

Profiles in History, Calabasas, California

Marilyn Monroe Trumps Everyone in Manuscripts Sale

by Jeanne Schinto

Photos courtesy Profiles in History

Profiles in History faced a challenge as it readied for auction part two of "The Property of a Distinguished American Private Collector," offered on May 30 in Calabasas, California. A typical collection's part two is often like the second novel that follows an author's ballyhooed debut. Six months earlier, part one had done so gloriously well—over \$6 million (including buyers' premiums)—it was unlikely that a sequel would match up. Though there weren't nearly as many six-figure estimates and the total was half the previous one, the sale did extremely well, according to the fair standards by which this

West Coast auction house had chosen to measure itself.

First, it was nearly a white-glove sale, with only three of 247 lots unsold. "We had a really good sell-through rate last time," said Marsha Malinowski, senior consultant in charge of manuscript auctions for the firm. "This time I wanted the unsold rate to be a single digit, and I overachieved the goal, so I'm not complaining about that." She laughed.

Second, there was an international bidding pool, just as there had been for the first sale. "I was able to reach out to the right people, and in fact it was even more international than last time," Malinowski said. "It was to the point that I even had foreign buyers for the American literature, which is something new for me, and that was very, very exciting."

Third, Malinowski, former senior vice president in charge of manuscripts at Sotheby's, observed, "The hammer was right towards our high estimate, so we felt it was a very good showing, and everyone's happy."

A large percentage of the sale's far-flung clientele got a chance to preview items personally. Malinowski brought a large selection from the sale to New York City in mid-April to coincide with the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of America's annual fair and other events the same week. Public previews took place in rented space on the Upper East Side. "I did it this far in advance because people want to know what to save their money for," she said at the time.

In the remaining weeks, she offered a number of clients, mostly in New York and Connecticut, the opportunity to look at selections privately. "I reached out," she said. "I made an effort to spend that time and let them carefully choose what they wanted to see."

The firm's president and CEO, Joseph M. Maddalena, offered West Coast clients the same opportunity for personalized viewings. "I think it helped enormously," Malinowski

said. "And I love learning what makes a collector tick, why he or she is interested in this or that, and that helps me be aware of what might be of interest to

that person going forward."

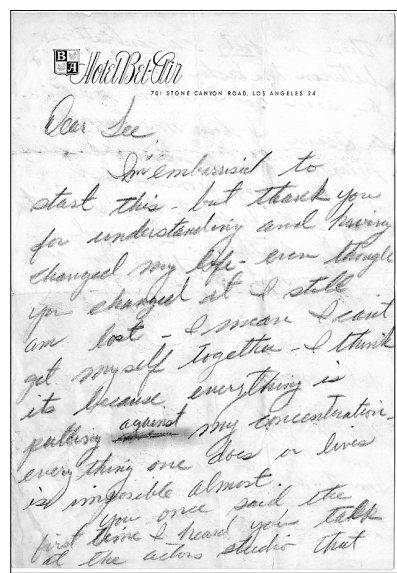
The auction house benefited from a spate of media attention in advance. "I'll be honest, the publicity we received was phenomenal," Malinowski said, citing features by Reuters, CNN, NBC's *Today Show*, and ABC's *Good Morning America*, among many others. "That really helped to get the word out and got us more clients and some new clients too."

Virtually every news organization highlighted a letter by Marilyn Monroe to her mentor Lee Strasberg. A celebrity with worldwide recognition was an understandable choice for them. But what does it say about the manuscripts market that the undated Monroe missive was the top lot of the sale? Selling for \$156,000, it beat out all other results for items by men of state (John Adams, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson), men of science (Thomas Edison, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Louis Pasteur), men of letters (Jack London, Samuel Clemens, Charles Dickens), and women of many different talents (Billie Holiday, Louisa May Alcott, Virginia Woolf, Mata Hari, Catherine de' Medici, Helen Keller, Isadora Duncan, and Jackie Onassis), to name a few.

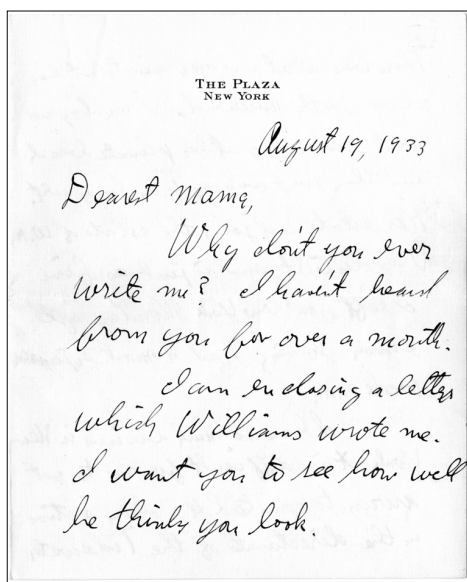
Maybe the outcome says that a manuscripts sale is a great leveler, just like fame itself. (Flannery O'Connor once commented that her fame had made her feel like a cross between "Roy Rogers's horse and Miss Watermelon of 1955.") Maybe it says more about the past successes of Profiles in History. Its customer base may be international,



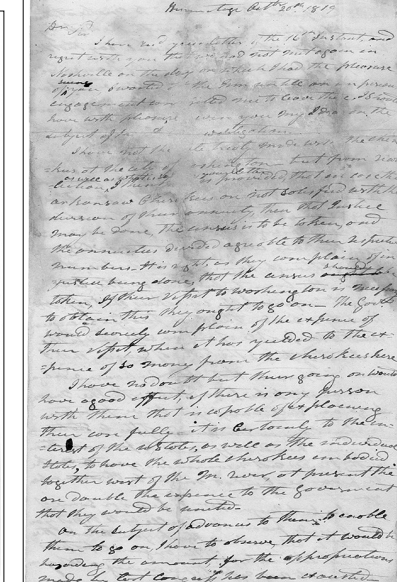
Marsha Malinowski is shown with the Marilyn Monroe letter in New York City in mid-April. Schinto photo.



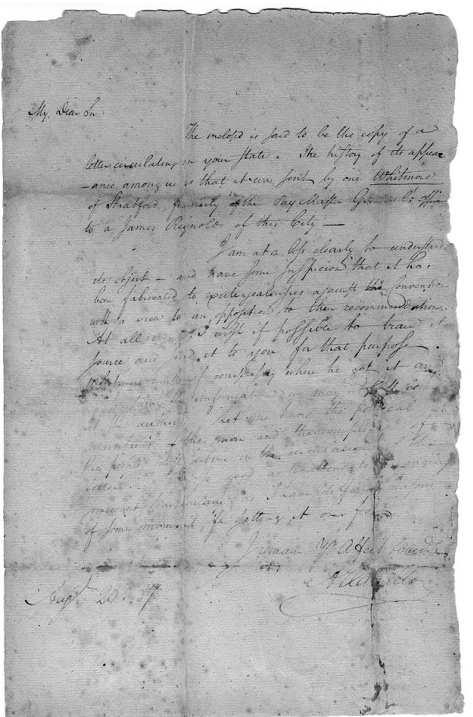
Marilyn Monroe's undated letter to Lee Strasberg sold for \$156,000 (est. \$30,000/50,000). Written in pencil, it is a wrenching cry for help.



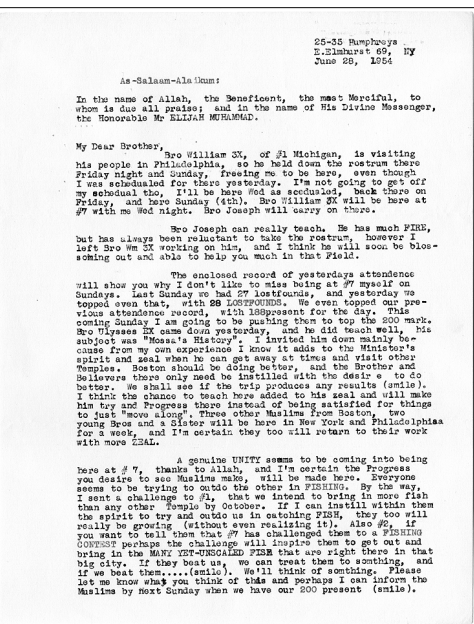
Jean Paul Getty's autograph letter to his mother contains a line that a child usually receives rather than sends: "Why don't you ever write me?" The five pages on stationery from The Plaza in New York City sold for \$2700 (est. \$2000/2500). Getty wrote it in 1933 when he was 40 years old.



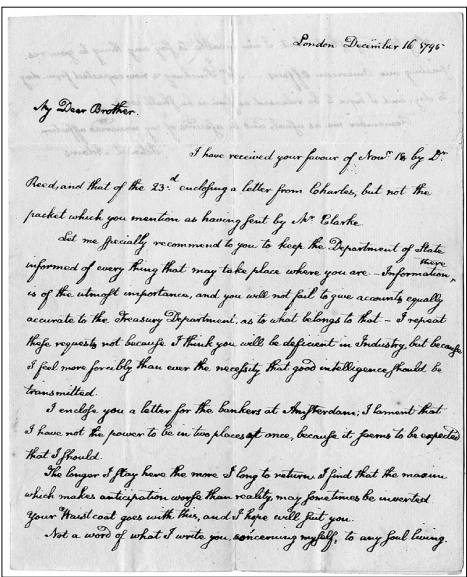
Andrew Jackson wrote these three pages on October 20, 1819, on the justification for his complicated Indian removal policy. The recipient was Joseph McMinn, governor of Tennessee, whose state was involved, since Jackson was proposing to exchange with the unconvinced Cherokees two million acres in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee for equivalent land west of the Mississippi. The autograph letter sold for \$20,400 (est. \$10,000/15,000).



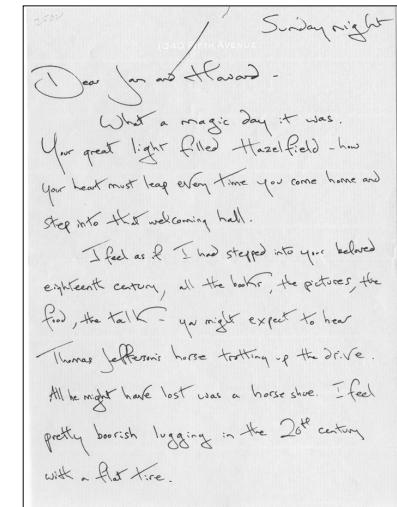
A one-page autograph letter by Alexander Hamilton to Jeremiah Wadsworth of Connecticut sold for \$15,600 (est. \$4000/6000). It is Hamilton's response on August 20, 1787, to opposition in New York to the upcoming Constitutional Convention. This co-author of *The Federalist* was trying to determine who the fomenter was and stop him from doing any more damage than he already had.



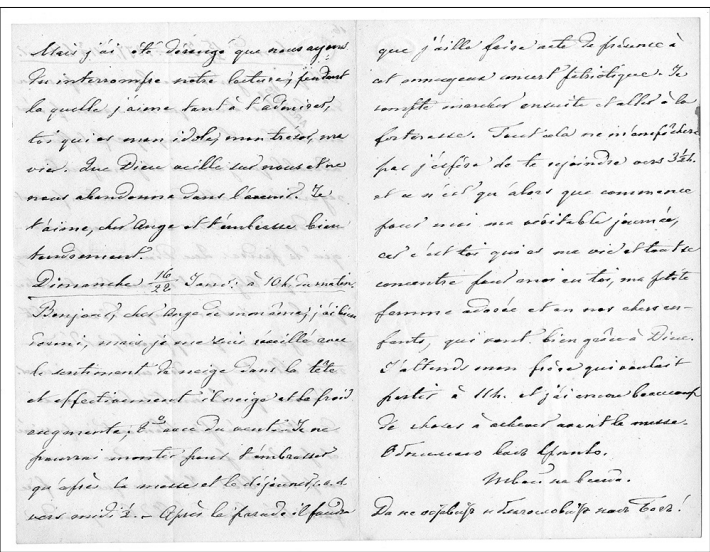
A two-page typed letter signed by Malcolm X sold for \$8400 (est. \$6000/8000). Dated June 28, 1954, it is an assessment of early efforts to recruit young men and women into the Nation of Islam. With various words typed in all caps and emphatic red he wrote to an unnamed correspondent, "...yes, sir, we have to BAIT our own MUSLIMS into becoming FISHERMEN. We have to bait them into becoming BAIT-ORS. In other words, we must FISH FOR FISHERMEN."



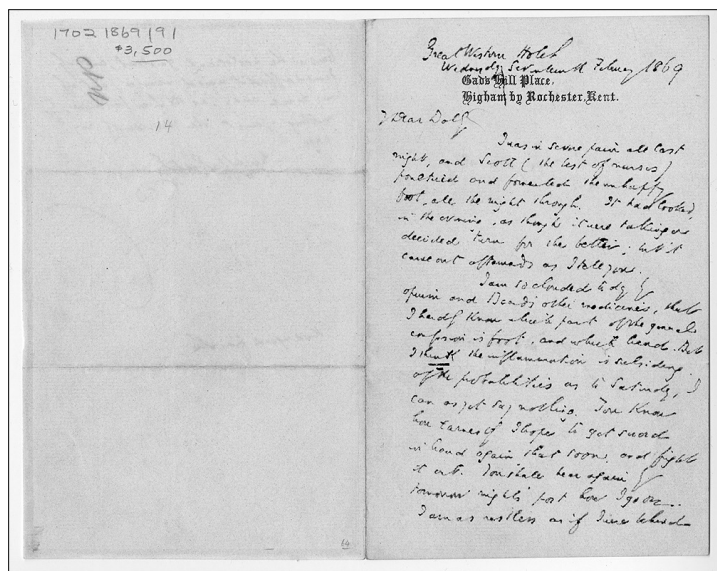
"Not a word of what I write you concerning myself, to any Soul living," John Quincy Adams wrote at age 28 to his brother Thomas Boylston Adams from London on December 16, 1795. So much for privacy, since here we all are reading it now, but isn't that a large part of the appeal of historic correspondence? At the time, Adams was in London, newly appointed minister to the Netherlands by George Washington. "The longer I stay here the more I long to return," wrote Adams in the two-page autograph letter that sold for \$4200 (est. \$3000/5000).



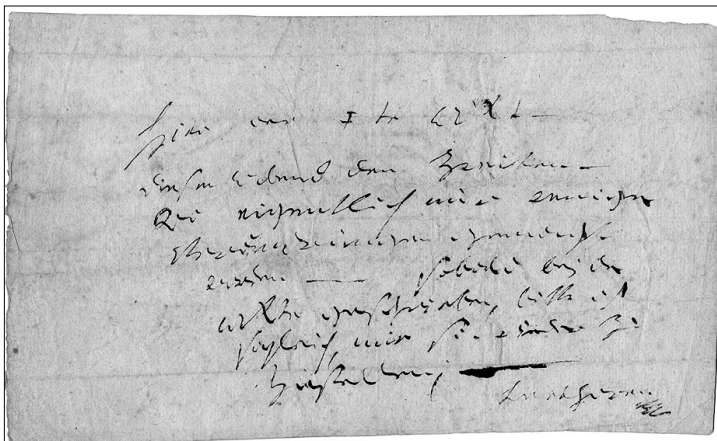
An autograph letter signed in the distinctive handwriting of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis sold for its top estimate, \$3000. The two pages on 1040 Fifth Avenue stationery, possibly dating from circa 1980, was a thank-you note to friends Jan and Howard Adams after a visit to their 18th-century house in Virginia. After signing "Jacqueline," she wrote in a postscript, "You are the only people who call me that—the only time I like my name!"



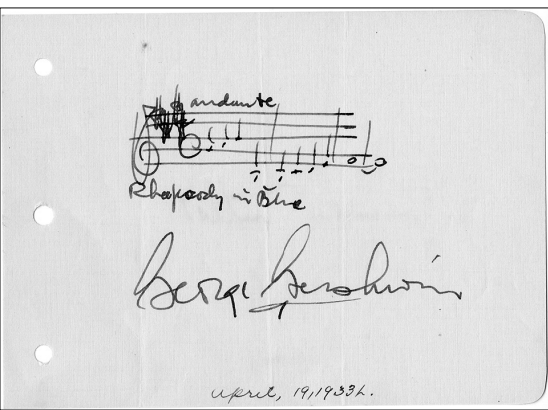
Love letters between Alexander II and Princess Catherine, including photographs, fetched \$96,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). Alexander died when a terrorist's bomb exploded in 1881. Catherine died in Paris in 1922.



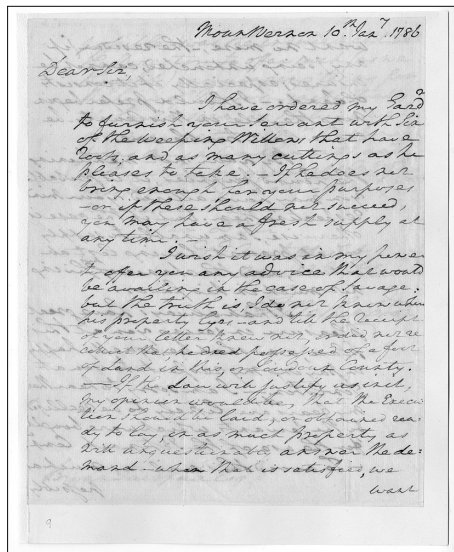
"I am so clouded today by opium...." Charles Dickens wrote on February 17, 1869, in a two-page autograph letter to George Dolby, who managed the author's reading tours in his later years. Dickens told Dolby he felt as restless as an animal in a zoo, "and if I could afford it, would wear a part of my mane away as the lion has done, by rubbing against the sides of my cage...." The letter sold for \$10,200 (est. \$3000/5000).



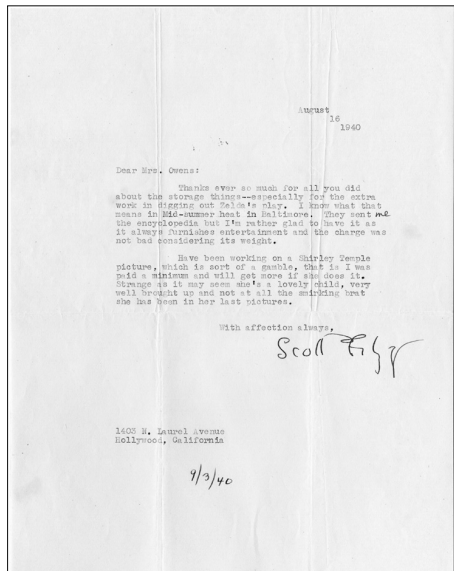
One page addressed to opera singer Friedrich Sebastian Mayer, this 1805 autograph letter by Ludwig van Beethoven served essentially as a cover note for one-half of the composer's only opera, *Fidelio*. "Here [is] the 1st act," he wrote in German to Mayer, who sang the role of Don Pizarro in the first performances. "Tonight the second where actually only a few changes [have been] made. As soon as both acts are written, I ask to have them sent back to me promptly. Beethoven." The letter sold for \$96,000 (est. \$40,000/60,000). "It was in gorgeous condition," said Marsha Malinowski to explain its appeal. "It was written on beautiful, thick paper, and went through the ages in very good shape, and I just thought it was so iconic, with his bold signature right there. I think that really attracted people."



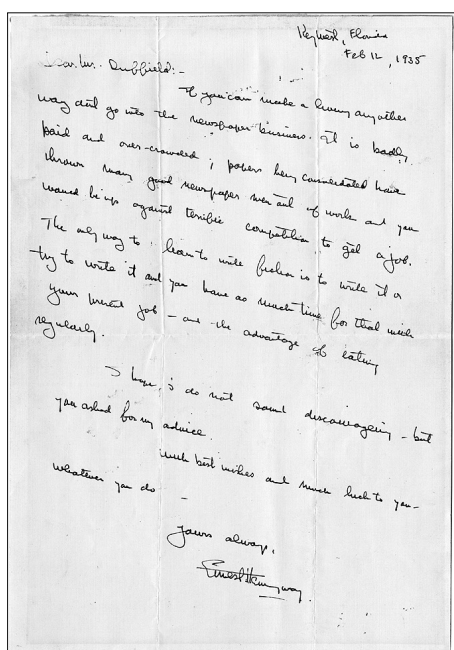
Three measures of *Rhapsody in Blue* written by George Gershwin on a leaf from an autograph album sold for \$7200 (est. \$3000/5000). It is dated April 19, 1933, in another hand.



A three-page autograph letter by George Washington, concerning "Negro slaves" that he hoped to hire for his ill-fated Potomac Navigation Company, sold for \$39,000 (est. \$30,000/50,000). Dated January 10, 1786, it was addressed to a lifelong friend, Bryan Fairfax, to whom Washington was also offering root cuttings of plants.



F. Scott Fitzgerald, in a signed, typed letter to his secretary Isabel W. Owens on August 16, 1940, passed judgment on Shirley Temple, who was, in his words, "a lovely child... and not at all the smirking brat she has been in her last pictures." The letter sold to an Internet buyer for \$7380 (est. \$3000/5000).



Hemingway often gave advice to would-be writers. In this one-page autograph letter, he told a Mr. Duffield, "If you can make a living any other way don't go into the newspaper business." The letter, dated February 12, 1935, sold for \$6600 (est. \$4000/6000).

but its headquarters is not far from Hollywood, and the auction house is known for its sales of high-profile movie memorabilia—e.g., the white cocktail dress that flew up as Monroe stood over a subway grate in *The Seven Year Itch*. The star of a \$22.8 million sale in 2011, the costume fetched \$5.52 million.

Asked for her take on the result, Malinowski said, "It's so hard for me to understand that a Marilyn Monroe letter sold for more than a Beethoven letter." (The sale's one-page autograph letter signed by the composer, a terse message to opera singer Friedrich Sebastian Mayer, fetched \$96,000.) "It's just incredible to me on so many different levels. Then again, that was probably one of the most poignant Monroe letters I've ever read in all my years in the business."

The content of the two pages, written in smudgy pencil on stationery from Los Angeles's Bel-Air Hotel, is startling and sad. Embarrassed ("embarrassed" she wrote) to be writing Strasberg at all, the actress admitted that even after he had "changed [her] life," she was "still lost," struggling to resist the feeling she was going insane. Strasberg, who developed method acting, was also a director. Monroe thanked him for letting his second wife, Paula Miller, help her on the picture they were making ("She's the only really warm woman I've known") but said that if she got in front of the camera and couldn't do what she'd been taught to do, "Then I feel like I'm not existing in the human race at all." She signed it "Love Marilyn."

Partly, the price can be explained by the fact that powerful contemporary material is selling for very high prices, Malinowski said. Yet, she added, there was something about this letter that transcended that trend. "It was such a poignant letter; it struck a chord with people across the board." And as if to underline that statement, the item went not to a Hollywood collector, as one might suppose. "It went to a good manuscript-collecting client of mine, and I was thrilled," Malinowski said.

Besides the word embarrassed, Monroe misspelled suicide ("suicide"). She was using it in the context of paraphrasing something Strasberg had said during an acting class, but it eerily foreshadowed her mysterious death at age 36 on August 5, 1962, which some believe was by her own hand and others believe was an accident or murder.

"When people die tragically young, they become iconic, whether it is JFK, James Dean, or Marilyn," Malinowski said. "So there's also that aspect. These tragic figures always garner a lot more attention." And because their lives have been cut short, "There's a limited amount of the material, and people just go for it. I've watched that happen over time, and it hasn't changed."

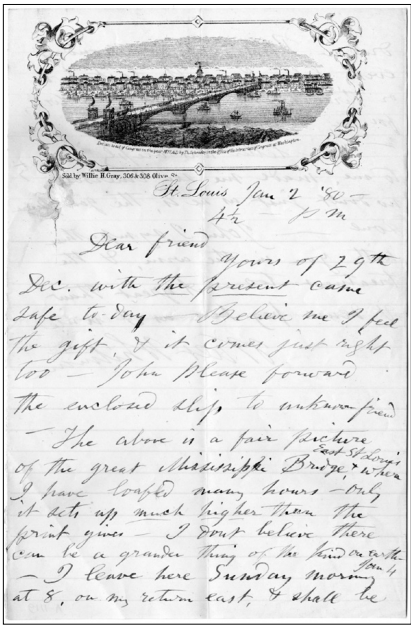
An archive of 56 letters by nine great figures of 20th-century physics and philosophy was the top group lot of the sale and the second-highest lot overall, going at \$108,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). Written by Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Erwin Schrödinger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others, including nine Nobel Prize winners, the letters were addressed to Moritz Schlick, a German physicist, philosopher, and founding father of logical positivism and the Vienna Circle. "The public must know that...we scientists are not only servants of technology or weird collectors of natural history rarities," Max Born wrote to Schlick. "...[B]ehind us lies a specific perception of the world, which we serve in the belief that it will lead humanity to a higher level."

In a completely different vein, an exchange of love letters between Czar Alexander II and Catherine Mikhailovna Dolgorukova—Alexander's mistress, then wife—sold along with an archive of family papers of photographs from the royal Russians for another very strong price, \$96,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). Catherine's letter to Alexander on the eve of her wedding said in part, "You must understand...what a joy it is to become the wife of the man you have madly loved for 14 years." Alexander was no less effusive, writing during their illicit courtship that "...we clenched each other like hungry cats both in the morning and in the afternoon, and it was sweet to the verge of madness, so that even now I still want to squeal for joy."

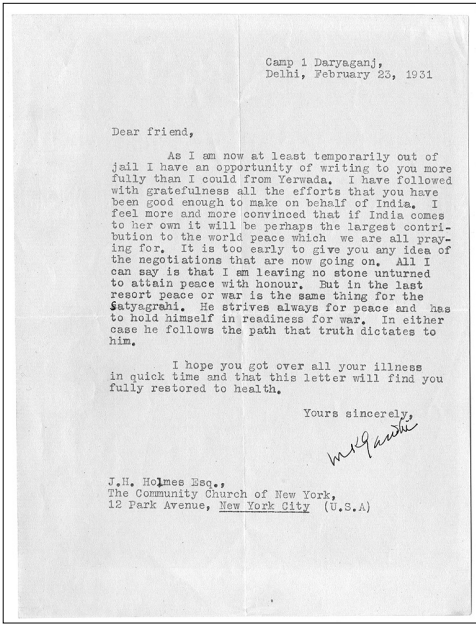
This sale offered several more lots of correspondence between couples. A group of 54 wartime letters handwritten (except for one) by Dwight D. Eisenhower to his wife, Mamie, fetched \$48,000 (est. \$40,000/60,000). The excerpts in the catalog were no match for the steamy Alexander/Catherine examples. Still, Dwight did express his love and revealed other details of a future president's domestic life.

Fourteen handwritten pages of correspondence by John Steinbeck to actress Ann Sothern, with whom he had a brief affair in 1949, sold for \$27,000 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The author, who contributed screenplays for various Hollywood films in the 1940's, wrote playfully, calling her at one point "Annie Wannie." He also repeated gossip, discussed missing his children, and made this comment about himself and his prolixity: "How I do run on. And darn it—this is the way I make my living. Oh! Well—its [sic] better than cleaning cesspools."

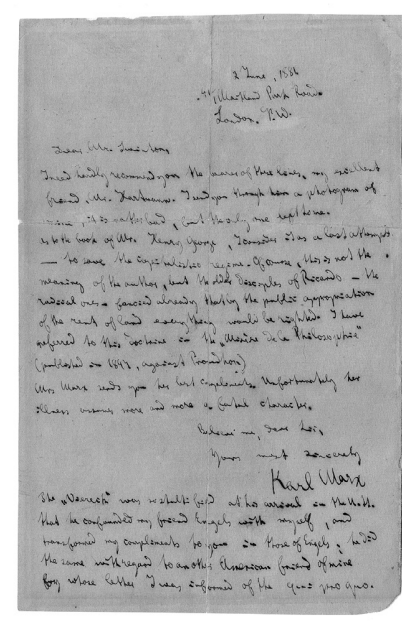
Two four-page letters handwritten by outlaw Frank James to his no doubt long-suffering wife, Annie, were offered separately. Each was written in 1883, while he was in jail awaiting trial for murder. "Some have said that I have a kind of magnetism about me that attracts almost everybody," the brother of Jesse James wrote in one of the letters, which



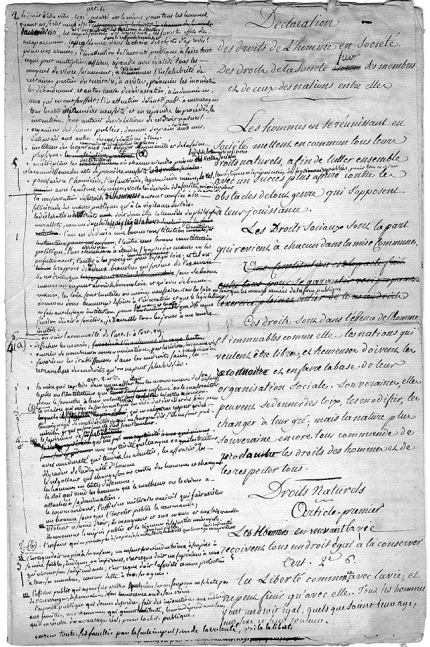
A two-page autograph letter by Walt Whitman brought \$16,800 (est. \$6000/8000). Dated January 2, 1880, it refers to the great transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson as "a good pure soul."



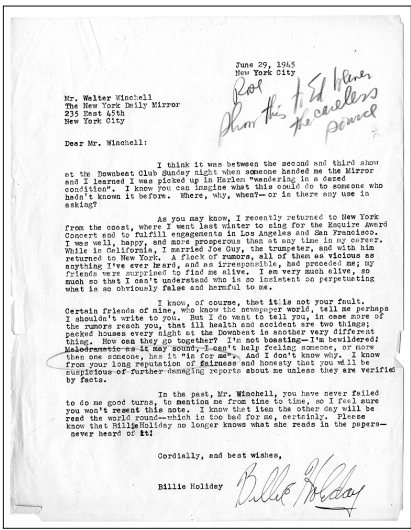
A typed letter signed "MK Gandhi" sold for \$19,200 (est. \$4000/6000). The recipient was J.H. Holmes of the Community Church of New York, and the topics were Indian independence and prayers for peace. It was dated February 23, 1931.



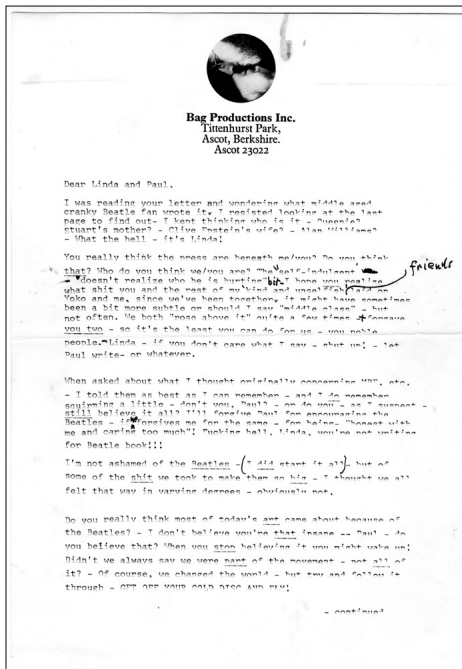
A one-page autograph letter in English by Karl Marx sold for \$51,000 (est. \$10,000/15,000). One purpose of the letter, dated June 2, 1881, was to convey a 9" x 6" photogravure to the addressee, American journalist John Swinton.



A nine-page autograph manuscript by French politician and mathematician Gilbert Romme—possibly the only extant draft of the Rights of Man in the French Constitution of 1793—sold for \$39,000 (est. \$30,000/50,000). Marsha Malinowski described him as "a French version of Jefferson when it comes right down to it."



In this single-page typed letter, signed by Billie Holiday to Walter Winchell, the singer asked the columnist to retract a story about her drunkenness, claiming it was false. "I know from your long reputation of fairness and honesty that you will be suspicious of further damaging reports about me unless they are verified by facts," she wrote on June 29, 1945. It was a true story, however, and Winchell did not retract. The letter sold for \$3900 (est. \$3000/5000).



John Lennon's typed, unsigned, hand-corrected diatribe blasting the letter's recipients, Paul and Linda McCartney, fetched \$36,000 (est. \$30,000/50,000). Undated, it is likely 1969-71.

sold for \$7800 (est. \$3000/5000). Modest he was not, although he sometimes tried not to be. "You deserve all the credit for my success," he told Annie. "Women as a whole are weak and men know it and take advantage of their weakness," the philosopher-bandit wrote in the second letter, which made \$3900 on the same estimate as the first. "There is but the one way to serve them and that is to...shoot [the men] dead on the spot."

On love letters in general, Malinowski said, "Over the years I've had so many caches of them, and they always sell so well. It goes right to the hearts of so many collectors, and it obviously was a genre that this distinguished American private collector enjoyed, and now the lots have been dispersed among different people who like this genre too, so it's been very interesting to watch."

No love was lost in one letter between two Beatles couples, John Lennon and Yoko Ono and Paul and Linda McCartney. A two-page typed and hand-corrected (unsigned) letter by Lennon to the McCartneys—essentially an expletive-laced rant about their many personal and professional differences—sold for \$36,000 (est. \$30,000/50,000). Lennon seemed to have it in for Linda especially ("So get that into your petty little perversion of a mind, Mrs. McCartney..."), along with her "insane" family. He also resented the fact that a

Paul and Linda letter, to which this was his response, had not been also addressed to Yoko. Perhaps to make his point all the louder, the stationery Lennon used was a Bag Productions letterhead, showing a photograph of his and Yoko's faces in profile with their lips about to kiss.

Judging from part one and now the part two selections, it's clear that this collector had settled for nothing less than material with good associations as well as good content. In an autograph letter signed by Mark Twain to Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, the author of *Huckleberry Finn* lamented his investment in the Paige typesetting machine, which helped to bankrupt him. "I can't get up courage enough to talk about this misfortune, myself, except to you," Twain wrote, referring to the machine that was trumped by the Linotype system as his "dissolved dream." The two pages sold for \$20,400 (est. \$8000/12,000).

Another choice literary item, an autograph letter by Jack London to book collector and bibliographer Merle Johnson, was, in Malinowski's opinion, "the best Jack London I've ever seen." From the Estelle Doheny collection, which sold at Christie's in New York in February 1988, the four pages included London's thoughts about his construction of his breakthrough novel *Call of the Wild* and the alternative names he considered for its canine protagon-

onist, Buck. Written in Oakland, California, in 1903, the letter sold within estimate for \$27,000.

This sale's science section was particularly strong, featuring, for example, an Edison light bulb patent, which made \$45,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000). Prior to the International Patents Act of 1884, an inventor had to obtain a patent in individual countries. The copy at this sale was the patent submitted to Bolivia in 1881, containing eight schematics printed from Edison's original drawings.

Several other Edison items did well, although his 1927-28 laboratory notebook with hand-drawn sketches was one of the sale's three non-sellers. Estimated at \$80,000/120,000, it carried the highest expectations of any lot. (The other two passed lots were comparatively minor and appear to have simply slipped through the cracks.)

A 1905 typed letter signed by Wilbur Wright on letterhead of the Wright Cycle Company sold for \$72,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). The single page was addressed to John T. Daniels, who had photographed the Wright brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, two years earlier. Wilbur told Daniels about the brothers' progress since that seminal event, mentioning flights of 16, 20, and 24 miles made by Orville. Besides the good content, the letter was in fine condition. It was also rare, since Wilbur died at age 45 of typhoid fever in 1912, while Orville lived 36 more years to witness the feats of Charles Lindbergh and all the way to the first supersonic flight by Charles "Chuck" Yeager.

A 1949 autograph letter signed by Einstein to the wife of his doctor wasn't about scientific matters. It was a commiseration about a recent fall she'd taken. The doctor and his wife had left Berlin for New York prior to World War II, and Einstein used the fact that they had fled the Nazis as a metaphor. "The devil is creative, as the Nazis were when it was finally decided to round us up," Einstein wrote in German in his feathery hand. "But we hold together and take pleasure with each other..." The letter realized \$18,000 (est. \$10,000/15,000).

Part one of this collection featured a Karl Marx autograph letter signed in German that sold for \$114,000. This time, one in English brought \$51,000 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The single page, dated June 2, 1881, was addressed to American journalist John Swinton. Marx mentioned several colleagues including Friedrich Engels and also referred to his wife's illness. He also enclosed a 9" x 6" photogravure portrait that was still with the letter.

Included with one of the six Wash-

ington letters in the sale was a lock of Washington's hair. "Someone carefully put that together long, long, long ago," Malinowski said. Dated August 3, 1796, that autograph letter signed was about his involvement with a long overdue debt of \$100 incurred by his nephew Howell Lewis. He advised Mrs. A.L. Dubarry to "pursue legal measures to obtain payment as I can have no farther agony in the Business." It sold for \$24,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000) along with the hair and a letter to Washington from Lewis about the matter.

Malinowski said her favorite item of the sale was another item from the American history section. It was a Jefferson autograph letter in which the aging statesman expressed his feelings about old age. The single page is dated January 26, 1822, written when he was 79 and realizing "... the prayers of an old man are the only contributions left in his power..."

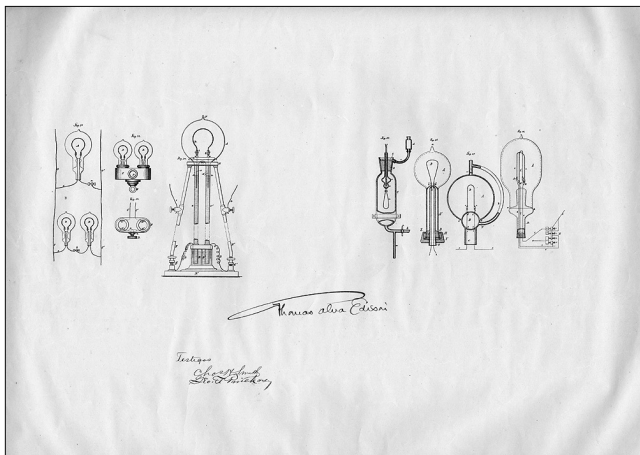
"He was such the elder statesman, saying it was time for the next generation of young Americans to move forward and for him to step back," Malinowski said, "and I just thought it could not have been more brilliantly written." She pointed out his use of the elegant self-description "presque Octogenaire." The letter sold for \$60,000.

The sale's estimates were uniformly realistic, none teasingly low. "I really tried hard to have truth in advertising and make sure my estimates reflected current prices on the market," said Malinowski.

Two groups of Civil War items, put together by Malinowski, were intended for new collectors. One lot consisted of eight letters from Confederate leaders, writing after defeat. For example, in declining an invitation to memorialize Gettysburg, Robert E. Lee told an unknown correspondent in 1869, "I think it wiser...not to keep open the sores of war, but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife & to commit to oblivion the feelings it engendered."

Seven letters by figures on the Union side included examples from William Tecumseh Sherman, Thomas Ewing Jr., Edwin M. Stanton, Philip Kearny, Don Carlos Buell, George Gordon Meade, and Michael Graham. In four pages dated August 22, 1863, Graham, a secret service agent, gave to Abraham Lincoln critical and detailed intelligence on conditions and opportunities in the Shenandoah Valley. He also pleaded for 800 men for a mission to take down Confederate raider Mosby.

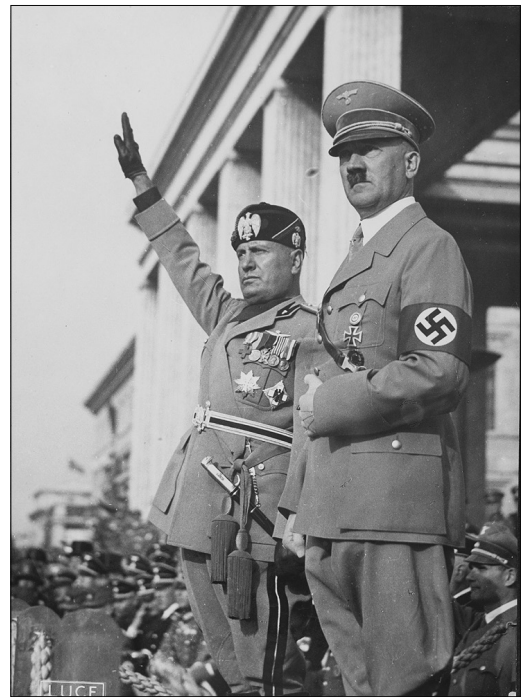
"I thought they would sell better in



The original patent application drawings for Thomas Edison's light bulb achieved \$45,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000). Submitted to Bolivia in 1881, because it was necessary before 1884 that patents be obtained in individual countries, it measures approximately 16" x 22½".



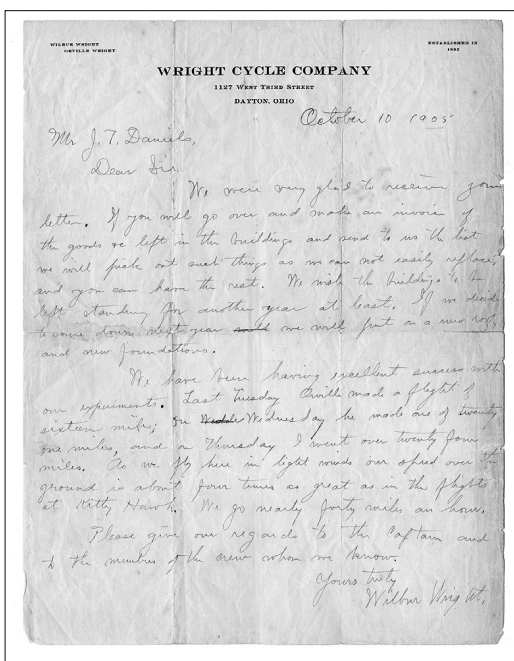
Two large albums of photographs documenting Mussolini's visit to Hitler in Germany in 1937 and Hitler's visit to Mussolini in Italy in 1938 sold for \$36,000 (est. \$30,000/50,000). The Istituto Nazionale Luce, the Italian state-run production house, produced them. The dictators are shown presiding over parades, military maneuvers, and rallies of adoring followers. If Profiles in History had made more of them in presale publicity, they likely would have brought more, but Marsha Malinowski said, "We really made a conscious decision to downplay them, be discreet."



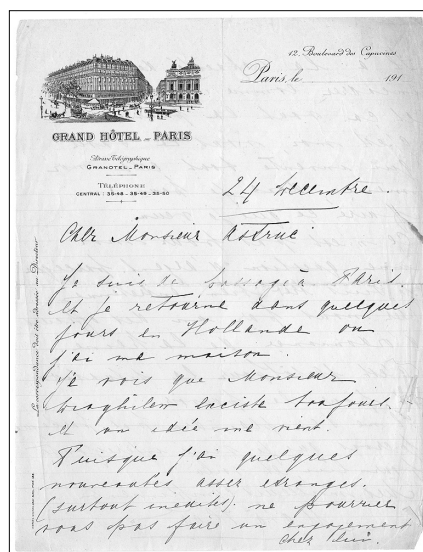
groups," Malinowski explained. "I also thought they could be the beginnings of a great Civil War collection for a new collector." Estimated at \$10,000/15,000 and \$4000/6000, respectively, they did much better, going at \$24,000 each.

New collectors must be wondering if this distinguished American private collector did well. Was his collection, in the end, a good investment? Malinowski said, "It's a very, very good question, and my gut overall reaction is yes, I think he did extremely well over such an extended, long period of time" (30 years). "I don't believe, though, in buying manuscripts for investment. I don't think to do a quick flip in manuscripts is ever, ever a good idea. It's not like contemporary art; it's not like Impressionists. Manuscripts do not have that sort of flipability. You don't buy manuscripts to flip them, and this collector did not do that in any way, shape, or form, and he has seen really strong prices for his material."

Part three of "The Property of a Distinguished American Private Collector" will take place in December, exact date to be announced. For more information, contact the auction house at (310) 859-7701 or see the Web site (www.profilesinhistory.com).

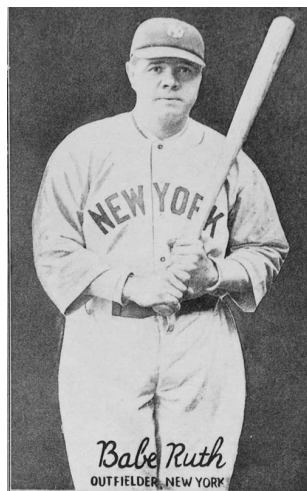


Wilbur Wright's 1905 typed letter signed to John T. Daniels, the photographer at the Kitty Hawk flight two years earlier, sold for \$72,000 (est. \$60,000/80,000). Less rare letters (not shown) by Orville Wright, who, unlike his brother, lived to see the jet age, made \$4800 and \$4500 respectively.



An archive of five autograph letters signed in French by Mata Hari, along with 15 photographs showing the First World War spy in various dance poses, sold for \$24,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000).

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