

Book Reviews: The problem with dealers....

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PETERSEN, Scott W. *Renaissance Hombre: Reflections on a Well-Rounded Life*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2020. Small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. ix, 236pp. Hardbound **\$26.99**, softbound **\$13.99**.

HELLENGA, Robert. *Love, Death & Rare Books*. Encino, CA: Delphinium Books, 2020. Small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. 321pp. **\$26.95**.

RAAB, Nathan. *The Hunt for History: On the Trail of the World's Lost Treasures – from the Letters of Lincoln, Churchill, and Einstein to the Secret Recordings Aboard JFK's Air Force One*. New York: Scribner, 2020. Small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. xv, 251pp. Color illustrations. **\$30.00**.

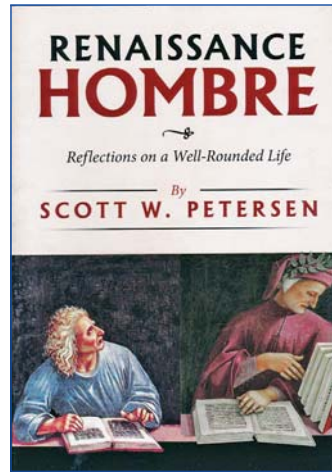
The problem with dealers is that a) you had a bad experience with one of the few bad apples in this specialized world, or b) you harbor a secret or not-so-secret desire to someday join their ranks.

Wannabe antiquarian book and historic document dealers are a demographic larger than you may imagine - the line between the two is fuzzy and the fortunate amongst us handle both equally. Having operated a brick-and-mortar in a high-traffic small town tourism hub for decades, and still doing the same but in an idyllic mail-order and by-appointment capacity, I can't tell you how often

visitors confide a deep-seated yearning to wear my shoes. Some are in earnest and are working out how to make the transition from their current career. One quit an enviable position as corporate pilot and runs a thriving brick-and-mortar ten years later; another left factory work to sell books from home. But the overwhelming majority never summon up the nerve and financing to follow through. Typically, this pipe-dreamer rhapsodizes about how much he or she loves to be surrounded by books and paper and would like nothing better than to sit and read all day. My stock reply: “I’d fire you on your first day,” followed by a reality-check talk that being a dealer at a serious level means physically hard and demanding work coupled with long hours and enormous learning curve – for starters. You’re far too busy to actually read a book for pleasure on the job. That said, most dealers can’t imagine not being surrounded by books and handling old books and paper all day every day, despite the realities.

The upshot of this is that books about the bookselling and (to a lesser extent) autograph dealing life remain favored reading for both dealers and those desiring to enter the profession. Three new titles that fall under this umbrella are worth your consideration. The first concerns autographs only tangentially from one of the best part-time dealers ever, the second is entirely fictional and only the third is a full-time dealer’s account.

Manuscript Society past president Scott Petersen recently retired from a distinguished law career with Holland & Knight in Chicago and before that served as a state’s attorney. He’s a knowledgeable long-time autograph collector, one of the country’s leading authorities on replevin, and as a part-time dealer issued lists



of documents for sale enjoyed by anyone lucky enough to receive them. *Manuscripts* readers will also remember occasional articles he penned for the journal on a wide variety of topics.

I knew I'd be using the word *abbondanza* to describe Scott's endless energy and enthusiasms before I even cracked the covers of *Renaissance Hombre: Reflections on a Well-Rounded Life*. The title itself is classic Petersen, the strange but whimsical pairing of two words you'd never expect side by side, *renaissance* and *hombre* – brilliant. And sure enough in the very first sentence of the introduction he remarks that “My wife, Donna, tells me I have an *abbondanza* of interests and ideas...” He had told this non-blog reader about his blog, but here in book form I learn that he began *Renaissance Hombre* to “honor those eclectic polymaths of bygone days” in 2011 and had posted twice weekly – that's more than 1,000 times, of which this book represents a “best of” selection.

He describes it as “an aggregation of information and observations... Favorite meals. Music and movies. Recommended reading. Quotations. Vacations. Jokes. Magic tricks. Trivia. Stories from my life and reflections on the human condition...” Instead of simply running these chronologically in order of appearance, Scott wisely groups them into seventeen chapters by subject matter – “Growing Up,” “What's Cooking,” “Funny Pages,” “Seeing the World,” “Historical Perspectives,” and so on.

Scott Petersen writes well – *really* well. His style is deceptively simple, straightforward, appealing, like most good writing, and he wears his broad and catholic learning lightly. He has a true knack for tale-telling and is a first-rate yarn-spinner adept at taking just about any topic and producing a memorable, often humorous 200 to 300 word snippet – most of them less than a page.

Autographs don't even make any appearance until “Flying Commercial” well into the book when Scott runs into Gerald Ford disembarking a commercial flight at O'Hare Airport and persuades #38 to sign his wife's plane ticket. Strangely, he meets Bill Murray on a flight to O'Hare in the very next essay.

The “Historical Perspectives” chapter is where you find most of the autograph topics. “The Rock Island Line,” for instance, tells of the 1977 auction of the defunct 130-year-old Chicago and Rock Island Railroad’s remaining possessions – which included:

Several hundred “tote” boxes full of archives of the railroad. All were filthy, and all were sealed. Any bid was on the contents. Sight unseen. The local news touted that perhaps the boxes contained a letter of Abraham Lincoln or Stephen Douglas, both of whom worked for the railroad.

I was drawn like a moth to flame – and I bought 45 boxes of “stuff” at \$3.50 a box. I crammed the boxes into the trunk and interior of our Plymouth Valiant. And drove home. Donna thought I was nuts. Until I opened the boxes.

There were hundreds of letters of U.S. congressmen, senators, vice presidents and members of the Supreme Court. There were Chicago mayors, and aldermen like “Bathhouse John” Coughlin and “Hinky Dink” Kenna. Original letters of Clarence Darrow. It was a trove of major value....

But there’s more:

Then I went on a three-year quest to acquire the rest of the defunct railroad’s archives.

After scores (hundreds?) of phone calls over three years, the squeaky wheel got the oil. A gusher. I was told the rest of the Rock Island Railroad archives were housed in a 10-story, 100,000-square-foot building at Polk and LaSalle streets. No one had been in the building for several years. “I’ll buy it,” I said. And did. I bought the entire contents of the building for \$500. They handed me

the keys, and it was mine. The only hitch – I had to get it out in four weeks.

It gets better - but you'll have to get the book to learn how it plays out.

There's the delightful memory of "The Cemetery of the Books":

Years ago, in another life (and over the course of several years), I traveled to Spain and Portugal with some frequency. I would normally come back with suitcases chock-full of handwritten manuscripts. Many dated to the 1400s. There were the garrison records for Gibraltar (all from the 1680s and 1690s), the thousand-page manuscript history of the church in Santiago de Compostelo (1540-1822, northwest Spain), the Jesuit activities in Goa (India) dating to the early 1500s and so on....

A personal favorite is "Hank," in which Scott tells of being ignored by his childhood baseball hero Hank Sauer, whose autograph he failed to get one day at Wrigley Field. "I screamed at him 'Hank! Hank! Mister Sauer!' He looked at me like I was a 9-year-old lunatic. And walked on..." Decades later, Scott's *Manuscripts* article about Sauer resulted in him writing to the elderly Sauer:

A few weeks later, I arrived at my office one morning, and there was a package on my desk. In the corner was a return-address sticker shaped like a baseball. Between the stitching, it said Hank Sauer. My eyes filled with tears, and I opened the package. Inside was a large album full of original pictures of Hank (a few signed), original baseball cards and... a priceless written sentiment: 'To Scott – my best Chicago fan.'

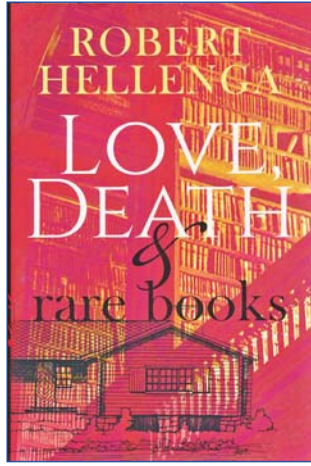
We also learn here of Scott's fascination with *The Man Without a Country* author Edward Everett Hale. "As a collector and dealer of historic autograph material... I acquired nearly 400 of Hale's original letters and signed first editions... Among the letters were perhaps a dozen small cards – each carefully handwritten – with Hale's favorite advice: *To look up and not down, / To look forward and not back, / To look out and not in, -- and / To lend a hand.* I couldn't agree more." This attitude nicely sums up Scott's approach to life.

Is *Renaissance Hombre* of direct relevance to the world of autographs? Absolutely not. Should it interest autograph folk? Absolutely. It's far from the usual subject matter for this column, to be sure, though *Renaissance Hombre* does have a small amount of autograph content. Of greater importance, though, *Renaissance Hombre* embodies the *spirit* of the wonderful avocation or vocation we all share. Scott's intense curiosity about the world around him, his engagement with matters major and minor, his clear love of learning – all traits you find in spades among the best autograph collectors and dealers.

Renaissance Hombre: Reflections on a Well-Rounded Life also captures the collecting mindset, the collector's mentality. For Scott, just about anything becomes a learning moment, a teaching moment. Whether he's keeping a sharp eye on the ground wherever he walks (and picking up coins, jewelry, you name it – not to mention hundreds of nails that've spared many a flat tire), searching antique shops in Vietnam or Wisconsin, scouring the New Mexican desert for Native American artifacts, reading the Quran before a trip to the Middle East, whipping up some experimental concoction in the kitchen, Scott's open mind and voracious curiosity represents to me what collecting is all about. Always learning, always expanding his interests – well-rounded, indeed! Would that this part-time dealer had ditched the law in favor of dealing autographs full time – the autograph dealing landscape would have been richer for it. *Renaissance Hombre* is a book easy to pick up and hard to put down.

America lost a fine novelist on July 18 when Robert Hellenga passed away at age 78 from cancer shortly after the release of his last novel, *Love, Death & Rare Books*.

In the interest of transparency, I was among a few booksellers Bob consulted regarding technical, nuts-and-bolts aspects of the bibliopolic world he was attempting to create. I recall lengthy lists of questions from Bob along the lines of: How large should a dealer's packing room be? What's the average turnover rate? How many rare books might a dealer have versus shelf stock? What's a typical inventory size? And so on. And I recall my even



lengthier replies in which I blathered on for page after page after page, trying to pull in the reins on his high-flying notions – which to my surprise he seemed to enjoy immensely. In the end I don't think my footnote-role as technical advisor of sorts compromises my ability to review this book objectively.

Antiquarian books and historical documents have long been the backdrop for the mystery subcategory known as bibliomysteries. It's a surprisingly sizeable genre that really took off and came into its own with John Dunning's bestseller *Booked to Die* in 1992, the first of five superb bibliomysteries featuring former detective Cliff Janeway and set in Denver (several of them reviewed in this column). But *Love, Death & Rare Books* is mainstream fiction, a far different and perhaps more challenging beast. More challenging because, while a bibliomystery tends to be plot driven and can get away with books, documents and bookshops serving as a superficial skeleton, a mainstream novel in which rare books

are front and center and even part of the title must recreate an entire believable universe – not only skeleton but blood, guts, connective tissue – if it’s to achieve the willing suspension of disbelief that’s the hallmark of first-rate fiction.

Robert Hellenga taught English literature at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois – best known as Carl Sandburg’s hometown – for a half century, meanwhile cranking out a few occupation-heavy literary novels as well as essays. In *Love, Death & Rare Books* he places fiction within the occupation of used and rare bookselling. I’ve yet to encounter a more thorough and engaging if flawed fictional bibliopolic narrative. Hellenga was a hardcore book guy, not just book reader, and even went to the length of attending the intensive week-long Colorado Antiquarian Book Seminar (CABS) to gain some of the “insider” knowledge you’d expect from a dealer – you’ve got to hand it to him for researching above and beyond.

The challenge in reviewing novels, I find, is discussing them in depth without lapsing into mere plot recitation and running the risk of giving away too much of the story. But here goes: In a nutshell, *Love, Death & Rare Books* explores third-generation bookseller Gabe Johnson’s search for happiness in life and in work in a profession into which he was born. His grandfather founded Chas. S. Johnson & Son, Ltd. Antiquarian Booksellers in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago in the early 1930s. He grows up amongst it and at home with his father and Grandpa Chaz, his Italian mother having left them when he was a child. In the ‘60s and ‘70s of Gabe’s youth, it’s a huge operation with enormous floors of used books, hefty rare book inventory and scads of employees. With the first impact of the Internet in the mid-1990s and the shop’s resistance to dive into it, the writing is on the wall. By 2009 grandpa’s gone, his father’s about to check out, the store loses its lease and the shop closes -- how’s that for a Country Western song? Gabe tries to reinvent himself in a lakeside home in Michigan but the lure of books remains strong. . . .

For me, the elephant in the room – er, in the book – is Hellenga’s depiction of the economics of antiquarian bookselling. It’s lofty, some would say pie-in-the-sky fantasy, although carefully worked out so that it has its own internal logic. In 1990, for instance, protagonist and narrator Gabe negotiates to buy a couple thousand better books from a nearby Catholic college gone bankrupt. “I offered \$40,000 for 2,000 books I thought I could sell for \$100 apiece, and \$72,000 for 600 books I thought I could sell for \$600 apiece. . . . A total of \$112,000 for 2,600 books” – plus a few highest-end rarities selling on consignment and 3,000 more auctioned odd. “In the end, I agreed to take everything: I offered him four hundred thousand for the lot – for about fifty-six hundred books I hoped to sell for two and a half million, though some of those books would sit on our shelves for three or four years. Or five. Or ten.” This fivefold markup sounds enviable – but is it believable? To the non-bookseller reader I suppose so, but I find it a stretch that even thirty years ago a bookseller could come up with that kind of money up front – that’s one huge nut. Or that, around this same time, this young dealer would buy from a colleague at a book show on a whim a significant early edition of Montaigne’s *Essays* for \$18,000 in order to admire it on his desk with no thought of selling it. Gabe is of course an introspective, scholarly fellow overly fond of quoting this favorite author. Just how uber-wealthy are we to think this firm is? (Note to self: Cut it out, Butts! It’s *fiction*, remember?)

On the other hand, here’s a beautiful passage in which Gabe sums up what every true bookseller feels when holding a fine antiquarian volume:

Descriptive bibliography may not seem like a lot of fun to most people, but it was exactly what I needed to do. I needed to pay close attention to something that was right in front of me. I needed to look at it in the way an artist looks at a leaf or a flower or a human face. A lot hinges on descriptions. This is where a book dealer shows his stuff.

The main thing, as Grandpa Chaz like to say – and if he had a philosophy of life, this was it – is to give the book a life, make it accessible, cherished, wanted. Who owned it? When was it bought and sold? Who did the restoration? Whose ex libris is glued to the upper pastedown? Why is this book important? And like any intimate physical experience, it can be healing. You touch the body of the book: the raised bands on the spine, the smooth leather stretched over the boards, the fore edge, the endpapers, the headbands, the hinges. You hold it to your nose and smell it, you sleep with the book, so to speak. You pay close attention to every physical detail: to rubbed edges; to worm holes...; to hinges that have be reinforced; to foxing (fox-colored spots caused by sunlight); to the sewing; to the quality of the leather – Grandpa Chaz claimed that he could feel the difference between goat skin and calf, though scientists say you can't really tell without DNA testing; you pay attention to the quality of the original binding or subsequent rebinding; to marginalia; to issue points...; to indications of provenance, like a coat of arms stamped in the compartments on the spine or library marks; to a printer's device stamped on the boards, to woodcuts, maps, illustrations (making sure all are accounted for); to owner's marks and inscriptions; to small tears; to ink holes and water stains; to the end bands, to library stamps...

It chills me how true this rings, as any bookseller will attest.

So too will any bookseller relate to the ups and downs one experiences if you're in this business long enough. After one book fair Gabe remarks, "I put my oars in the water and rowed hard, buying aggressively at estate sales and auctions, horse trading at book fairs, cultivating our contacts and the collectors who relied on us. I continued to row hard for several years, and our rare book department prospered in spite of the dot-com bubble. ..." But

our two hundred thousand secondhand books on floors one, three, and four had become the proverbial drug on the market. The cavernous old inner-city bookshop as rapidly becoming a thing of the past, as were the old barns full of books... that used to dot the countryside. These old shops, which had once been cultural centers where many collectors got their start, had been undermined by Google. Readers could find what they were looking for on the Internet without rummaging through an old bookshop. Cheaper too. I didn't blame them.

Though many dream of what they perceive as the idyllic lifestyle of a bookseller. It seems that after abandoning Chicago for shoreline Michigan Gabe was born into the bookselling but may not have been cut out for it. He describes his ideal day to his early love Olivia, who'd left him to attend Yale, had a child by a professor who she later married, then returned to Chicago to manage a Border's Books:

"Up at first light," I said, "for a swim; then breakfast; then at my desk with Montaigne till time for lunch; then an hour to read Homer; an hour to do some sketching; an hour to practice the guitar. I could get a chainsaw, look after the trees. We could sit out on the balcony, watch the sun set in the evening."

Quite an about-face, which goes to show that we all want what we don't have. But still, ensconced alone in small town Michigan in a spacious old home crammed with some 20,000 books (the cream of his old shop plus his grandfather's seriously-valuable Americana collection), that familiar old tug creeps back: "I could almost hear my books in the living room, boarded up in their Jefferson bookcases, crying out for me, like someone stuck in an elevator, or a coffin: 'Let us out of here. We're suffocating. Let us out. Let us OUT!'"

For all its character development and narrative strength, the bookselling framework of *Love, Death & Rare Books* does become cumbersome. To his credit, Hellenga has done his homework and works hard to bring it to life. If you're "in the trade," though, you can't help but find the economics of it all fantastical and high-falutin. Gabe loses his lease and is forced to move out and pack up his vast inventory, yet soon after "estimates – over two and a half to three and a half million for eighteen books and two maps" for a small portion of his grandfather's collection? And at the Michigan home, among many six-digit rarities, sits "All twenty volumes of Edward S. Curtis's *The North American Indians*... stacked on one end of the table" signed by Curtis and Theodore Roosevelt, sets of which sold at auction in 2012 for 1.2 million and 2.5 million? Yet despite having the obvious wherewithal, the thought of renting another storefront or buying a building in Chicago never comes up.

On the nitpicky-but-worth-noting side, *Love, Death & Rare Books* does have what I'll call "technical issues." Now, as a rule quirky punctuation doesn't warrant mention in a review – but I can't tell you how often an opening or closing quotation mark is missing from this text, which really throws you off when reading dialogue. It's a strange flaw that should have been corrected in the editing process. A few other glitches occur here and there, including between pages 123 and 124 an actual skip in the text (a paragraph? pages? entire scene?), but I suspect Hellenga was ailing as the book approached completion so the fact that he saw it through to publication is a testament to his courage and commitment.

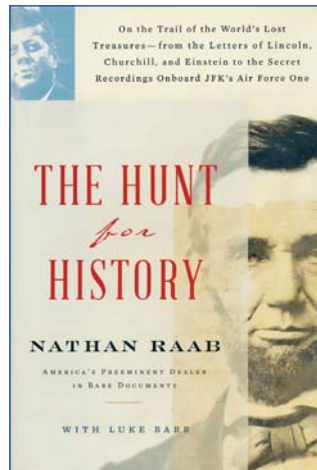
Love, Death & Rare Books illuminates the seductive, all-engrossing addiction of the bookselling life well – more so if you're not a current bookseller. It's not just a pleasant backdrop against which Gabe Johnson wrestles with the eternal quest – how to find meaning, love, and happiness in this world – but almost a character by itself, a foil which Gabe confronts like a beloved but cantankerous elderly relative. Robert Hellenga's swan song, despite this reviewer's reservations, sucks the reader into the bookseller's

world and you'll finish it affectionate towards Gabe and hopeful for his future.

Love, Death & Rare Books reminds me of the motto of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (to which every member of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America belongs): *Amor librorum nos unit*. The love of books unites us. And I'll fondly remember Bob Hellenga, fine writer and honorary bookman, with one other Latin phrase: *Ave frater atque vale*. Hail brother and farewell.

It's been a score of years since I reviewed a book by a Raab. In Spring 1999 I reviewed in this column Steven Raab's *The Educated Collector's Guide to Buying Autographs and Television Star Autographs of the Golden Era 1948-1973* (both co-authored with Neale Lanigan) and *Movie Star Autographs of the Golden Era 1930-1960* (with Susan Raab), in Spring 2000 I reviewed his and Lanigan's "*And the Winner Is...*": *Academy Award Autographs, 1927-1998* and in Spring 2001 I reviewed Steven and Susan's *Military Autographs of the World*. A nice run of modest, still-useful reference works, by the way.

Steven's son Nathan joined Steven S. Raab Autographs in 2005 and helped rebrand it as The Raab Collection to reflect a focus on only the highest-end material for the carriage trade. Just as Philadelphia attorney Steven and wife Susan decided "By the mid-1990s... to go all in on the autograph business," Nathan decided after a few years that a career in public



relations wasn't for him. His parents "would do this full-time," he writes. "The main barriers to entering the field – capital for inventory and marketing – were significant but not the barriers they are today." (Nathan and I will have to agree to disagree about this. My wife and I founded our business in 1991 on a shoestring, as do many book/autograph dealers, and newer dealers still do make their way without deep pockets. The name of the game is the hunt for "sleepers" and slowly but surely ratcheting up one's inventory, with lower-end inventory proving its worth. Nothing wrong with serving the vast majority of collectors who purchase at modest levels along with the one percent who collect at the highest levels.)

For me the most revealing aspect of *The Hunt for History* are the images of Raab's childhood and of his father that emerge. Steven's passion for history shines in the son's recollections of bonding over baseball games and baseball-card shows, umpteen trips to Gettysburg and distant historic sites. Raab remembers that his father "didn't just want us to be present. He wanted us to get into it, to feel it. He was passionate, and he wanted to pass that passion along." Steven is a dominant presence throughout *The Hunt for History*, at times seeming an uncredited co-author. Most diehard autograph dealers have tales about how they got bit by the collecting bug, and Raab's warm memories of early exposure through his father are a charming and heartfelt opener.

The Hunt for History is peppered with memorable anecdotes about great finds, the quest for superb content in letters and documents that lay unrecognized in attics, antique shops, even other autograph dealers' catalogues. Early on, there's the Theodore Roosevelt letter in which he mentions "Speak softly and carry a big stick" apparently for the first time, nervously bought from a well-known Pennsylvania dealer for a hefty \$4,500 but ultimately sold (albeit many years later) for \$200,000. Heady stuff that pointed the fledgling business in another direction. "My father's catalogs," he recalls, "once containing hundreds of items priced between \$20 and \$5,000, now began to showcase fewer pieces at much higher prices."

“Best finds” stories lace every chapter of *The Hunt for History* and – let’s face it – for many readers that’s what it’s all about. A few examples at random – tip of the iceberg: The famed Maggs Bros. of London catalogue with a Napoleon letter for L5,000 that completely disregarded its content about invading Spain was one of Raab’s early finds, netting \$25,000 due to that superlative content. “Maggs is experienced,” he remarks, “but smart people make mistakes.” Or the woman who arrives at Raab’s home with a “leather briefcase... full of old papers.” A Benjamin Franklin letter, valuable but unremarkable in content, reveals a still-present address panel bearing his legendary “B Free Franklin” free-franked signature. “This was one of only a handful of such signatures to reach the market in decades and the only one still with the letter it sent. We sold it for \$50,000...” There are great finds made at heavily-trafficked antiquarian book shows (\$15,000 Charles Darwin letter), a New York City antique shop (\$5,000 Theodore Roosevelt speech page with bullet hole), a farm in New Hampshire (\$40,000+ for two fine content Abraham Lincoln letters), a high-end Christie’s auction (\$68,750 for box lot of significant Napoleon and European royalty documents) – all of which they in turn sold for far greater sums. There are chapters on forgeries avoided, documents of questionable ownership passed up and numerous significant treasures unearthed that proved worthy of chapters unto themselves.

I differ with Raab’s thoughts about the learning curve that faces novice dealers or collectors. At one point he maintains, “The hardest part of my apprenticeship wasn’t learning how to authenticate documents and artifacts. That can be done in *a few years*. It was learning how to assess value, learning how to spot gems in a sea of mediocrity, taking that ‘blink’ moment and translating it into action, and putting money on the line as a result. That takes a long time, *a decade or so*” (italics mine). Hmmmm... a cocksure and offhand statement, and the math from a dealer 15 years in the business I think questionable. Those longest in this business steer clear of such bald assertions. Truth is there’s the

steep initial learning curve during which one learns the basics and gets comfy – years and years -- followed by the *lifelong* learning curve in which one adds to, refines, and hones those skills.

There's also occasional odd, blunt thinking on Raab's part. In writing of the development of autograph collecting in this country, he notes: "The early collectors, motivated by a growing realization of the importance of the American story and the collecting spirit of the Victorian era, put together collections that would today be nearly impossible to find. The material cost little, \$5 or less for a letter by George Washington, for example." I've noted a few times in this column autograph prices of yore bringing tears to my eyes – but you've got to temper it with reality. Give your reader *context*. In the 19th century the market for letters and documents was miniscule, with very few collectors and collecting institutions. Demand is what drives up prices – plus during much of the 19th century \$5 would easily buy a week's groceries and that the average worker's *yearly* salary ranged from a couple hundred dollars at the start of the century to several hundred near the end. Five bucks? Many would have to work hard and often for days to earn that. Give that sawbuck context and you start to think about it differently, more realistically.

Elsewhere, Raab writes: "Our entire inventory is stocked with material that we have bought ourselves, paying cash up front, on the assumption that we will eventually sell it at a profit. I'm not aware of any competitive autograph dealers operating like this anymore." Poppycock and balderdash! Frankly, I don't know any dealers who do *not* operate like this. Sure, there are some who take consignment or buy collections jointly with other dealers, but the majority at every level are proud of owning their inventory outright: They buy, they sell.

And finally, I hope it's not a hint of attitude when Raab tells of a box of letters sent him in which he finds "some random signatures cut off letters – a standard discovery when dealing with things collected during the Victorian era. More or less junk."

I find this a disconcerting editorial about legitimate but lower-end autograph material that was and is still standard fare for many an autograph collector and many a dealer – simple signatures and such -- Steven S. Raab Autographs handled puh-lenty of them. We all love outstanding content historical documents and enjoy reading about them, though they're beyond the reach of most collectors. As I wrote, "I hope it's not a hint of attitude..."

If you like the thrill of the chase, Nathan Raab's *The Hunt for History* provides it in spades. Despite some issues and what I intend as gentle chiding and constructive criticism, it's certainly interesting and often entertaining. Part of me wishes he were to write it twenty years from now. The writing style is breezy and conversational, sometimes lapsing into didactic, with a few stiff interjected quotes from Emerson and other thinkers to lend *gravitas*. At circa 40 years of age Raab is one of the new kids on the block in a profession where few claim a "4" as the first digit of their age and fewer a "3." Raab has been with the firm founded by his parents for fifteen years, which may seem long for an air traffic controller to hang in there, but in a field in which careers are long and handling documents many hundreds of years old routine, this barely registers as a blink of the eye. Readers will enjoy *The Hunt for History* and I look forward to future writings from a more seasoned Nathan Raab.