



F. Opper  
April 21, 1911

AUTOGRAPH of "Happy Hooligan's" creator

The

AUTOGRAPH

AUTOGRAPH collectors are a varied and remarkable group of people. They range from the teen-ager whose interest in the autograph of an idol will induce him to stand in the rain for hours, climb through windows, and harass celebrities with letters, to the learned collector who attends sales, scans catalogues, and studies his special field to build his collection. Through private collectors who have made the Minnesota Historical Society the final repository for their treasures and through the discovery of notable signatures on letters primarily prized for their content, this institution now has in its collection some three thousand autographs considered important enough for special attention.

The society has never been a purposeful collector of autographs as such. Its paramount interest is the collecting of historical manuscripts dealing with Minnesota and Minnesotans in the broadest sense. Yet, in almost every large group of personal papers there are letters that have a special interest and a special use because of the signatures. Presidents, senators, diplomats, artists, actors and actresses, writers, lecturers, scientists, musicians, and historians — well-known peo-

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MISS KANE, who is curator of manuscripts for the Minnesota Historical Society, contributed a fuller account of its autograph collection to the fall, 1952, issue of the *Autograph Collectors' Journal*.

ple from many parts of the world — have written to Minnesotans or have drawn the interest of Minnesota collectors.

About fifteen hundred of the autographs owned by the society are in a monumental collection assembled over a period of many years by William H. Amerland of Wabasha, who presented it to the society in 1944. Among the more than three million items in the society's manuscript collection, the Amerland albums are the only example of signatures assembled systematically simply for their interest as autographs. Comprising eighteen leather-bound volumes, the collection includes the signatures of the great and near-great in many walks of life. Some accompanied their signatures by sketches, bits of poetry, snatches of music, or pertinent remarks, which in some instances were expanded to letter length. For example, F. M. Bell, an artist who had painted a portrait of Queen Victoria, recalled his first meeting with his subject. Gelett Burgess pictured one of his comical "Goops"; Giacomo Puccini, Victor Herbert, and John Philip Sousa quoted bars from their own music; and Alfred Lord Tennyson provided an autographed copy of some of his own poetry. The collection as a whole reflects a wide range of literary, professional, musical, political, and artistic activity, not only in the United States but throughout the world.

Among other manuscripts of autograph in-



LUCILE M. KANE

Gelett Burgess

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# COLLECTION

terest owned by the society are some Lincoln items given to Edward Duffield Neill, a Minnesotan who was Lincoln's secretary at the time he was assassinated, and now included in the society's collection of Neill Papers. Best known of these documents is the order issued by Lincoln on December 6, 1862, directing General Henry Hastings Sibley to execute thirty-nine Sioux and half-breeds who participated in the Sioux Outbreak of 1862.<sup>1</sup>

The papers of many Minnesotans other than Neill contain letters of interest and value for their autographs. There is evidence in the papers of Henry H. Sibley that he himself was a collector of autographs. In 1851 he wrote to Henry Clay to ask for his signature, but had he searched among his own papers, he would have found a letter received from Clay in 1840. Sibley's wide correspondence makes his papers an important source for autographs.

The world-wide acquaintance and resulting correspondence of Minnesotans in other walks of life give their papers a like distinction. Dr. William W. Folwell, first president of the University of Minnesota, for example, received letters from Matthew Arnold dealing with the philosophy of education. The papers of William S. King, Congressman and

True to friend and foe  
W. J. Cody  
"Buffalo Bill"  
Mar. 15<sup>th</sup> 1911

Giacomo Puccini  
New York 1911

Not the mere ornament, nor the  
idle vaporing, meaningless phrase,  
but genuinely and substantially  
for the right: for justice,  
for humanity

Sincerely yours,

Samuel Gompers  
Washington D.C.  
March 9, 1911.

海軍大将 徳島 幸四郎

AUTOGRAPHS from the Amerland collection:  
Gelett Burgess, "Buffalo Bill," Giacomo Puccini, Samuel Gompers, and Admiral Togo

<sup>1</sup>This document is described in detail in the summer, 1952, issue of this magazine (33:77-79).

newspaper publisher, contain comments from Horace Greeley about the defeat of a railroad bill in Minnesota. Some twentieth-century collections, like that of Frank B. Kellogg, contain so many items of autograph interest that it is impossible to record all of them in the autograph calendar.

Although there is more than one Benjamin Franklin signature in the society's collection, the most notable is on a passport issued on March 26, 1783, at Passy, France, to "Mss<sup>rs</sup>. Johnson, Conant, & J. Welch." The passport, partly printed and partly in manuscript, was found by Dr. E. E. Braun of Fort Ripley, Minnesota, in an attic of a Charlestown, Massachusetts, house and was given to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1868.

During Franklin's nine-year stay in France, he was given, rent free, by the French government, a handsome residence, the Hôtel de Valentinois, located in the village of Passy near Versailles. Some authorities believe that Franklin set up in this residence merely for his own amusement the press on which he printed the passports.<sup>2</sup> Many items other than passports printed on the Passy press have been discovered in the past century, and they reflect the versatility of Franklin's interests.

The Passy passport in the society's collection measures twelve by sixteen inches. It is printed in a large ornamental script "probably designed by Franklin himself, for use in printing important documents, which it might have been to the advantage of some one to counterfeit." This type is believed to have been cut for Franklin in 1781 by S. P. Fournier, the younger, a member of a famous French family long known as type founders.<sup>3</sup> In the lower left-hand corner of the passport is the Franklin coat of arms, and printed below it is the word "gratis," indicating that the passport was issued free of charge. More than thirty of these passports are known in the United States; they are highly prized by autograph and Americana collectors.

Although accumulating autographs has been incidental to the society's main collecting program, those received have been han-

dled in a special way. When a manuscript with an interesting signature is discovered, a special descriptive card is prepared and filed under the writer's name in an autograph calendar. By using it, one can quickly locate signatures in the Amerland volumes or in any of the society's many personal collections.

The autograph calendar is far from a complete index of notable autographs in the society's possession. Members of the staff often discover in its large collections documents that should be added to the list. Since there has never been a firm definition of the kind of autograph that should be included in the calendar, one may well find there names of purely local fame, as well as those of international importance.

The autograph collection is used in two major ways. People are constantly coming to the society with documents which they wish to have authenticated. Land grants signed by Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and other presidents are especially common. That they were signed by clerks often becomes evident when the signatures are compared with authentic originals. Although no final judgment can be given on authenticity by a superficial comparison of signatures, it helps to see other documents signed by the same individual. The society's autograph collection is used, too, in arranging displays. When signatures of presidents, governors, and senators are needed for an exhibit, it is a simple matter to locate an autograph through the calendar.

The manuscripts in the autograph collection have given pleasure to a greater number of people than any others owned by the society. There is a natural appeal in the handwriting of distinguished historical figures who are largely known to people only through their "history books." When a child points to a manuscript, and says with wonder, "Look, this was written by Lincoln," in some measure history becomes alive for him.

<sup>2</sup>Luther S. Livingston, *Franklin and His Press at Passy*, 6-9 (New York, 1914).

<sup>3</sup>Livingston, *Franklin and His Press*, 109, 111.



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