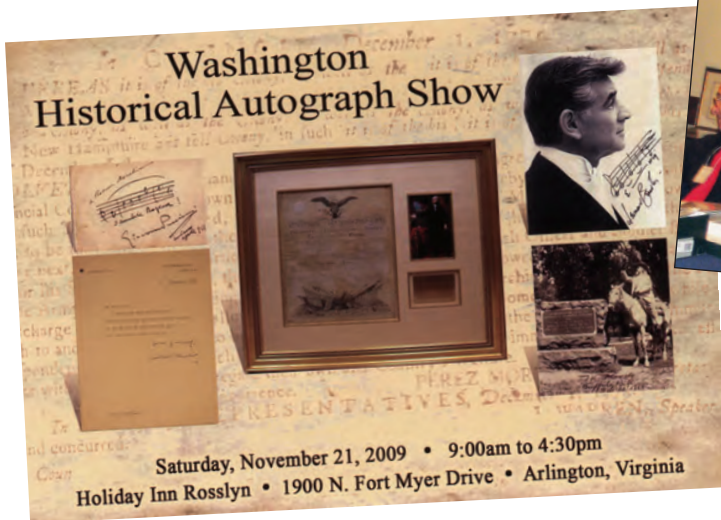




DC Autograph Show a Modest Success



From top: Dealer Peter Forman (right) answers questions from collectors after his autograph collecting seminar at the booth of New York dealer Gary Combs (seated). • Dealer Ed Bomsey pulls a ticket for one of two \$150 door prizes from bowl held by show organizer Rick Badwey. • Postcard for the 2009 show

EARLY MORNING ON A MILD, pleasant Saturday in Arlington, Virginia, the week before Thanksgiving. Car traffic buzzed about the Holiday Inn on busy North Fort Meyer Drive in the condo-and-commercial Rosslyn area.

Who'd know that in the spacious, elegant ballroom on their second floor an autograph show featuring a spectacular array of original documents was about to take place? Autograph collectors would, that's who, and a respectable number of them turned out to visit the Fourth Washington Autograph Show.

Local dealer Rick Badwey, owner of nearby Museum Framing, and dealer Ed Bomsey have organized this show since its inception. While it's not a show sponsored by PADA (Professional Autograph Dealers Association), nine of the 15 exhibitors were PADA members: Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, Alexander Autographs, Edward N. Bomsey Autographs, Gary Combs Autographs, Roger Gross Ltd. Music Autographs, Steven L. Hoskin Historical Autographs, Stuart Lutz Historic Documents, yours truly (Main Street Fine Books & Manuscripts) and J.B. Muns Fine Art Books & Musical Autographs. Seven of the exhibitors were also members of the ABAA (Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America). Other exhibitors included

Bartleby's Books, Custodians of History, Quinn's Auction Galleries & Waverly Auctions, F. Don Nidiffer and Signature House.

Dealer offerings seemed to range equally among high, middle and low end. If you wanted five dollar material, it was there, if hard to find; if you wanted five *digit* material, it too could be found in abundance. Browsing among my colleagues' offerings, I noted that J.B. Muns had a stunning and rare signed photograph and letter from the Oscar-winning film composer Franz Waxman, best remembered for his *Sunset Boulevard* and *A Place in the Sun* scores. Steve Hoskin wowed with a superb Zachary Taylor letter as president mentioning "Rail roads and canal routes between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans"—one of the earliest transcontinental railroad references you'll find. Ed Bomsey featured a moving 1925 ALS in English from Marie Curie to a recent widow. And Stuart Lutz's large and lovely signed Amelia Earhart photograph could hardly be more timely. Among my own offerings, nothing tripped my trigger more than a pair of small space flags, an Apollo XVII moon flag and a Skylab 4 flag, as presented to then-Senator Adlai Stevenson III.

Attendees had the opportunity to attend a 30-minute seminar on autograph collecting conducted by dealer Peter Forman,

Custodians of History. Several visitors told me how informative and entertaining Peter's presentation was. Two \$150 door prizes, good at any booth, were given away during the show. At 10:30 and again at 2:30 Rick Badwey called on Ed Bomsey to pull a ticket stub from a bowl of stubs. The fact that each time the winning attendee could not be located—stub after stub after stub!—only spurred the excitement of attendees as their chances of winning increased.

Having exhibited at this show twice before myself, I can attest that the downturn in the economy was certainly evident. Despite well-placed advertisements in two major DC newspapers and relevant magazines, despite nice mentions in local media, despite sizeable direct mailings to collectors, attendance was... well, *underwhelming*.

But attendance was actually up from last year, though it still hadn't returned to the levels of the two earlier shows. Perhaps more important than numbers, though, was the level of interest and enthusiasm among attendees—which was high. Off and on throughout the morning the ballroom rang with animated chatter and laughter as collectors browsed and visited with dealers.

Reports that the recession is over to the contrary, most dealers reported modest sales at best. Buying was scattered and definitely cautious. Nevertheless, I'd call the Fourth Washington Autograph Show a mild success. The crowds may have been thin, but they were there—as was a fine range of top-notch dealers and a broad range of quality autographs. Let's hope we can report on a fifth show this time next year. 