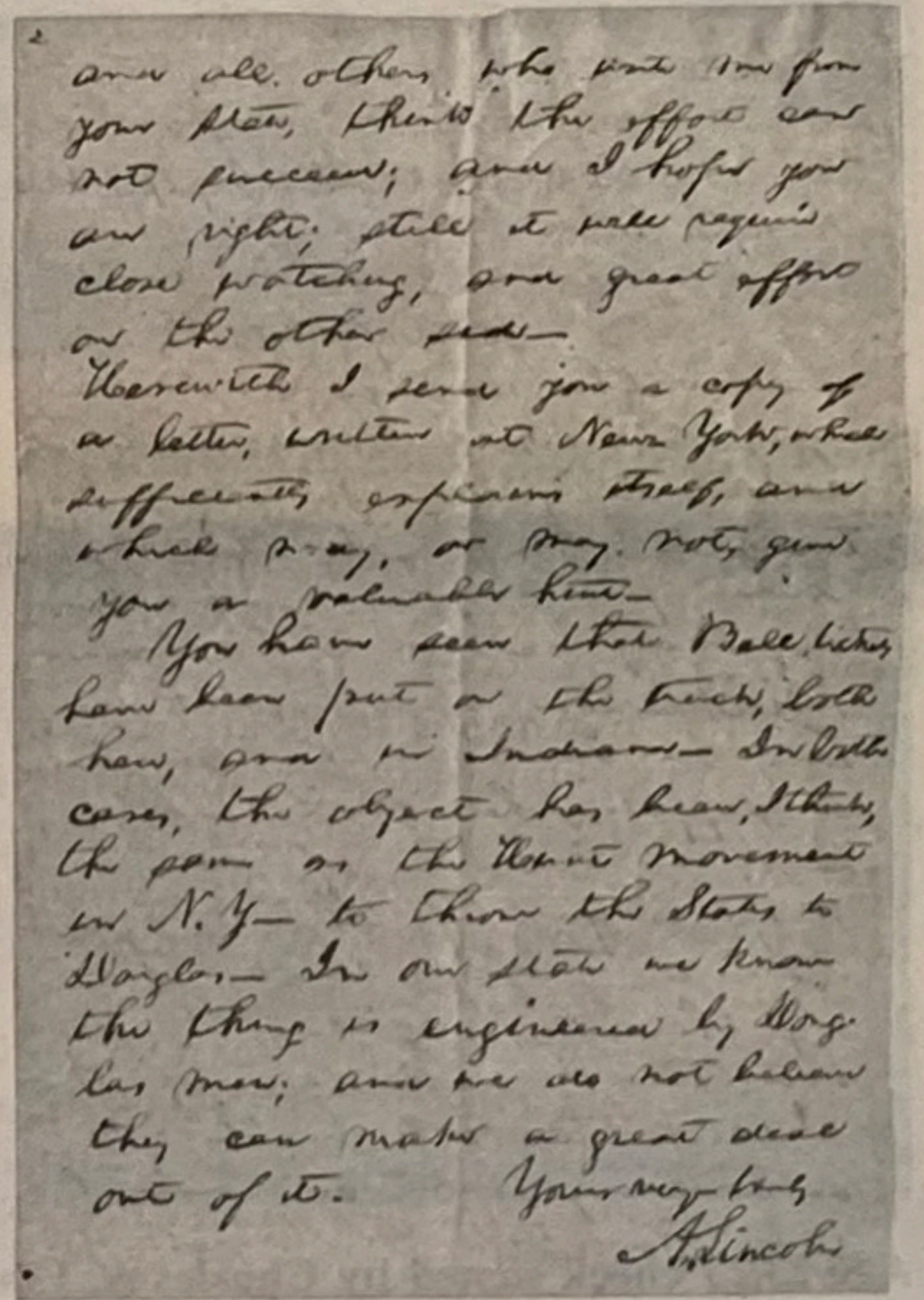
Two Thomas Jefferson items possessed the winning combination. One was an autograph letter signed by Jefferson, while he was vice president, on the subject of Monticello. The one-page missive, addressed to an unidentified "Dear Sir," embodied Jefferson's ideas for fireplaces designed to improve upon the then state-of-the-art ones by Count Rumford (i.e., Sir Benjamin Thompson). "The figures below will show everything necessary," Jefferson wrote to his correspondent, referring to his architectural drawings that take up about a quarter of the page. The letter is dated May 2, 1799; Jefferson had begun remodeling and enlarging Monticello three years earlier. According to the timeline on the Monticello Web



An eight-page manuscript draft for a scientific paper signed by Albert Einstein was the sale's top lot, bringing \$180,000 (est. \$120,000/180,000). The subject is his unified field theory, which was an attempt to unify his general theory of relativity with Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism. The latter theory was named for the 19th-century Scottish physicist and mathematician James Clerk Maxwell. On the first page of the circa 1930 draft, Einstein characterizes the work as being the "result of an unpublished investigation, performed by myself and Mr. W. Mayer..."—i.e., mathematician Walther Mayer, known as "Einstein's calculator."



An autograph letter signed by Abraham Lincoln realized \$87,500 (est. \$60,000/80,000). The two 7 1/4" x 5 1/4" pages, written in Springfield, Illinois, on August 17, 1860, were addressed to Thurlow Weed. The subject was the 1860 presidential election.



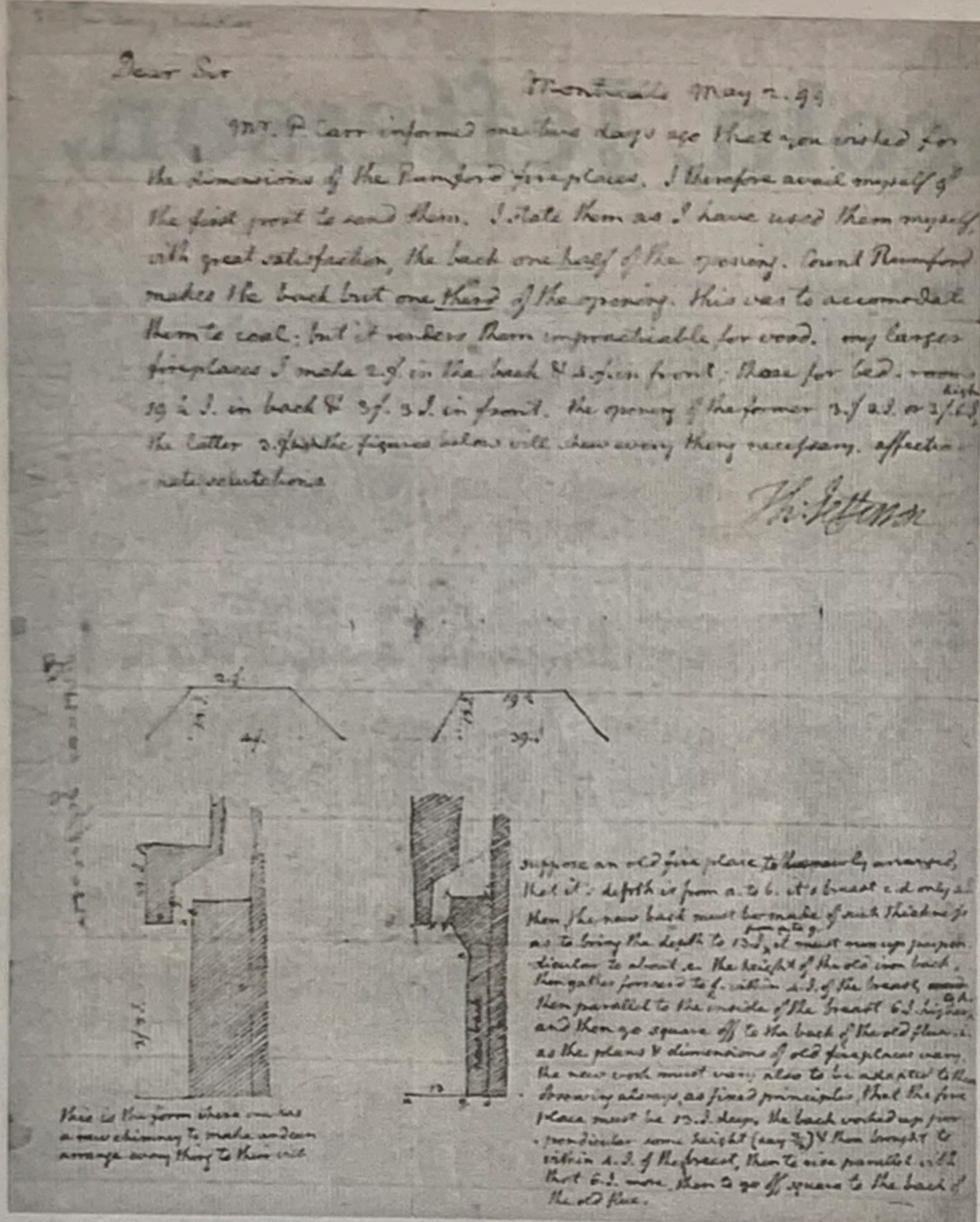
The desk that Abraham Lincoln used in 1840-42, during his last term in the Illinois state House of Representatives, sold for \$144,000 (est. \$100,000/150,000). It was made of Ohio valley yellow walnut and measures 30" high x 49" wide at front (42 1/2" wide at back) x 28" deep.

site (www.monticello.org), he was still at it until at least 1809. The letter sold to an American private collector for \$72,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000).

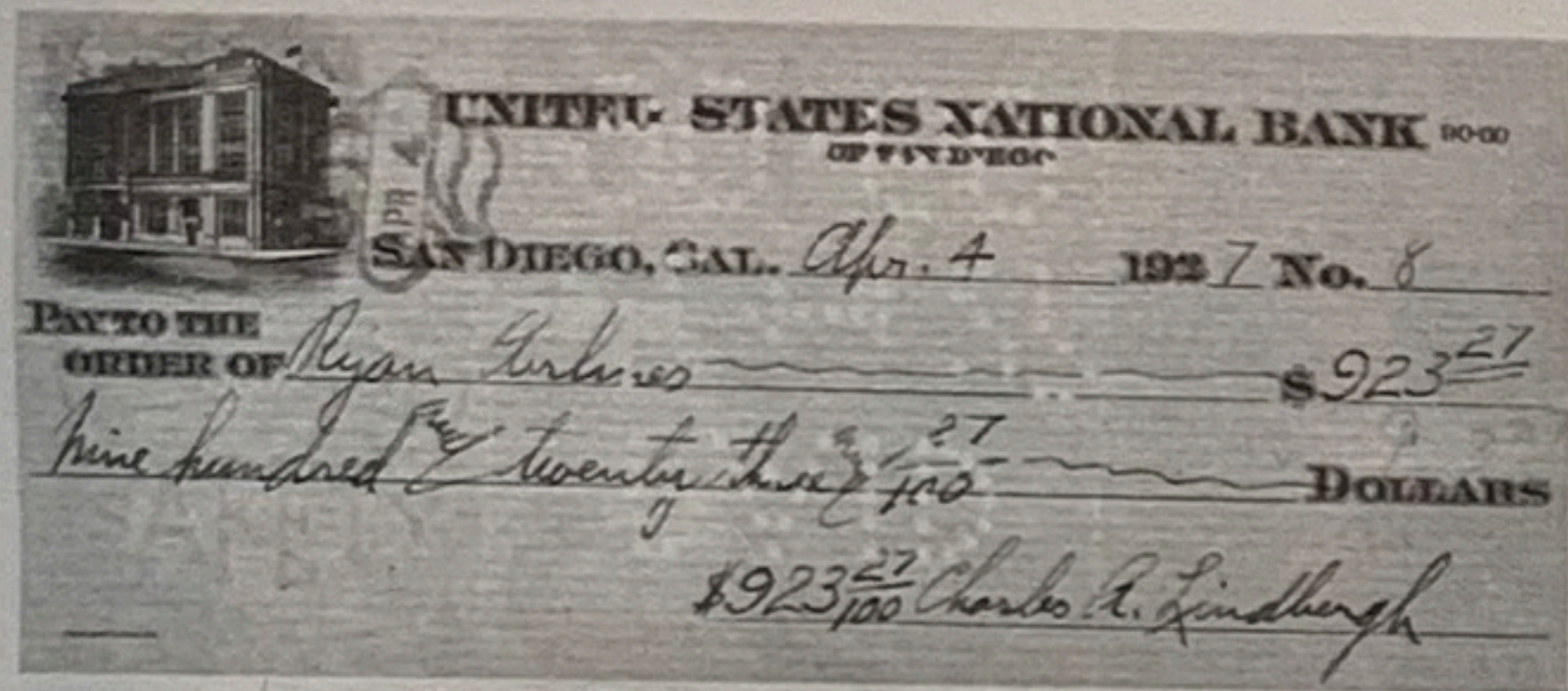
Another American private collector paid \$27,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000) for a book from one of Jefferson's libraries—the fourth volume of *The Memoirs of the Duke of Sully*, in its original French. The duke—Maximilien de Béthune (1560-1641)—was a confidential advisor to King Henry IV of France, among other roles. Jefferson often included this book in lists of recommended historical read-

ing, and this copy was inscribed with Jefferson's secret marks, the initials "T" and "L." Jefferson sold one of his libraries to the Library of Congress in 1815, but he continued to build libraries afterward. When his final library was sold posthumously at auction in 1829, his eldest grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, apparently kept this volume back. It then found its way to the market, becoming at one point part of William Randolph Hearst's library. When that library was sold in 1941, the book was bought by Dr. Alice Watson. An heir of Watson was the

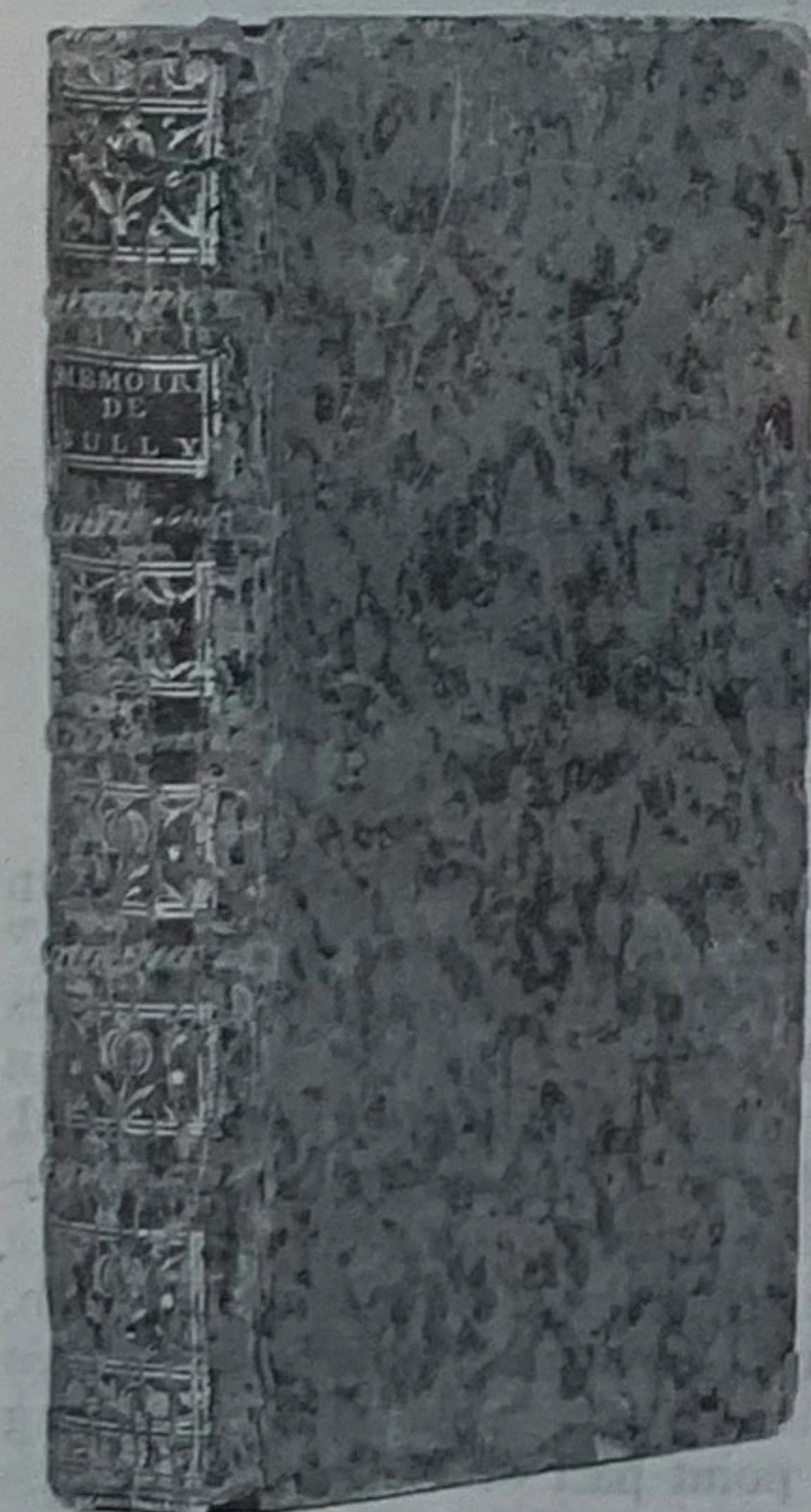
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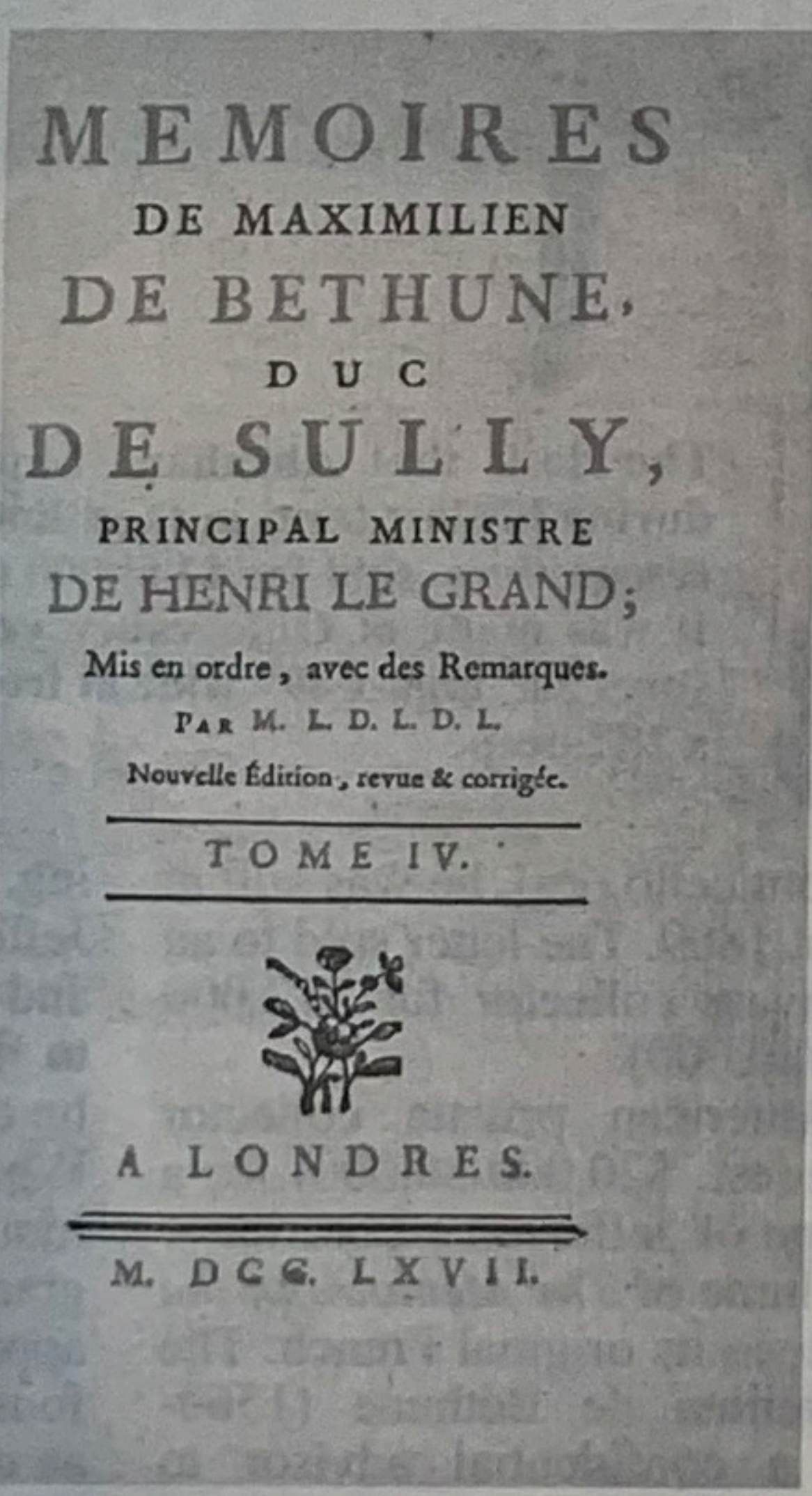
An autograph letter signed by Thomas Jefferson while vice president realized \$72,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). The subject of the one-page, approximately 10" x 8" missive, which is addressed "Dear Sir," is his idea for retrofitting fireplaces in Monticello.



A \$923.27 check signed by Charles A. Lindbergh to Ryan Airlines on April 4, 1927, for instruments installed in the *Spirit of St. Louis* sold for \$30,000 (est. \$25,000/35,000). The lot included a small pocket compass presumed to have been used by Lindbergh and a swatch of silver fabric skin from the famous plane. The fabric skin measures 1/4" x 1/2". It came from a larger (3/4" x 2 1/2") piece that Lindbergh himself removed following the plane's final flight to Washington, D.C., in April 1928, when it went into the Smithsonian Institution's collection.



A book from one of Thomas Jefferson's libraries—the fourth volume of *The Memoirs of the Duke of Sully*, in French—sold for \$27,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000).



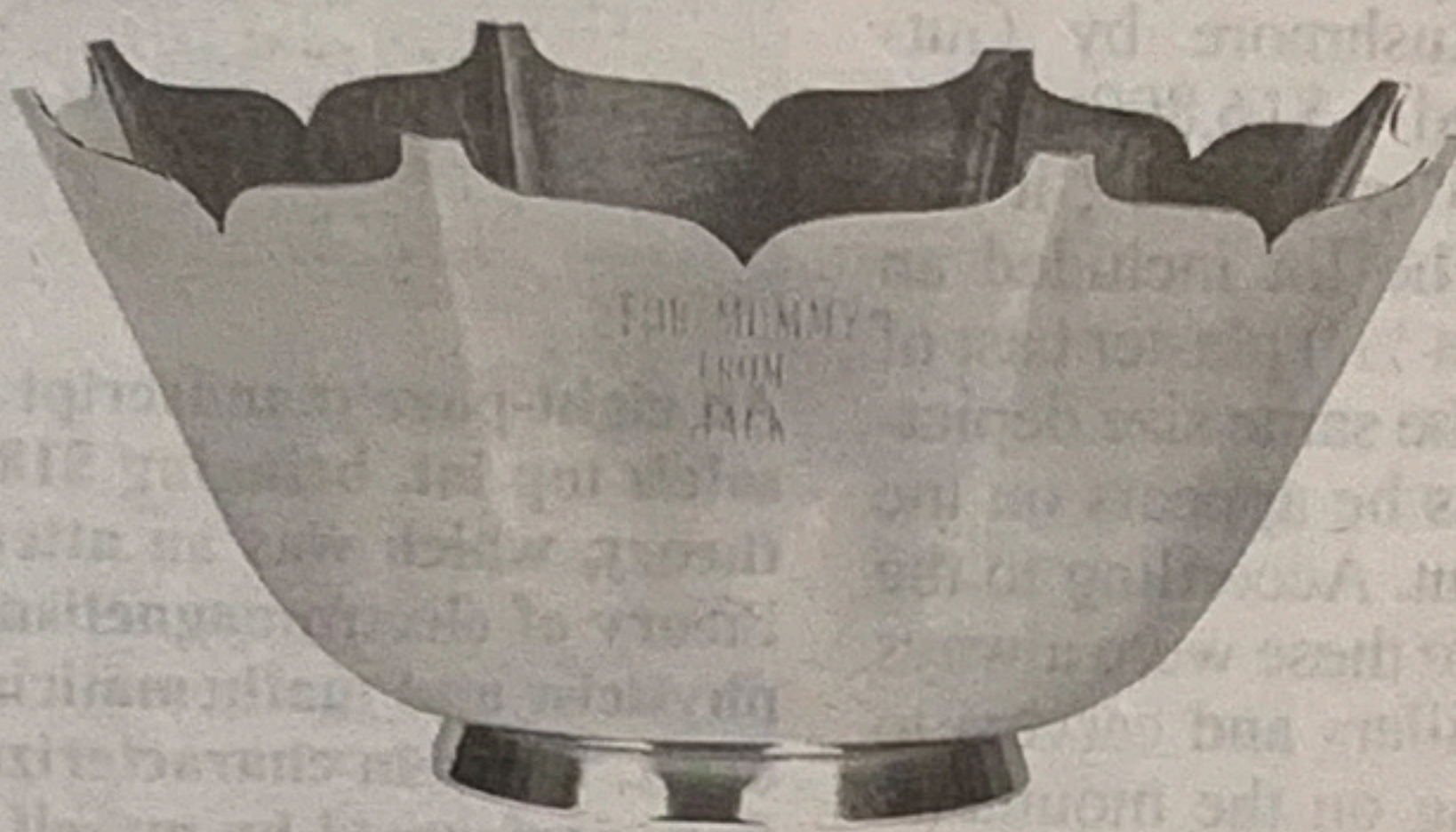
consignor to Profiles in History.

Among 20th-century highlights were two unusual items relating to John F. Kennedy. One was a cobalt-blue dinner plate that fetched \$7200 (est. \$3000/5000). The plate was produced for a dinner of the Inter American Press Association in honor of Kennedy. It was held at the Hotel Americana in Miami Beach on November 18, 1963—just four days before the assassination in Dallas. The buyer was the same private collector who bought the Lincoln desk.

The same person paid \$15,600 (est. \$10,000/15,000) for a silver footed bowl by Gorham, inscribed "For Mummy From Jack." The bowl came with an autograph note signed by "JFK" on White House stationery. It says: "For Mummy from J.F.K. and the people of R.I. with love"—which requires some explanation. "Mummy"

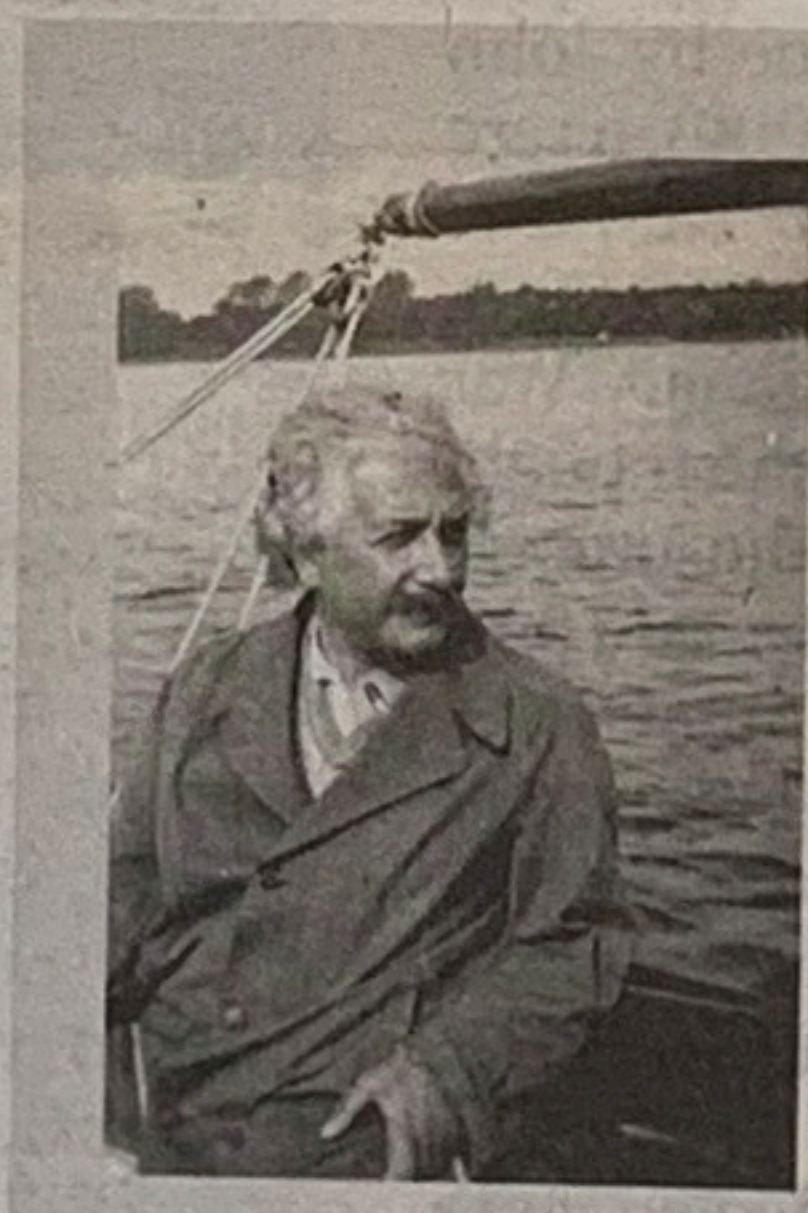
is Kennedy's mother-in-law, Janet Lee Bouvier Auchincloss. According to *JFK's Last Hundred Days* (2013) by Thurston Clarke, Kennedy received a silver-plated vase from Rhode Island Governor John Chafee as an anniversary gift. Kennedy thought it was chintzy. He subsequently gave it to Mrs. Auchincloss, calling it "a token of my undying affection." She didn't get the joke and thanked him, probably thinking it no less chintzy than had JFK, who finally confessed where it had come from. The beautiful bowl is believed to have been a makeup gift for what can legitimately be viewed as one of the great "re-gifting" flops of all time.

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



A silver footed bowl by Gorham, inscribed "For Mummy From Jack," sold for \$15,600 (est. \$10,000/15,000). It is 3 1/4" high x 8" diameter and accompanied by a John F. Kennedy autograph note.

*For Mummy
from J.F.K.
and the people
of R.I. with love*

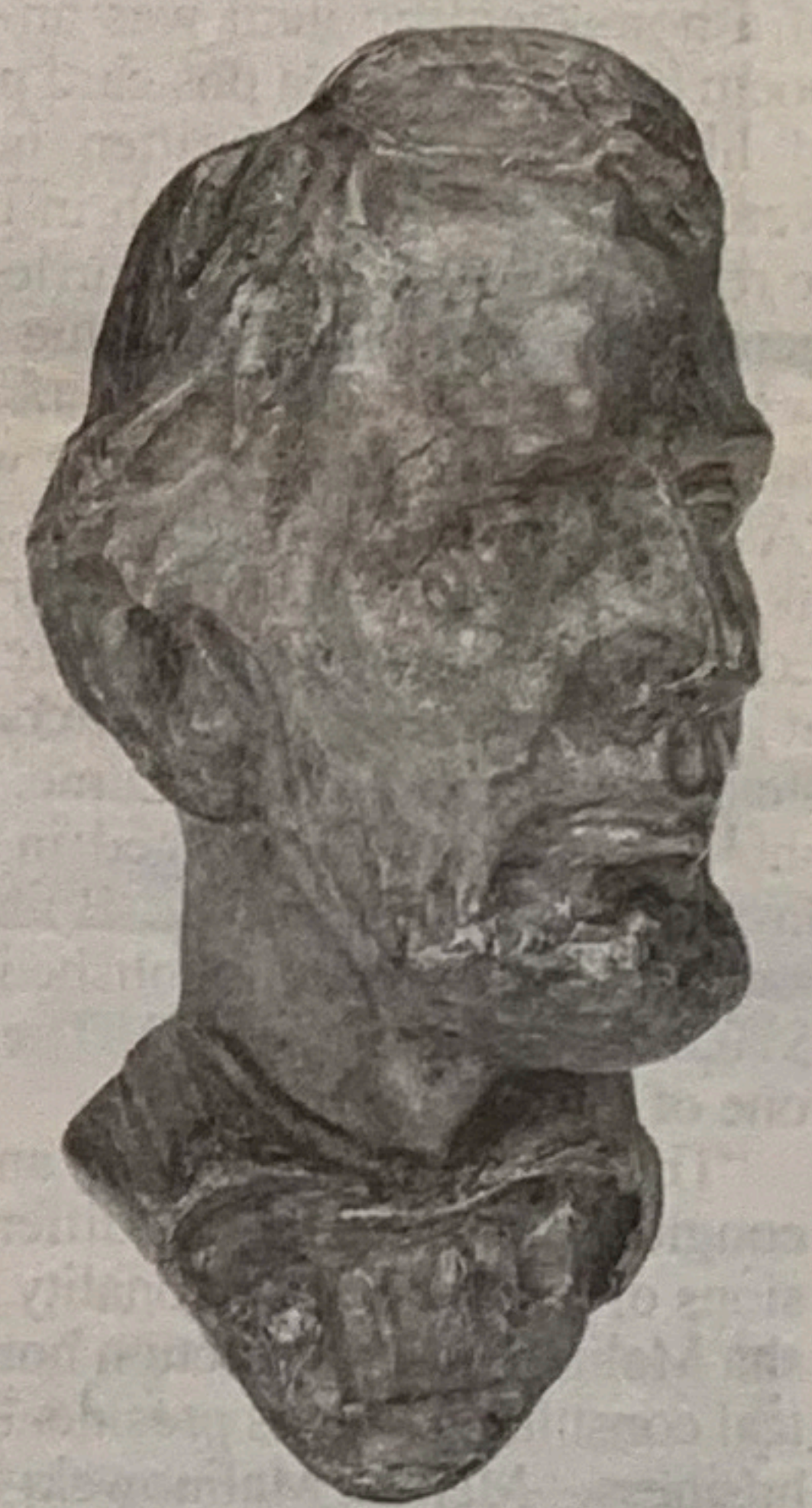


*Frd. Buge kann geschwind
Denn es gab heut den wund-
erlichen Flug und großen
Kampf die Tausende von Leuten.
Zur Erinnerung
A. Einstein.*

An autograph poem by Albert Einstein and a photograph of him, both unpublished, 3 1/2" x 5 1/2", sold for \$10,800 (est. \$2500/3500).



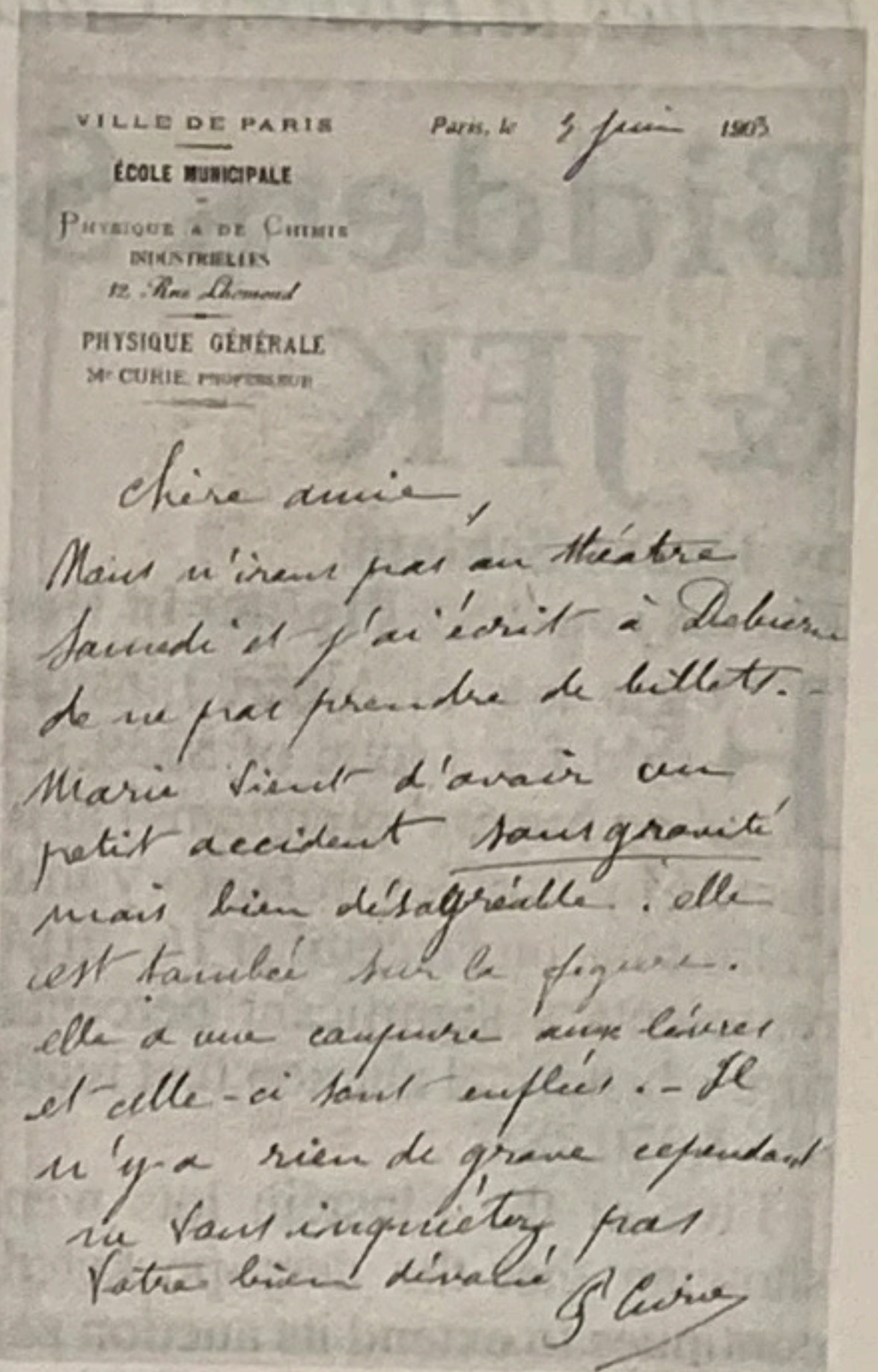
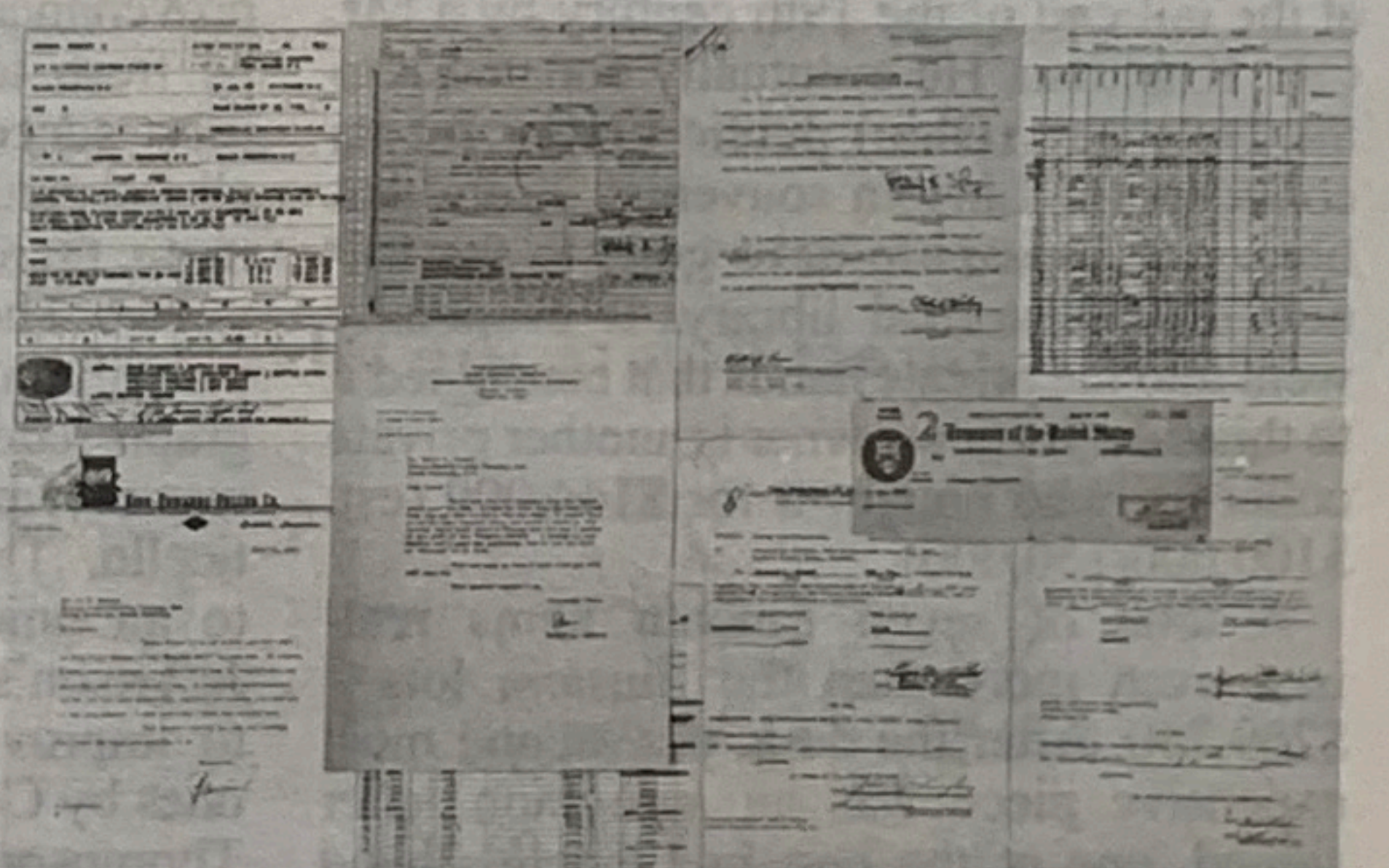
A cobalt-blue dinner plate, 10 1/2" diameter, sold for \$7200 (est. \$3000/5000). It was produced for the dinner of the Inter American Press Association in honor of JFK, held at the Hotel Americana in Miami Beach on November 18, 1963.



Gutzon Borglum's painted plaster cast of Abraham Lincoln as depicted on Mount Rushmore sold for \$16,800 (est. \$12,000/15,000). It is 6" x 3" x 3". The lot includes two smaller plaster casts, one of Lincoln, the other of Thomas Jefferson, as well as related paper documents.



An archive of more than 130 items relating to World War II U.S. Army Air Corps Colonel Robert K. Morgan (1918-2004) realized \$24,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000). Morgan commanded the legendary B-17 bomber *Memphis Belle* in Europe as well as the B-29 *Dauntless Doty* in Japan. Besides documents, letters, and other personal papers, the lot included a vintage Bulova wristwatch engraved with the words "For Valor Capt. Robert K. Morgan Pilot of the 'Memphis Belle' July 1943 A tribute from Ardé Bulova." Ardé, the son of the Bulova founder, was the company's chairman of the board from 1930 until his death in 1958. He worked with the U.S. government to produce military watches, specialized timepieces, aircraft instruments, and critical torpedo mechanisms and fuses—at cost—throughout the WWII years.



A one-page 8 1/4" x 5 1/4" autograph letter signed by Pierre Curie sold to an Internet bidder for \$12,500 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Written in French on letterhead stationery, it was dated June 3, 1903, the year Pierre and Marie Curie won the Nobel Prize in Physics. It was addressed to "Chère amie"—an unidentified correspondent—and discusses an unserious fall Marie had taken. It also mentions the cancellation of the Curies' theater outing with André Debierne, a French chemist who collaborated with Marie in her work on radioactivity.



Two photographs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt sold for \$5000 (est. \$4000/6000) and \$6000 (est. \$3000/5000), respectively. One (below) is a staff photograph of the *Harvard Crimson*. The 7 1/4" x 9 3/4" sepia-toned image, which sold on the Internet, was made in 1902 and is signed "F.D. Roosevelt" on the reverse. It is also signed by approximately half of the other staff. The future president is standing near the center of the group, with his pocket watch chain visible. The second photograph, measuring approximately 8" x 10" overall including its mat, shows FDR as a Mason. He joined the fraternal organization for life in 1911. The photo clearly shows leg braces—a rare view of evidence of his disability. The Secret Service was mandated to prevent such photographs by the press or anyone else. Interesting, though, that he did choose to sign this one.



Henry D. Thoreau

Not for the sake of the man who saw the bones of the hide and deposited them in his cabinet but him whose sheep the wolf killed who has summered and wintered within hearing distance of his howl....

A partial autograph manuscript, unsigned, by Henry David Thoreau brought \$8750 (est. \$6000/8000) from an Internet bidder. The one page, which measures 3" x 7 1/4", contains ten lines not found in Thoreau's published writings. Eloquent on the subject of bearing witness to nature, it says in part: "We do not want to hear the man who saw the track only—or even followed the trail—and found the bones and the hide and deposited them in his cabinet— but him whose sheep the wolf killed who has summered and wintered within hearing distance of his howl...." The manuscript was housed in a 13 1/4" x 19 1/4" frame that included a small engraved portrait of Thoreau and a facsimile signature.



A collection of 27 crime scene and autopsy photos of Elizabeth Parker and Clyde Barrow—i.e., Bonnie & Clyde—fetched \$14,400 (est. \$12,000/15,000). The photos were so-called first-generation, meaning the first prints made from the negatives, not copies of those prints. This image archive included five bullets test-fired from the pair's guns. The material had been featured on the PBS television show *History Detectives*. To see the program, go on line (www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/bonnie-clydes-bullets).



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