

# AUTOGRAPHICA CURIOSA

BY WILLIAM L. BUTTS

## The Lost “Signature” Series

**T**HE CURIOUS PRESS RELEASE before me bears no date, unfortunately, but represents an intriguing footnote in the history of autograph collecting:

“FOR YOU..... *TWO PRICELESS DOCUMENTS!*” it screams. And elsewhere, after this “hook” had lured me into reading the announcement, I realized what the hulloaloo is all about:

“SIGNATURE”... *A half-hour television series of GREAT IMPORTANCE!*”

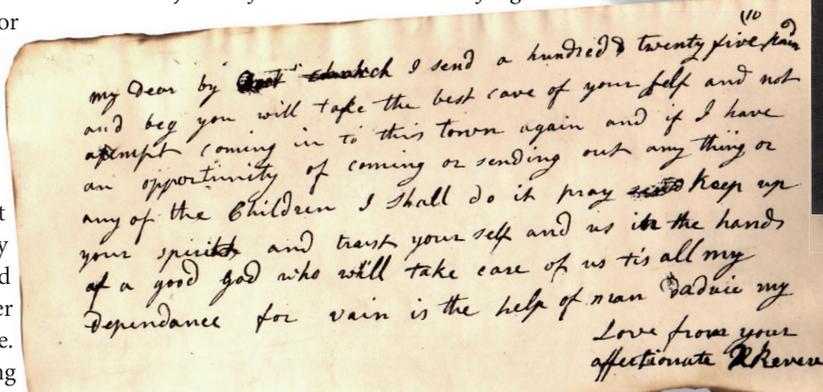
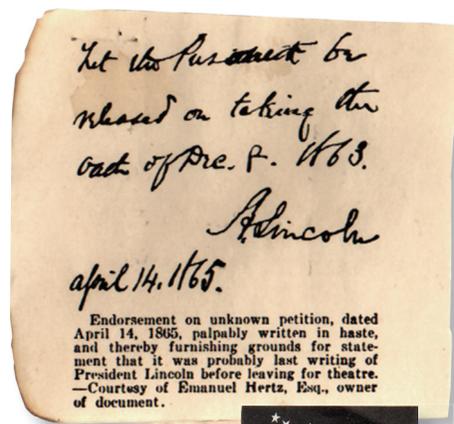
Nowhere in the autograph literature at this autograph dealer’s disposal, nor anywhere on the Internet, is there a mention of the existence of a television series devoted to autographs.

This delightful and rare memento—a single sheet of low-grade modern paper, mimeographed, not typeset but simply typed—is homely as can be. There’s no watermark to aid in dating it, but based on the paper and typewriting it’s of 1960s vintage. It opens, not with a routine blazing headline, but with two small reproduction documents stapled at upper left sure to catch any newspaper editor’s attention. The mimeographed text below then explains the significance of these two pieces.

Both of these facsimiles are offset printed on a tan stock meant to resemble old paper, and both feature die cut edges mimicking the irregular edges and rounded corners people expect to see on old documents—they’ve even been artificially singed about the edges to impress those who believe that all old documents look like a treasure map from a 1930s movie. The facsimile document on top, smaller than the second, is a small endorsement penned by Abraham Lincoln. The printed caption beneath it reads: “Endorsement on unknown petition, dated April 14, 1865, palpably written in haste, and thereby furnishing grounds for statement that it was probably last writing of President Lincoln before leaving for theatre. —Courtesy of Emanuel Hertz, Esq., owner of document.” A disingenuous explanation, surely—Lincoln may have been heading for the presidential privy.

Well-known Austrian-born Lincoln scholar Hertz may have owned the Lincoln document at one time, but the fact that he had died about a quarter-century before this press release is—well, odd at best.

The second, larger document facsimile is an autograph note signed from Rachel Revere to husband Paul, undated but circa April 18, 1775. “I send a hundred and twenty five pound and beg you will take the best care of your self and not attempt coming in to this town again... pray keep up your spirits and trust your self and us in the hands of a good



A curious press release for a TV show was accompanied by two facsimile handwritten documents by Abraham Lincoln (top) and Paul Revere (left)

god who will take care of us...” —a touching note of warning from a loving wife.

The glitzy sales pitch text beneath these moving documents notes breathlessly: “The first of the enclosed letters represents the last official act of ABRAHAM LINCOLN... the last time he ever signed his name. The DRAMATIC story which led to this signature, signed as he was about to leave for the theatre where he met his death, is one of intense dramatic interest.

“The second letter is to PAUL REVERE from his wife, warning him not to re-enter Boston for he would be captured. However, this letter was never delivered... and turned up many years later. Another story of tremendous impact... and all part of one of the most absorbing series ever to be presented... with the ‘originals’ actually displayed at the climax of each telecast.”

(By the way, “The ORIGINALS of these facsimiles are available, along with invaluable research obtained by this office through the cooperation of ACCREDITED and AUTHENTIC sources throughout the country

with which we are connected.” I assume they meant “available for purchase.”)

Did the *Signature* TV series ever begin? Was a pilot episode filmed and aired, but no commercial sponsors found? Could a crumpling reel or two lay forgotten in some basement or archive? Or perhaps this lone press release and facsimile documents are as far the project ever got?

The only other clue to *Signature* is the press release’s letterhead: “Elaine Starr Productions Inc.” of 9 East 49th Street in New York—phone PLAZA 8-1724. (I actually phoned, but no answer.) Of this production company, absolutely nothing can be found.

My guess is that *Signature* never got beyond this stage. A bit ahead of its day, a bit too specialized, a bit too commercial. With today’s plethora of cable channels, *Signature* might fly today—minus the sales pitch to buy the documents in question. I picture it on PBS—yours truly hosting of course.

Do you have any information on the *Signature* TV series? If so, email [william.butts@autographmagazine.com](mailto:william.butts@autographmagazine.com).

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