

## Not “ah-one” but “ah-two” Lawrence Welk facsimiles

**L**ET’S BURST SOME PEOPLE’S champagne bubbles and lay a burning issue to rest once and for all: Lawrence Welk’s 1971 memoir *Wunnerful, Wunnerful! The Autobiography of Lawrence Welk* does not—repeat, NOT—bear his authentic signature. Buying a copy advertised as “signed”—barring one exception mentioned below—will be a less-than-wonderful experience.

Welk (1903-92) was of course the North Dakota-born bandleader known as “The King of Champagne Music.” His bubbly musical variety *The Lawrence Welk Show* ranks as the longest-running show of its type in television history, lasting from 1955 until 1971. Unbelievably, it’s still shown in reruns. No show produced more groans among me and my siblings than Lawrence Welk—elevator-style Big Band music, more pastel colors than you can shake a stick at, the ever-present bubbles—but that’s a generational thing. In his day, among those of his generation, Welk’s audience was vast.

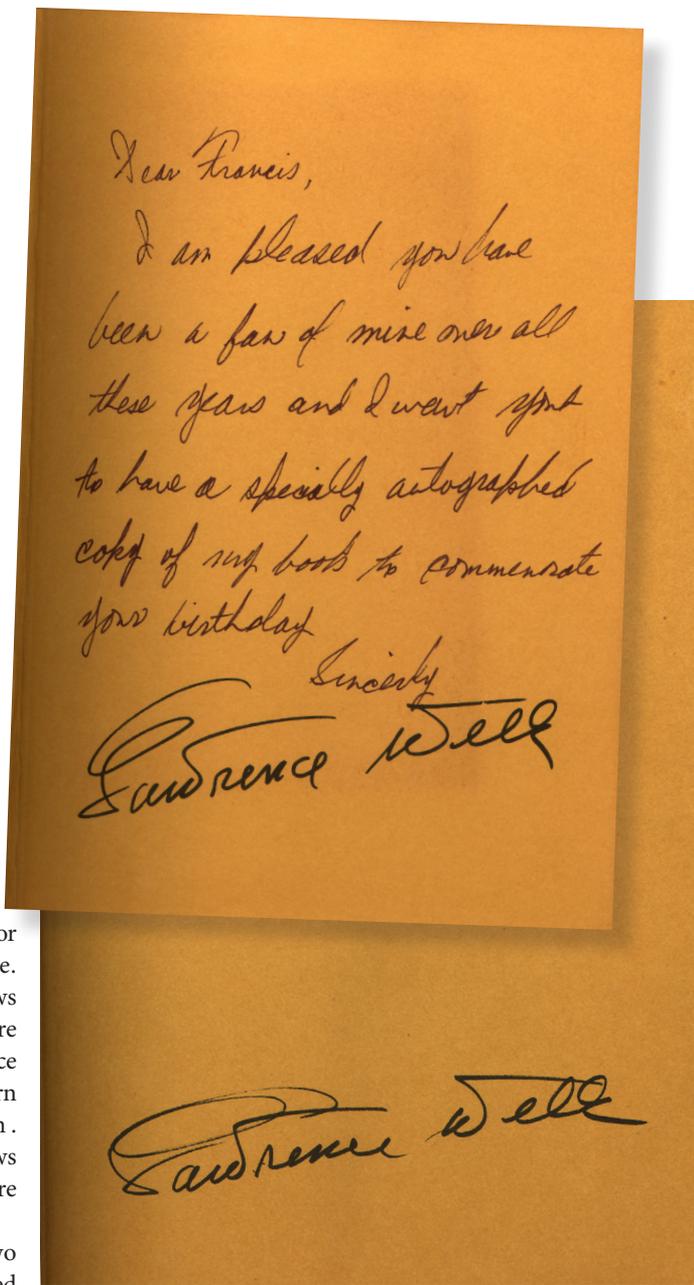
Prentice-Hall, Inc. in Englewood Cliffs, N.J., published Welk’s memoir at the time his show came off the air, and it went through quite a few printings. The front fly-leaf, printed in a dark mustard color, bears a large, bold signature of Welk’s near the bottom—clearly and unmistakably printed in flat black printer’s ink. To a noncollector it might easily deceive, but no experienced dealer or collector should mistake this printed product for an authentic signature.

Yet mistake it they do, over and over. There are literally hundreds of copies of this common book listed for sale online, with a majority of sellers noting the “fact” that the book is signed by Welk. Not a single one of these descriptions notes that this is a facsimile signature—clearly no serious examination of the signature was even made. Many of the sellers are not known in the book and autograph collecting world, but others are well known, respected members

of the ABAA (Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America). Prices for these “signed” copies, by the way, range from a couple dollars to a couple hundred dollars.

What spurred this columnist’s curiosity to explore this mass oversight is the unusual fact that these printed Welk signatures exist in two variants—a most strange occurrence for a printed signature. **Illustration A** shows the printed signature that, in our experience at least, seems to turn up less often. **Illustration B** shows the printed signature most often seen.

Why would two variations of a printed signature even occur? My best guess (having been a trade book editor a lifetime ago) would be that the printer’s slug bearing the facsimile signature either got lost or simply began to break down and wear out and had to be replaced with another. In **Illustration A**, note that the long horizontal stroke that concludes the “W” in Welk shows a small break near the middle. Perhaps this break started to grow, necessitating a new signature slug. The fact that this facsimile is seen less often suggests that this break occurred early in the first print run, which would explain why the majority of copies bear the facsimile shown in **Illustration B**.



**Illustration A (top):** The variant, less common, form of the printed Welk signature; **Illustration B:** The most common printed signature

Surely Welk himself was asked to personally sign copies of *Wunnerful, Wunnerful!* for admirers during the 20 years between its publication and his death, but surprisingly I’ve yet to encounter a copy with an authentic signature above the facsimile signature. It seems he preferred instead to add a personal inscription only above the facsimile, resulting in the combination shown in **Illustration A**. Perhaps an authentically signed copy of *Wunnerful, Wunnerful!* actually is a scarce book. **A**