A one-page autograph letter by Alexander Hamilton to Jeremiah Wadsworth of Connecticut sold for $15,600 (est. $4000/6000). It was written in 1787.

"These tragic figures always garner a lot more attention."

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.

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 the unconvincing 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).

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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.

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 are all reading it now, but isn't that a large part of what makes America great? 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).

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 a letter in which he 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 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 auction. "I've reached out to the right people, and in fact it was more international than last time," Malinowski said. "It was so much 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 on target because people want to know what's going on, and everyone's happy."}

Profiles in History, Calabasas, California

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.

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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.

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.

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 [at 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 Pizarro in the first performances. "Tonight the second act will be at nine…"

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 smiling trait she has been in her last pictures.” The letter sold to an Internet buyer for $7380 (est. $3000/5000).

Three measures of Rhapsoody 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.

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 over Monroe’s body when she 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 fetched so much more than other letter.” (The sale’s one-page autograph letter sent 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" she wrote to be written. "I don’t want to think about it ever, and I can’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 to a humanitarian collector, as one might suppose. “It was sold 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 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 once or twice, and it hasn’t changed.”

An archive of 56 letters by nine great figures of 20th-century philosophy was the 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 Mortiz Schlick, a German physicist, philosopher, and founding father of logical positivism and the Vienna Circle. “The public must know that…we scientists…behind 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 Caro 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 Alcibiades, written on the day 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 years.”

Alexander was no less expressively wordy during their illicit courtship that “…we clench each other like hungry cats both in the morning and in the afternoon, and in the middle of the night one has the worst 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 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 letters. 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 Sothorn, with whom he had a brief affair in 1949, sold for $27,000 (est. $10,000/20,000). 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—it is this 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 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...
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-hand in his recent book, which sold for $3900 (est. $3000) on July 28, 1861, was to convey a copy of the Nancy's memoirs to the French revolutionaries.

A nine-page autograph manuscript by French political 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 Jef- ferson when it comes right down to it."
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 America 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 flip-pability. 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).

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 10” 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 adorers. 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.”

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).