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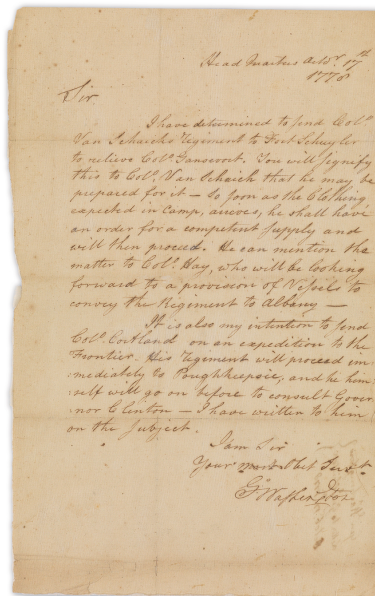Communications Director
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Wartime Washington Letter Leads Swann Autographs Auction

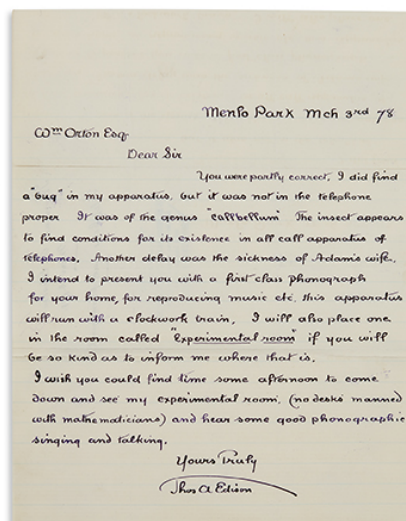### Early Use of "Bug" by Edison Makes Rare Appearance

New York—Swann Galleries will offer an auction of **Autographs** on **Thursday, March 22**, featuring vestiges of history spanning the thirteenth to twentieth centuries. Revolutionary Americana makes up a significant portion of the auction's pre-sale estimate, as do letters by scientists and some of humanity's greatest luminaries.

Leading the sale is a 1778 letter signed by **George Washington**, as Commander-in-Chief, to General James Clinton. From his headquarters in Fredericksburg, Virginia, he discusses preparations for the Sullivan Expedition against Loyalists and enemy Iroquois in western New York and Pennsylvania. The letter carries an estimate of $25,000 to $35,000.

Revolutionary Americana continues with a letter signed by Thomas Jefferson as Governor to Major-General Nathanael Greene, reporting on February 17, 1781 that he has ordered more than 1,000 riflemen to join him against the British General Cornwallis ($15,000 to $25,000), and a 1772 letter by the treacherous Benedict Arnold, at $3,000 to $4,000.

MORE

The earliest item in the sale is a manuscript charter on vellum by William, the Bishop of Coventry, granting a church to an abbey in Cheshire in 1222, replete with the pendant Episcopal wax seal of William Cornhill, carrying an estimate of $3,500 to $5,000. Another early highlight is a 1470 document signed by Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy to Johann IV of Nassau, at the height of his powers and concerning his ongoing military campaigns across Europe, valued at $3,000 to $4,000. Additional European historical autographs include a letter that mentions the burning of Whitehall in 1689, fifteenth-century vellum legal decrees and various royal missives.

An 1878 letter by **Thomas Edison** contains an early use of the word "bug" to describe a technical issue, a term he coined: "I did find a 'bug' in my apparatus, but it was not in the telephone proper. It was of the genus 'callbellum.'" The letter, addressed to Western Union President William Orton, explains that there would be a delay in the delivery of his phonograph ($10,000 to $20,000). Additional laboratory notes and correspondence paint a vivid picture of the inventor's life.

The Edison correspondence complements a characteristically deep selection of autographs by important scientists, among them an extremely scarce autograph letter signed by Wernher von Braun, who played a key role in the space program, about a conversation he had with President John F. Kennedy "on his promise to the American people to land a man on the moon before the year 1970" ($5,000 to $7,500). Signed photographs and drawings of Albert Einstein join letters by the genius on a variety of subjects, and an autograph quotation signed by Oppenheimer to photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt (who took his portrait in Princeton, NJ) rounds out the selection ($1,500 to $2,500).

Correspondence relating to Charles Dickens is led by a letter by the author to Lord Robert Grosvenor, explaining the inspiration for Wackford Squeers and Dotheboys Hall of *Nicholas Nickleby*, and announcing that *Oliver Twist* will soon be published ($3,500 to $5,000).

Autographs by cultural luminaries include Letters by Jacob Lawrence and Hale Woodruff to a Miss Esther Krasny, describing their processes and, in the case of the Woodruff letter, with illustrative sketches ($400 to $600 and $800 to $1,200, respectively). Also available is a print by Léon Bakst of Vaslav Nijinsky as the lead in *The Afternoon of the Faun*, signed by the dancer in 1916, with an estimate of $3,000 to $4,000. A full-length signed photograph of Josephine Baker inscribed to Eubie Blake, the writer of *Shuffle Along*, the show that launched Baker's career, carries an estimate of $1,500 to $2,500. A draft of Walt Whitman's last work, *A Thought of Columbus*, with his signature and holograph corrections, dates to 1892, and illuminates the poet's pre-publication process ($20,000 to $30,000).

Curious revelations into the personal lives of some of history's greatest players include two letters by Louis Armstrong to his lip salve purveyor, 1965 and 1970, signed "Satchmo" and estimated together at $1,500 to $2,500.

The complete catalogue with bidding information is available at www.swanngalleries.com.

Additional highlights can be found here.

Captions:
Lot 5: George Washington, Letter Signed, as Commander in Chief, planning the Sullivan Expedition, "Head Quarters," Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1778. Estimate $25,000 to $35,000.
Lot 41: Thomas A. Edison, Autograph Letter Signed to Western Union President William Orton, Menlo Park, 1878. Estimate $10,000 to $20,000.

Auction date: Thursday, March 22, at 1:30 pm
Exhibition dates: March 19, 10-6; March 20 to 21, 10-6; March 22, 10-12

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