

Cosey Forgeries

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Forgeries

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Lincoln Forgeries

Joseph Cosey

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
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COSEY AGAIN?

Repeatedly this office has cautioned readers of THE COLLECTOR to be on their guard against forgeries. However, despite these warnings and numerous articles in nationally circulated newspapers and magazines, nothing seems to prevent individuals, whether collectors of autographs or not, from being trapped into buying fakes when the opportunity arises. The lure of a "possible" Lincoln, a "probable" Franklin, or a "very authentic looking" Washington gets the better of them. In my book, "Autographs: a Key to Collecting" (R. R. Bowker Co., 1946), considerable space is devoted to the subject of forgeries and to the careers of the best-known forgers, such as Chatterton, Denis-Lucas, "Antique" Smith, Alberti, Gerstenbergk, Spring, Byron, and, in recent years, Cosey and Weisberg. I particularly drew attention to the handiwork of Joseph Cosey, whose record should be known to all, and whose career bears watching. Cosey was at his zenith in the last decade, and at this time the market was flooded with his spurious examples of Lincoln, Franklin, Mary Baker Eddy—the latter, to the best of my knowledge, never having been attempted by anyone but Cosey. Indeed, these became so common that even the dealers in remote sections of the country caught on to the fraud and were on the alert. But his productions became progressively less authentic looking, and gradually disappeared from the market.

The reason for the present article is to

advertise as widely as possible to all and sundry a new influx of forgeries. The recent specimens which have been sent or brought in to me bear a striking resemblance to known examples of Cosey's versatile work, examples which he admitted to be his some years ago. As it is a distinct possibility that he may be up to his old tricks again, I think it wise to pass on the information given about him in "Autographs: a Key to Collecting."

"[Joseph] Cosey, the name by which he is generally referred to, according to an article in the New York Sun, November 13, 1941, has a career checkered with jail terms and convictions — nine in all, for grand larceny, carrying concealed weapons, forging checks, and various other crimes. He is known, like 'Antique' Smith, for his great skill, and, in addition, for the inordinate pride he took in his forgeries. He began, as he admitted to Mr. G. William Bergquist, then Special Investigator of the New York Public Library, whose tact and patience were largely responsible for the full exposure of both Cosey and Weisberg, with stealing from the Congressional Library a pay warrant signed by Benjamin Franklin. This he offered to a book dealer, who scornfully refused it as unauthentic. Cosey, he himself explained, was angered to the point of taking up diligent practice in handwriting imitations and succeeded so well that, to quote Mr. Bergquist's lecture before the Bibliographical Society in January, 1943, 'A year later, he had the satisfaction of selling a forged Lincoln to the same store.'

"Soon he began a series of experiments in the making of ink, at first using Waterman's brown correspondence ink, and later one that was more accurate. He obtained paper from various sources and was lucky in unearthing a supply bearing Moinier's 1851 water-mark and of a blue color identical with the paper on which many of Lincoln's authentic legal documents were written. He claimed he had acquired this paper in an old ledger which he had bought in Peoria. Cosey's vanity led him to boast untruthfully that he himself had manufactured another supply of long white paper which bore the water-mark, 'T. Ed-

monds, 1824,' but this stock Mr. Bergquist eventually traced to its right source.

"Cosey, who had good reason to be proud of his Lincoln forgeries on the Moinier paper, had mastered Lincoln's writing in an astonishing manner. Once his supply of this paper gave out, and he could not obtain proper substitutes, his subsequent forgeries were more easily detectable. For the most part, he did not attempt Lincoln A.L.S.s but rather devoted himself to the production of lengthy legal manuscripts and pleadings of the Civil War President. With these he was singularly generous for a forger. Many of them covered three or four folio pages. Regardless of whether he wrote a one- or four-page item, he sold each at a fairly uniform price. Originally, it is said, this ran as high as \$20 to \$50, but he later disposed of them at \$2 each.

"The Lincoln forgeries were only a small fraction of Cosey's output. Items of Francis Bacon, John Marshall, Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Lynch, Jr., Button Gwinnett, Aaron Burr, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Mary Baker Eddy and others were believed to have been put on the market by him at various times. And, sadly enough, a goodly number of them still appear at sales. His best work was with his Franklins, Poes and Lincolns, and, of the latter, the most irritatingly acceptable of his forgeries are Lincoln endorsements, which he wrote on authentic Civil War records. These he docketed with three or four lines signed in the President's hand. So perfectly were they executed that only experts, by sharp examination of the ink, which alone provided the clue, could detect them.

"In his work Cosey resorted to many stratagems. For example, knowing that a certain famous man used a particular color of stationery, he dyed his own paper with Tintex to the required shade. This device was, however, among his less successful. Even more clever was his custom of composing a letter on old paper and then writing a modern letter to authenticate the forgery. Again, a great number of his forgeries carry endorsements in blue or red pencil or in ink different in color from that used in the body of the document. Such endorsements, written obliquely across some portion of the paper, appear quite frequently on authentic manuscripts, and Cosey was quick to catch on and use this subtle imitation.

"Nor was he averse to piling up his effects through association, as is illustrated by the

following item, dated Mount Vernon, June 12, 1779, which, were it genuine, would command a substantial price. Owned by the New York Public Library, it begins:

To the

Hon. P. Henry,
House of Burgesses

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting this map of ancient symbols. I am sure that John Marshall will find in it just what he seeks for his new book.

Cordially yours,

Richard Henry Lee

This was purportedly in the handwriting of Lee, the Virginia Signer, with his signature, and, below it, dated on the same day, appears 'Endorsed by me Th. Jefferson,' presumably written by that patriot. Then follows:

My dear Mr. Henry:

There remains nothing for me to do but add my approval, since Mr. Lee and yourself have endorsed the drawings therein.

As ever,

G. Washington

Next comes, dated June 16, 1779, from Washington City:

Hon. John Marshall,
Richmond in Virginia

Sir:

Here is a map which was kindly given to me by Doctor Priestly. If you will examine figures 1 to 9 and all of them with the exception of 11, 12 & 13 you will see the various periods represented of which we are speaking. I showed this to the Continental General, and he expressed a desire to use it when you have finished it.

Mr. Adams of Boston has promised to send me some maps showing old money and coins used in the period of which you are writing. These are very fine steel engravings, and I hope they will be of some aid to you in your book.

Yours very sincerely,

P. Henry

"Cool craft also characterized Cosey's methods of marketing. For instance, he never stated that he was offering a Lincoln, or a Poe or a Franklin. He simply presented a paper with the remark that he had found it in an attic or cellar and knew nothing of its value, adding, 'Do you think it is anything of interest?' His carefully chosen victim, seeing an excellently executed forgery and per-

haps thinking he knew sufficient of the signer's writing to judge properly, not unnaturally jumped to the conclusion intended. If he considered the letter authentic under the circumstances, Cosey unselfishly shunted the responsibility over to him."

In the chapter on detection of forgeries, I commented and repeat here: "Always there are certain danger signals which the collector, who habitually adopts a mild attitude of suspicion, can often see clearly. He should be initially skeptical of the authenticity of any letter excellent in contents or of any A.L.S. of an eminent historical personage if it is offered at a nominal price. Such an autograph may have been stolen or, more likely, is not genuine. The forger caters to the collector's supposed covetousness for a fine item, backed by a natural desire to obtain a bargain. The gambler's instinct — and greed traps more victims than ignorance—prompts the conclusion that five, ten or twenty-five dollars can be sacrificed on the chance that a rare item may prove genuine. Not the gambler, but the forger, who has once more played his old game, is the one who usually wins out."

The "mild attitude of suspicion," although exercised by the dealers, should apparently have been a more moving force. They, more than private collectors, have in recent weeks fallen prey to the person marketing these forgeries. "Fallen prey" may be too strong a term, since generally only \$2.50 to \$3 has been offered by the dealers, on the understanding that if the items are proved genuine they will gladly pay the difference in value. But this token offering is just what the seller wants. Inconceivable as it appears, he seems fully satisfied with these paltry sums.

For the present, the source of supply has been mainly upstate New York, in Albany and Schenectady, and in New Haven, Connecticut, and Springfield, Massachusetts. Whether the forgeries, which are extremely poor ones as to both paper and ink, are old ones, made five to ten years ago, or a fresh supply, there is no way of knowing. Certainly they are of the same general type as the old ones. The Lincolns are usually of a legal nature, and purport to be in the handwriting of and signed by Lincoln; the Franklins are generally the D.S. type, pay warrants or what are commonly referred to in the trade as the "In Council" documents, these two words generally appearing at the top of the quarto page. Franklin actually did sign many authentic "In Council" docu-

ments, and these are frequently countersigned by John Nicholson, at right angles to the main text, which appears in both written and printed form. This countersignature the forger has noted and also imitated. Other Franklin forgeries (which seem at this time to be the most numerous) are countersigned by Richard Henry Lee or other important or unimportant persons. The Mary Baker Eddy item recently offered is a quotation signed on an octavo sheet, written on both sides, from her "Science and Health."

At the time that Cosey was offering his variety of forgeries some years ago, a description of him was spread abroad, and when dealers saw a "gaunt, bushy-haired Irishman," as John Kobler pictured him in the Saturday Evening Post article of March 13, 1943, entitled "Trailing the Book Crooks," they were extremely cautious about buying from him. More recently he has been described as being a man of slight build, weighing perhaps one hundred and thirty-five pounds, about five feet five or six in height, and appearing to be about fifty years of age. Actually he is older than this. His hair is turning gray, his eyes are blue, and he appears almost emaciated, so thin and drawn is his face. Since he is not in jail at this time, it is not inappropriate to give the above description of him as ready reference. There is always the possibility that he might like to try his hand once again in an art at which he was certainly a past master.

With regard to the latest peddler of forgeries, I give below descriptions of this man, sent me by three dealers who had transactions with him. The first wrote: "We bought them from a short wizzled-up man who claimed he was a driver for the City Mission, which is the local equivalent of the Salvation Army." The second dealer, whose Franklin document was accompanied by a pencilled memorandum signed "Francis S. Miles," stated: "The man . . . was a very small light complexion man. The receipt he signed is filed under his name and I cannot remember the name. The enclosed memorandum was with the Franklin document. It may not be difficult to trace Francis S. Miles. For the amount we paid for this document, it would not pay anyone to do the forging."

The third dealer gave the most detailed description of all: "The man who presented the spurious Lincoln document was a poorly dressed individual who represented himself as being an employee of the Salvation Army. He looked and acted the part. He had a re-

cepted bill with him showing that this document had been sold by McDonough Book Store of Albany (long out of business) for \$75. We have since been unable to find this receipt. He made promises of bringing down a lot of valuable books and other things which he had accumulated but we never saw him again which aroused my suspicion. When making the deal to purchase this item, his actions and manner were what would be used by a man of little intelligence. He did not know what price he wanted — anything I cared to give. I told him that I would give him \$3 and if he would come back within about a week, I would then pay him the difference, so that I would have time to investigate the item. This he agreed to do but never showed back. It is very evident that the forgery business must have arrived at a very low state when they would make up this item for \$3. If in the meanwhile we find the receipted bill I described herein, I shall send it to you. The man appeared to be about five feet four or five inches and rather a light-weight, as my memory recalls, about fifty years old.” —M. A. B.—

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Joseph Cosey

ONE day in 1929, a slender little man of forty-two, with a wen on his right cheek and a lock of brown hair drooping over the right side of his forehead, walked into the Library of Congress, in Washington, diffidently asked the guard at the information desk the way to the Manuscripts Division, and was directed to the spacious northwest pavilion on the second floor. Upon entering it, he lingered for a moment, gazing admiringly at its lofty ceiling, embellished with a flight of seraphs and cherubs, and at the four murals adorning its buff walls, each depicting a nymph symbolic of one of the seasons. Then, after glancing about at his more immediate surroundings, he walked toward the center of the room, where, beneath a ring of lights, stood a massive circular table divided by clear-glass partitions into a number of semi-private segments, at some of which scholarly-looking visitors sat reading. In addition to the head of the Manuscripts Division, his assistant, and a cataloguer, there were five attendants on duty, and when one of these asked the newcomer, whose legal name was Martin Coneely, to sign the visitors' register, he readily obliged by writing "Joseph Cosey," which was his favorite of six aliases, although it was the only one he had not employed while committing a series of commonplace felonies that extended back to the early years of the century. At the moment, as it happened, Cosey—to use the name under which he was soon to achieve a national

PROFILES

YRS. TRULY, A. LINCOLN

reputation in bibliographic circles—had no criminal intentions but was merely seeking to gratify an intense and enduring passion for nineteenth-century Americana. Guided by the attendant to a bank of mahogany card-catalogue files at one end of the room, he began flicking his way through them knowingly and jotting down on call slips the numbers of several miscellanies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century autographs, mostly those of Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln. When he had finished, he handed the slips to the attendant, who assigned him a place at the table, disappeared into the adjoining stacks, and presently returned and placed before him several boxes, each containing an assortment of letters, signatures, memorandums, and government papers. Cosey subsided with them in a state of rapt delight.

The mood lasted nearly two hours, by which time Cosey had lovingly studied almost every autograph in the lot. Then, as he neared the end of the final boxful, his mood changed to one of irresistible desire. Skimming back through the contents of the boxes and comparing the merits of one item and another with an experienced eye, he finally settled on a pay warrant endorsed by Benjamin Franklin in 1786, when he was president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. Sliding this into his pocket, Cosey replaced the rest of the autographs in their boxes and handed them back to the attendant. It was not the practice of the Manuscripts Division to verify the contents of a box before restoring it to the stacks, and Cosey left the library unchallenged. (In fact, the theft still remains officially unnoticed, since no complete inventory of autographs has been made since the time of Cosey's visit.)

AFTER a year or so, during which Cosey roamed the country, living in flophouses, drinking heavily, and occasionally inspecting other collections of Americana, he wound up penniless in New York City. Desperate for money to buy liquor, he painfully resigned himself to the idea of selling his stolen Franklin autograph, and took it to an obscure dealer he picked at random on "Book Row," the six blocks of Fourth Avenue extending between Astor Place and Union Square that constitute the

center of the city's second-hand-book business. The dealer spurned it as a forgery. The effect of this hasty judgment on Cosey's career was revolutionary, and its effect on the American autograph market was catastrophic. His pride of scholarship was so deeply outraged that he left the dealer's shop determined to teach the ignorant man a lesson by creating a truly bogus document and selling it to him. Severely handicapped though he was by malnutrition and alcoholism, Cosey spent the next several months in public libraries, painstakingly copying facsimiles and originals of the handwriting of various distinguished men in American history, producing what the law, using the adjective rather loosely, terms archeological forgeries. He found that Lincoln's handwriting came easiest to him, and by 1931 he had become proficient enough at imitating it to forge "Yrs. Truly, A. Lincoln" on a snippet of paper so convincingly that the dealer bought it from him for ten dollars as an authentic autograph.

Nothing stimulates the creative spirit like achievement. Spurred by his success in pitting his skill against the dealer's sagacity, Cosey felt that he had at last discovered his true bent, and he at once set about making a career of archeological forgery, a career in which, as far as anybody knows, he may still be engaged. From the early thirties until shortly after the Second World War, he papered the country with his handiwork—forgeries predominantly of Lincoln, but also of Franklin, Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Baker Eddy, and a score of other illustrious Americans—in such profusion that the autograph market was thrown into a state of demoralization from which it has not even yet fully recovered. Although Cosey disappeared from his former haunts in 1943 and now is generally believed to be incapacitated, if not dead, there have been intermittent reports over the past dozen years which suggest that he may be continuing his activities, though on a much smaller scale. "Cosey was the greatest forger of his kind in this century," says G. William Bergquist, an authority on literary hoaxes of all kinds, who got to know him well while serving, from 1929 to 1946, as special investigator for the New York Public Library at its main building, on Forty-second Street, and who subscribes to the

belief that Cosey's forging days are probably over.

Cosey successfully forged not only signatures but whole letters and other manuscripts in the handwriting of the signers. Ordinarily, when he attempted holographs, he reproduced an actual text verbatim, but he became so familiar with the literary style of some of the persons whose handwriting he forged that from time to time he improvised texts over forged signatures and thus ad-libbed some lines that became—temporarily, at any rate—footnotes to history. He usually let his victims set their own prices, which ranged between five and ten dollars for the most part, although on occasion he accepted fifty or seventy-five dollars and at least once, in 1937, demanded, and got, a hundred. In the spirit of the sportsman who scorns to shoot a sitting bird, Cosey seldom tried to fob off his forgeries on amateurs. "I take pleasure in fooling the professionals," he often said. Among those who afforded him this pleasure were some of the nation's most astute bibliophiles and autograph experts. Many otherwise impeccable autograph collections, including those of the late Emanuel Hertz, of New York, and the late John Gribbel, of Philadelphia, failed to escape the taint of a Cosey. Auction galleries have listed his work in their catalogues, among them the Parke-Bernet Galleries, the country's leading auction house, which once scheduled a Cosey Lincoln for sale, appraised at fifteen hundred dollars. (The document was found to be a forgery in time to be withdrawn before going under the hammer.) The discreet recesses of an office safe in Brentano's, on Fifth Avenue, contain a lengthy Lincoln legal brief from Cosey's pen. The late Arthur Brentano purchased it at a price and under circumstances that the present officers of the company shrink from discussing. "The less said, the better" is how the president, Nixon Griffis, feels about it.

"Practically everybody has been stung by Cosey," says Mary A. Benjamin, whose autograph firm, at 18 East Seventy-seventh Street, was founded in 1887 by the late Walter R. Benjamin, her father and the acknowledged

dean of the trade, and is today pre-eminent in its field. Benjamin himself was no exception. He paid Cosey twenty-five dollars for a Lincoln legal brief. In fairness to Benjamin, however, it should be pointed out that he was eighty-three at the time Cosey tackled him, and that his eyesight (he always trusted to his natural vision, disdaining the magnifying glass most experts use) had begun to fail, because of a cataract; as soon as his daughter saw the brief, she recognized it as spurious by the uncharacteristic sheen of the ink. In her book, "Autographs: A Key to Collecting," published in 1946, Miss Benjamin devotes more attention to Cosey than to any other forger, living or dead. "Cosey, who had good reason to be proud of his Lincoln forgeries, had mastered Lincoln's writing in an astonishing manner," she writes. "Only Cosey in the more recent past is distinguished for that painstaking care which characterized many of his predecessors." In a lecture on the subject of Cosey before an audience of bibliophiles at the Grolier Club in 1939, Bergquist said, "Decid-

edly, there is something intriguing in the idea of a person sitting down and deliberately forging the handwriting of some well-known person. Obviously, this is not the work of any ordinary criminal. I am convinced that the person who does this is hardly ever motivated by the sole hope of monetary reward. . . . Rarely do these forgers sell their goods to the unwary. No doubt, hunger or some other unsatisfied want forces them at times into the displeasing practice of selling a forgery to the ignorant, but certainly they get no pleasure in doing so and must feel that they are prostituting their art, for it is an art, rather than a profession. It is understandable how a man might learn to forge one hand, but marvellous to switch to others at will."

Cosey received an even greater tribute from the New York Public Library when, in 1934, with the dual purpose of educating the innocent and removing from circulation as many specimens of his work as possible, it set up, under Bergquist's supervision, a special file known as the Cosey Col-



"What do you mean, men are all alike? Do you realize, young lady, that less than one-tenth of one per cent of all the men in this country are in my income bracket?"

lection, to which it has been adding ever since. Consisting principally of items the library has been able to prevail upon Cosey's dupes to donate, the Collection now comprises seventy-eight documents—thirty-one Lincolns, eight Poes, five Franklins, five David Rittenhouses, four Mary Baker Eddys, four George Washingtons, two Edwin M. Stantons, two Thomas Jeffersons, two

John Marshalls, two James Madisons, one John Adams, one Samuel Adams, one Button Gwinnett, one Lyman Hall, one Benjamin Rush, one Richard Henry Lee, one Patrick Henry, one Alexander Hamilton, one Walt Whitman, one Mark Twain, one Sir Francis Bacon, one Earl of Essex, and one Rudyard Kipling, the last three being rather unusual examples, since Cosey made

few excursions into the foreign field. Bergquist started the Cosey Collection with two specimens he had more or less confiscated from the forger himself—a Lincoln legal petition and a draft of some notes Poe wrote in connection with "Tamerlane." The latest additions—two Franklin pay warrants, probably copied from the one Cosey stole—were contributed in 1954 by

Arthur Swann, a vice-president of Parke-Bernet, who weeded them out, with the owner's approval, from a group of autographs the galleries were about to auction off. Although speculation is almost meaningless in such matters, one well-informed collector has ventured to guess that if its contents were genuine, the Cosey Collection would be worth about a hundred thousand dollars.

MARTIN CONEELY, to revert briefly to Cosey's real name, for the sake of vital statistics, was born in Syracuse, New York, on February 18, 1887, the son of Robert Coneely, an Irish Catholic immigrant who was a cabinetmaker by trade, and Sarah Bease, a native of Virginia. There were six older children—Robert, Jr., Thomas (who died in childhood), Patrick, Arthur, Philip, and Elizabeth. All of the five who grew up turned out to be respectable citizens. Robert ran a small printing shop, Patrick became a plumber, Arthur and Philip cooks, and Elizabeth a housewife. Cosey recalled in later years, while discussing his youth with various parole officers, that as a boy he resented parental authority and tended to make things difficult around the house. Away from home, however, he appears to have got on all right. In both elementary school, which he entered at the age of six, and high school, which he attended through his sixteenth year, he stood near the top of his class. In his spare time, he enjoyed helping his brother Robert in the printing



"Well, there she is, Braley. Your fabulous white goddess."

shop. He also acquired a taste for reading about mid-nineteenth-century America, the subject that continued to fascinate him as an adult.

Cosey left home at seventeen, after a quarrel with his father, and, as far as is known, had no further contact with any member of his family. For a while he wandered about the Middle West as a printer, starting at three dollars and fifty cents a week—the standard salary for an apprentice in those days—and slowly working up to twenty-five dollars. Wherever he went, he would explore the resources of the local library, and he would generally not move on until he had read everything it had to offer in the way of nineteenth-century American history. The city he stayed longest in was Peoria, Illinois, where he kept a job for six months, and where, while rummaging through his employer's stockroom one day, he came across something that proved of paramount importance to him in his later career as a forger—an old but unused ledger with blue-tinted pages watermarked "Moinier's, 1851." From holographs he had scrutinized in libraries, Cosey had learned that while Lincoln was practicing law in nearby Springfield he filed a number of briefs on blue-tinted paper watermarked "Moinier's, 1851." Cosey affectionately appropriated the ledger as a souvenir, with no notion at the time of putting it to any practical use, and in spite of the itinerant, dissolute, and spasmodically criminal way of life he drifted into, he somehow managed to keep it with him until he took up archeological forgery, a quarter of a century later. Cosey students attribute the excellence of what they term his Blue Lincoln Period to this ledger.

With the increasing use of the Linotype machine, Cosey became a victim of technological unemployment. In 1908, he turned up in Chicago, and the Bureau of Charities there hired him to distribute its reports. The wages were only fifteen dollars a week, though, and he found the work tedious, so in 1909, for a change of pace, he joined the Army, and was sent to the Philippines as a private with Company G, 19th Infantry. In 1913, he was abruptly restored to civilian life, with a dishonorable discharge, after assaulting the company cook. In the thirties and forties, whenever Cosey had occasion to review his military career, he would flourish a certificate of honorable discharge and a summary of his Army record containing the information that he had served from 1918 to 1920, first with the 153rd Depot Brigade, at Fort Slocum,



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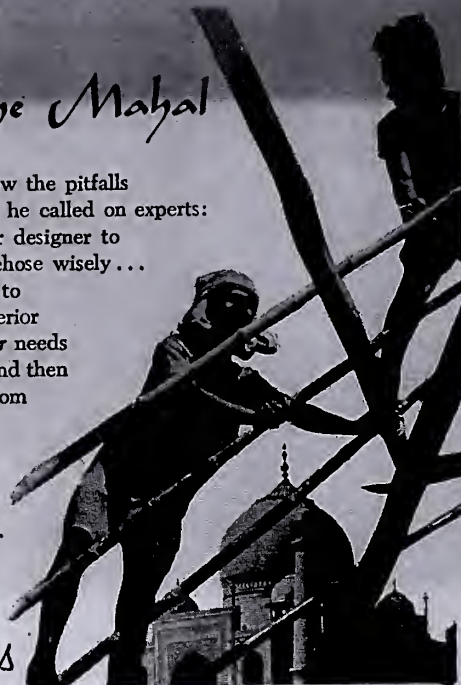


New York, and then with Group C Repair Units 306 and 311, at Camp Holabird, Maryland; that he was eight years younger than his actual age; and that his character while in service was "very good." Photostats of these two amiable fakes, rated among his lesser works, are included in the Cosey Collection.

Cosey always claimed that Army discipline permanently prejudiced him against law and order and drove him to drink. Whatever the cause, he soon became a petty criminal and an alcoholic, only occasionally trying his hand at legitimate work, such as selling newspapers, loading trucks, and soliciting business for a printing company. Between the time of his discharge and his début as an archeological forger he accumulated a record of seven felonies in five cities. But his heart does not seem to have been in non-archeological fraud, and his approach to it was so desultory that the police were almost always able to catch him with little difficulty. His first conviction was for stealing a motorcycle while on a bender in Sacramento, California, in 1913; he was still tooling around on it when he was arrested. He gave the alias Joe Hallaway and was sentenced to eighteen months in San Quentin Prison. Paroled at the end of six months, he rode the rails back and forth across the continent, stopping off, as usual, in cities whose libraries were rich in Americana. As Frank Thompson, he was arrested in Philadelphia on December 4, 1914, while trying to cash a forged check; because he had not quite succeeded in doing so, the court was lenient and gave him a suspended sentence. The following year, as John Hill, he paid a fine of fifty dollars and spent five days in a Seattle jail for carrying a concealed weapon. In later life, he sometimes boasted that in 1915 he had been a gold prospector in the Klondike and had shot up quite a few rivals who tried to jump his claim, but no record confirms this reminiscence, and such acts of violence would seem rather alien to his normally mild disposition. In 1916, as John Martin, he cashed a forged check in San Jose, California, and went back to San Quentin for three years. One day in 1920, at a time when he was employed as a runner for a Philadelphia bank, under his Frank Thompson alias, he stole thirty thousand dollars' worth of negotiable bonds by forging delivery receipts; a detective arrested him the same day when he attempted to convert all the bonds into cash at once. He was convicted of grand larceny, and served one year of a three-year term in

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the Eastern State Penitentiary. In 1922, as Arthur Roche, he cashed another forged check, in Boston, and was sent to the Massachusetts State Reformatory for five years, of which he served two. Returning to Philadelphia, again as Frank Thompson, he cashed a series of forged checks and was sentenced to from eight to sixteen years in Holmesburg Prison, from which he was paroled after five years. Thus, Cosey passed more than a fourth of the first forty years of his life behind bars. The time was not wholly wasted, however, for, as might be expected, he spent a good deal of it in prison libraries, reading books on American history.

In contrast to the trouble Cosey had keeping out of jail as a common criminal, he hawked his autographic and allied fakes for at least twenty years and was convicted only once in connection with them—for the very good reason that, while wildly violating the spirit of the law, he almost always carefully observed its letter. Section 959 of the New York State Penal Code (and other states have similar statutes) reads as follows:

The reproduction or forgery of any archeological object which derives its value from its antiquity, whether copied or not, with intent to represent the same to be an original and genuine archeological specimen, with intent to deceive or offer such object for sale or exchange, representing the same to be the original and genuine; or knowingly to have possession of any such reproduced or forged archeological objects, with intent to offer the same as original and genuine, is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not less than twenty-five nor more than two hundred dollars or by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than ninety days, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

As a rule, Cosey strictly avoided misrepresenting the documents he forged. He would give a prospective buyer a plausible account of how he had come by an item, but he would shrewdly leave it up to him to decide whether or not it was genuine. "My sister used to work for a doctor, and he gave it to her when he retired" was one of his favorite explanations. Another was that he was a W.P.A. worker and had found the document while helping demolish an old building on the lower East Side as part of a slum-clearance project. Such statements were not illegal, and Cosey very seldom made stronger ones; if there were any repercussions, he could blandly point out that he had never represented the document to be anything more than an old piece of paper.

On occasion, Cosey would use the tantalizing word "inherited" to interest

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a prospective buyer in a document, but here, again, he was on safe ground, since a man drawing up a will may specifically leave his heirs scraps of paper as worthless as last month's grocery bill if he feels so inclined. Around 1934, Cosey employed this device to sell a three-page Mary Baker Eddy letter of his own composition, telling Benjamin Bass, the proprietor of the Strand Bookstore, at 81 Fourth Avenue, that it was an inheritance from an uncle. Dated March 21, 1905, and addressed to Miss Sarah Dean, of Brookline, Massachusetts, it read:

MY BELOVED STUDENT,

Your letter arrived and I just want to thank you for it. Also the verse you so considerately sent. I think it is beautiful and contains a sentiment worthy of the occasion for which it was written. I am sending you here a few lines from "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," and am sure you will find in them an answer to your question of Sunday.

As every Christian Scientist, and every practitioner of Christian Science knows, to mention the name of a practitioner who is absent to a patient receiving treatment, as a suggestion is malpractice and wholly at variance with all my teachings.

"—the human will which maketh and worketh a lie against the Principle of divine harmony, is destructive of health, and is the cause of disease rather than its cure."

Do not give way to things alien to our cause. God will comfort you. He will stand by you.

Affectionately,
MARY BAKER EDDY
Pleasant View

Bass paid Cosey four dollars for the letter. "I was pretty new at the game then, and autographs weren't exactly in my line anyway," he said recently. "I looked up letters like it in records of book auctions and saw that they brought upward of forty dollars. So I figured at four dollars it was worth the gamble." The gamble did not pay off. Bass had the letter examined by more experienced collectors, who told him that while the spirit was Mrs. Eddy's, the text was pure Cosey, pointing out that, among other things, the founder of Christian Science habitually referred to "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," the bible of her faith, not by its title but simply as "the textbook." Such instances of scholarly slovenliness are relatively rare in Cosey's dossier.

Sometimes Cosey would offer a subsidiary document in tacit support of the one he was primarily interested in selling. This would be a forged letter of verification, for which he would also make no claim of authenticity. The letter, in addition to displaying impressive scholarship, would be deftly calculated

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to suggest Cosey's simplicity, tickle the buyer's vanity, and hold out the promise of a unique bargain. In June of 1938, for example, he showed up at the offices of the Fox Book Company, in Brooklyn, with three Lincoln items he wanted to sell—a notification to the Senate of the signing of a bill to suppress insurrection, a note to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton relaying a telegram from General Grant ("All looks remarkably well"), and a message to Congress on an act to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. These were contained in an opened envelope (Cosey is thought to have retrieved it from an ash can) franked by "Walter Kahn, Department of the Interior, Office of Education, Washington, D.C." and addressed to "William A. ('Hank') Wheeler, Jr., Educational Radio Projects, Box 191, Station D., N.Y." Without actually saying so, Cosey conveyed the impression that he was Wheeler. The envelope also contained a letter, signed "Walter Kahn," which read:

FRIEND HANK,

The message to Congress of April 16th was probably revised many times before Lincoln was satisfied with it. It was customary for him to make drafts of his speeches and addresses beforehand. This copy (April 16th) is not the copy he read from to Congress. The one Lincoln used is now in the Boston Public Library—(Barton-Tichenor [*sic*] Collection) presented by Col. R. Higgins. The original draft of the famous Gettysburg address has never been found. The copy from which Lincoln delivered the address at Gettysburg was not the original, but a revision and was given to Lincoln's son Robert. It is now in the Library of Congress.

This copy of a telegram is undoubtedly the only one made, certainly the only one sent to Stanton, the Secretary of War, because it is merely a copy of another telegram sent by Gen'l Grant. There were so many of them at the time it is unimportant as it is valued only as an autograph—the substance being Grant's. The discolored and stained message is in my opinion the best of the lot. It and the other message go together. At any rate don't be a fool and give them away. Go to some reliable dealer. It is a waste of your time trying to find a "collector." There are many of them but as you wish to sell them at once you can expect but a nominal sum, because even a dealer may have to keep them months before he can find a buyer. I am not trying to discourage you, but I am merely giving you information. I would buy them myself but just purchased a quantity of stamps and I am short at present. But I wish you to get all you can. Don't think you have a fortune. People who never had any autographs are apt to think when they come into possession of such as these that they have an extremely rare and priceless document! Believe me, Hank, these are common enough. Of course, a Lincoln letter or other document

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When Cosey left the Fox Book Company, he was richer by three dollars.

DURING the deep-depression year of 1932, while men who had once been well off were finding it difficult to sell apples, Cosey began turning out forged autographs in substantial numbers and selling them with an ease that, if it failed to restore his shattered physique, so bolstered his self-respect that he appears to have permanently renounced the life of a common criminal. The first person to suspect that the autograph market was being undermined by a gifted forger was Bergquist, who early in 1933, while investigating the theft from the Public Library of some valuable back issues of the *Christian Science Journal*, paid a visit to the Rare Book Company, at 99 Nassau Street, which, as he knew, specializes in Christian Science publications. Bergquist asked the proprietor of the shop, Herman Zadek, if by any chance someone had been trying to peddle the missing periodicals there. No, replied Zadek, but as a matter of fact an assistant of his had recently paid a meek little man ten dollars for a letter supposedly written by Mary Baker Eddy; Zadek had sent it for authentication to the archivist of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, and had been informed that it was a forgery. The assistant's description of the man who had sold him the letter became a familiar one to Bergquist in the course of the following year, during which he heard it repeated in convincing detail by more than thirty dealers who had also been taken in by the meek little man, and had, in consequence, found themselves the owners of forged Lincolns, Franklins, Poes, and so on, as well as Mary Baker Eddys. But as for who the shadowy seller of the forgeries was, no one had the slightest idea.

The identity of Cosey as the perpetrator of the multiple hoaxes was established on January 11, 1934, as a result of an effort he made to sell a fraudulent holograph of a legal petition drafted by Lincoln to a rare-book-and-autograph dealer named Edward Lowell Dean, whose shop occupied three rooms on the fourth floor of an office building at 347 Madison Avenue. Dean, who now, at sixty-eight, lives in White Plains and confines his professional activities to appraising private libraries, still remembers the incident vividly, for it had a melodramatic twist of a kind that does not

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often disturb the even tenor of an autograph dealer's working day. "It was around noon, and I was trying to interest a lady collector in a first edition of 'Alice in Wonderland,' when a kind of shy, apologetic-looking stranger poked his head through the door," Dean recalls. "He said that he had something to sell and that another dealer had told him it might be in my line. I asked him to wait, since I was busy with a customer, and left him to browse."

After the customer had gone (without buying the "Alice"), Dean's visitor—who, of course, was Cosey—pulled out of his overcoat pocket a legal petition written on three pages of age-stained, creased, white foolscap, and said, "I drive a moving van between Baltimore and Boston, and I found this in an old crate we were packing stuff in."

An inscription on the first page of the document described it as "A petition for mandamus [a writ from a superior court to an inferior court or official, ordering some specific action] in the case of the People vs. the Auditor of Illinois, before the Hon. S. H. Treat, C. J., presiding during the June term, 1851, Lincoln and Herndon for the petitioner." Dean, fascinated, turned the page and read on:

Your petitioner avers, that on the 1st day of January, A.D. 1851, your petitioner being the legal holder of certain state indebtedness of the State of Illinois, other than the canal and school indebtedness of said state, to wit: New Internal Improved Bonds to the amount of one hundred and seventy-eight thousand and one hundred dollars, did, on the said 1st day of January present the same to the Auditor of the State of Illinois, Thomas H. Campbell Esq., and demanded from him payment of the same. . . .

The petition concluded:

And your petitioner prays that a writ of mandamus may be issued out of and under the seal of this honorable Court, directed to said Auditor, commanding him forthwith to apportion and pay to your petitioner by his warrants on the treasury of the State of Illinois, the amount which your petitioner is entitled to receive from said tax money, excluding from the computation and apportionment to be made by said Auditor, the said pretending claim on behalf of the United States, and the said Interest Bonds.

LINCOLN AND HERNDON
P. P.

"I felt that here was possibly a major discovery," Dean says. "The paper unquestionably belonged to the right period. The handwriting had that occasional thickening of line typical of Lincoln. The terminology, the nature of the case, the names—all called to mind other Lincoln legal documents that I had

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seen. There was nothing unlikely about the little man's story of how he had found it, either. A lot of Lincoln material has been recovered from old packing cases, trunks, and whatnot. I was very excited." Dean's excitement was intensified by the fact that he had a lunch engagement around the corner at the Hotel Roosevelt with a wealthy and enthusiastic collector of Americana—a Chicago lawyer named Oliver R. Barrett, who had been known to pay three or four hundred dollars for Lincoln papers of similar length and content. (After Barrett's death, in 1950, his collection was sold by Parke-Bernet and brought \$273,632.50.)

"How much do you want for it?" Dean asked.

"I took it to the Philadelphia Public Library on my way up here," Cosey replied. "They told me it was worth maybe seventy-five dollars."

"I need time to study it," Dean told him. "Why don't you leave it with me for a few days?"

"I can't do that," Cosey said. "I've got to drive on up to Boston this afternoon."

"Well, then, let me keep it until after lunch," Dean said. "Come back at two and I'll let you know."

Cosey agreed to this, on condition that Dean advance him twenty-five dollars. Dean gave him the money in cash, and Cosey went away. "Such a mild, pleasant little man," Dean says. "I took quite a liking to him."

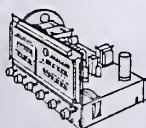
Although Dean did not wholly reject the possibility that the document was a forgery—no experienced autograph dealer ever does—it bore such a striking likeness to the real thing that he was concerned primarily with whether or not it had been stolen. Like many other men in his profession, he had a profound respect for Bergquist's judgment in such matters, so he carefully put the petition in an envelope and hurried over to the Public Library to show it to him before keeping his lunch date. Bergquist examined the handwriting carefully, then sighed and informed Dean gently that it was a fake.

"But how can you be so sure?" Dean protested, and went on to point out the various aspects of the petition that seemed to him to establish it clearly as genuine.

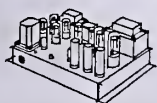
"I think I can describe the man who sold it to you," Bergquist said. "Short? Slight? About fifty? Shy? Quiet?" He then told Dean about the numerous forgeries of Americana that had been foisted on reputable and knowing dealers within the past year, and wound



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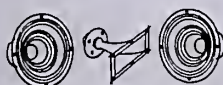
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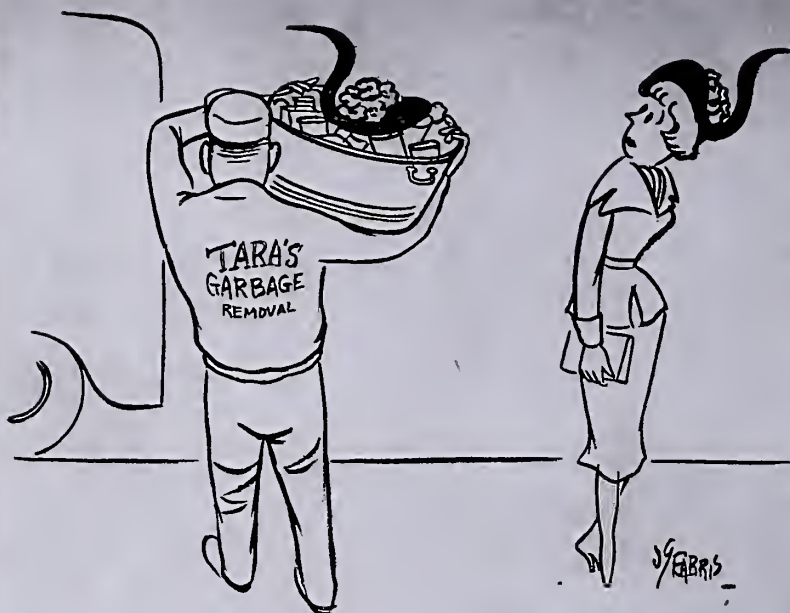
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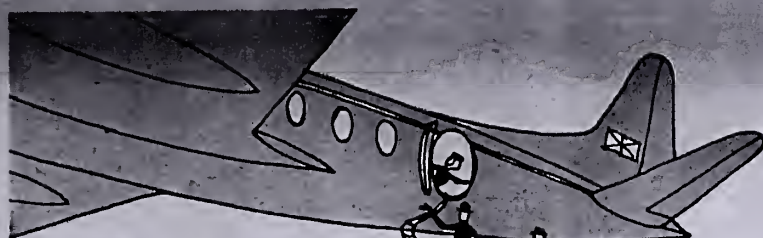
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up by saying, "Don't feel too bad. This man, whoever he is, is a genius."

It seemed unlikely to Bergquist and Dean that the forger, having safely made off with twenty-five dollars, would return to keep his two-o'clock appointment, but, of course, there was just a chance that he might, so it would be a good idea to have some plan for dealing with the situation. After the months Bergquist had spent on the evanescent fellow's trail, he was extremely eager to be in on what could be the showdown, but he was scheduled to appear in court that afternoon to testify against a book thief, so he reluctantly delegated an assistant, Arthur Heinle, to represent him at the rendezvous in Dean's office. Dean happened to have a brother-in-law in the Police Department—Detective Bradley Hammond, assigned to the West Forty-seventh Street Station—and he decided to ask him to be on hand, too, even though, as Bergquist reminded him, the man who had offered the petition for sale had done it in such a way as to provide no grounds for legal action. His disappointment somewhat tempered by anticipation, Dean went off to have lunch with Barrett.

Shortly before two, Dean, Hammond, and Heinle convened expectantly in the front room of the shop on Madison Avenue. They were barely seated when in came not Cosey but a fat man in ragged clothes—"a flophouse type," says Dean—who introduced himself as Gallagher, a friend of the truck driver who had been in that morning. "He had to go to Boston," Gallagher said. "He asked me to collect the money for him." Hammond expressed skepticism, and hinted that Gallagher would be in for considerable trouble with the law if he didn't tell the truth about where they could find his friend. For some time, the loyal Gallagher stuck to his story, but at last, thoroughly frightened and





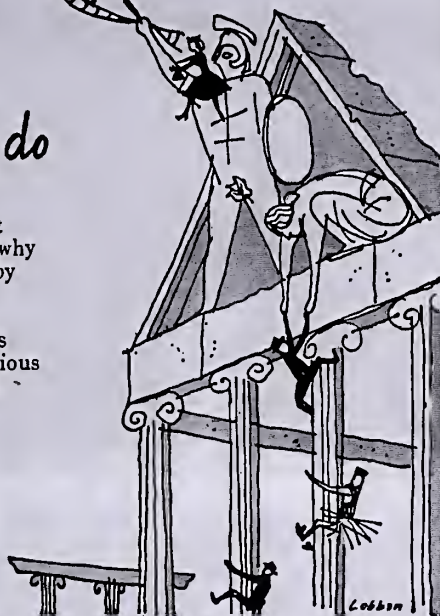
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bewildered by the turn events had taken, he shrugged, and led the way down to the main floor and through a passage connecting the building with Grand Central. There, in the smoking room, sat Cozey. He stuck to his story, too, and kept repeating in a sullen and hostile manner that he had found the Lincoln petition in a crate. Dean, Hammond, and Heinle thereupon shepherded Cozey and Gallagher to the Public Library, where Bergquist, having learned that the trial of the book thief had been postponed, was wishfully, though not very optimistically, awaiting just such a dénouement. Gallagher was obviously of no interest, so, to his relieved surprise, he was sent shuffling on his way. Hammond and Heinle, who had other duties to attend to, also departed. Dean would have liked to stay around to hear the whole story, but he had an appointment with another affluent customer, so he returned to his shop, leaving Bergquist alone with his prized quarry.

Bergquist is a large, white-haired man, cheerful and avuncular by nature, and Cozey quickly warmed to him—so much so that it required little coaxing to get him to identify himself and to admit that he was responsible for the rash of archeological forgeries that had broken out all over town. Asked by Bergquist if he had any other samples of his work with him, he produced two manuscripts, along with a pocketful of the paraphernalia of his art—penholders, nibs of various shapes and sizes, a bottle of doctored ink, sheets of artificially aged paper, and notes on the handwriting idiosyncrasies of various famous Americans. Of the two manuscripts, one was a practice copy of the Lincoln petition (“A dry run for the one Dean got,” says Bergquist, who has since learned that the original from which Cozey worked had been exhibited the previous year in Hartford by the Connecticut Historical Society), and the other was a not entirely accurate copy of the notes Poe wrote for the first edition of “Tamerlane.” (The actual notes contained the line from the poem “which blazes upon Edis’s shrine,” but Cozey slipped up and made it read “which blares upon Edis’s shrine.”) “I haven’t violated any law,” Cozey mildly protested to Bergquist, who readily conceded that this might well be the case and complimented him upon his craftsmanship. Delighted to encounter a properly qualified admirer of his art, Cozey set about explaining certain technical difficulties he had found himself up

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against in forging the two manuscripts. Bergquist described some other forged documents that had been brought to his attention in recent months, and Cosey, proudly acknowledging that he was the author in each case, went into some detail about the problems he had faced in producing them, too. Indeed, he was extremely communicative about all the phases of his work except for the matter of the paper he had used in preparing the Lincoln petition and the Poe notes. The paper bore the watermark of T. Edmonds, a stationer of the mid-nineteenth century, and when Bergquist casually asked where he had obtained this important ingredient of the forgeries, Cosey looked embarrassed and changed the subject.

Bergquist said he planned to keep the Lincoln and the Poe, to which Cosey offered no objection, and then, urging his visitor to employ his talents more constructively in the future, showed him to the door. The two men parted in an aura of mutual respect, testified to on Bergquist's part by the fact that he turned the two forgeries over to the Library's keeper of manuscripts, the late Dr. Victor H. Paltsits, and they became the first items in the Cosey Collection. Bergquist tried to persuade Dean to donate his copy of the Lincoln petition to the Collection, but the dealer would not part with it; he has since refused an offer of two hundred and fifty dollars for it from a collector of literary curiosities. Dean is not the only dealer to covet a Cosey. The late Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, of New York and Philadelphia, an unrivalled authority on literary rarities, who bought the Bay Psalm Book for a hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars—the highest price ever paid for a book—rejoiced in having in his vast collection a Cosey forgery of two verses from Poe's "The Raven," which he acquired from a dealer as a curio at a cost of twenty-two dollars.

Some time after making Cosey's acquaintance, Bergquist was called upon, as a matter of routine, to investigate the mutilation of a Library copy of a nineteenth-century genealogy, from which someone, using a razorlike instrument, had cut out several blank pages provided in the back of the book for additional entries. Bergquist was not greatly startled to discover that the remaining pages of the volume bore the watermark of T. Edmonds, and by the time he had lined up the pages of the Lincoln and Poe forgeries with the cut edges of the missing pages of the genealogy and found that they matched precisely, he

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was more amused than indignant. Recalling Cossey's uneasiness at being questioned about the paper, he hardly expected to see him in the library again, but six months later the forger paid him a social call. This got off to a rather lame start, owing to Bergquist's professional obligation to accuse his visitor of having mutilated the genealogy. Cossey sheepishly confessed to the source of his paper with the T. Edmonds watermark but attributed the actual excision of the pages to his crony Gallagher, whereabouts then unknown, and promised that he would not again use the library as a source of supply. (It was a promise that he—or Gallagher—failed to keep. In 1936, a book entitled "A Modest and True Account of the Proceedings Against Mr. Abraham Anselm," published in London in 1694, was reported missing from the Library, and four years later, now enhanced by some legal notes supposedly written and signed by Lincoln on one of its end papers, possibly to make it appear that it had once been part of the President's library, it was picked up in a bookstall on 125th Street by a collector named Otto A. Hicks, who took it to Bergquist for verification of the handwriting. Bergquist was saddened to see that the end paper was clearly another bit of Cosseyana.)

Once the painful business of chiding his caller was disposed of, Bergquist restored the amenities by letting him inspect the rapidly growing Cossey Collection. The forger flushed with pleasure, like a painter at his first *vernissage*, as he lingered over each item, enlarging on its fine points and reconstructing the circumstances under which he had sold it. "Believe me, I work hard to earn a dollar," he told Bergquist as the two men pondered one of the more elaborate of the exhibits—a general order relating to the surrender of Cornwallis, signed by George Washington. Cossey took to dropping in at the Library frequently to check on the progress of the Collection, and he was always delighted to help clear up any confusion surrounding its new accessions, such as the location of the original manuscript on which he had based a forgery or the means by which he had slipped a bogus document into circulation. Although Cossey turned out a prodigious amount of work during the thirties, he was constantly running out of funds, and occasionally Bergquist would slip him a few dollars. Bergquist urged him to write his memoirs, believing that a publisher could be found who would pay well for them; Cossey got no further than the opening para-

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graphs. Bergquist also arranged with a bank to offer him a job of copying some cancelled checks, as part of an exhibit to alert the public to the dangers of forgery and counterfeiting, but could not interest him in anything so dreadfully aseptic.

NO one knew where Cosey was a good deal of the time, but when he was in New York he usually stopped at the Windsor House, a Bowery hostelry near Houston Street. He produced some of his most delicate forgeries there—a feat that professional calligraphers can hardly believe, working conditions at the Windsor being what they are. The rooms there, which measure about seven feet by four and during the thirties rented for thirty cents a night, are separated by beaverboard partitions that reach neither to the floor nor to the ceiling, and they contain no furnishings except a cot and a locker. The only light in them flickers feebly in over the partitions from ceiling fixtures in the corridors. The air reeks of creosote, an eye-watering disinfectant with which the rooms are scoured daily. The stairs, rising steeply from the street, are brass-bound, and arriving and departing guests thunder relentlessly up and down them all night long. There Cosey, oblivious of his surroundings, worked with the serenity of a medieval monk illuminating a manuscript in his cell. His appearance and personality were scarcely more appropriate to such a setting than was the work he performed in it. Though his suit and overcoat were often threadbare, he took pains to keep them looking as spruce as possible, while his shirts—usually white, with long collar tabs—were always immaculate, no matter how frayed they might be, and even the cap he customarily wore had a neat and jaunty air about it. His conversational style tended to be rather formal and sparing of colloquialisms, contrasting oddly with a disarming Irish lilt in his speech. He had large, light-blue eyes that sparkled ingratiatingly, and the fact that he wore austere rimless glasses with steel sidepieces for reading and writing provided another curious contrast.

Before attempting a single stroke of the pen, Cosey would devote many days to studious preparation, scrutinizing every available scrap of his model's handwriting and, when he proposed to invent a text, saturating himself in the appropriate literary style. His next consideration was ink. At first, he used Waterman's, but he found that it didn't fade fast enough to simulate hundred-year-old inks, so he worked out a formula of

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his own, which involved mixing pulverized nutgall or rust filings with water. His most ticklish problem was the choice of paper. For his more ambitious forgeries, he used title pages and flyleaves of old books, which he bought when he could afford them and stole when he couldn't. But since, in either case, his supplies of these were limited, he used ordinary corner-stationery-store paper for short documents that he figured he could dispose of easily, and during the early days of his career gave it an appearance of age by treating it with a weak solution of oxalic acid. Later on, however, he became aware that while the acid imparted the desired yellowish tinge to the paper, it destroyed the size, as papermakers call the glutinous material used for filling the pores of their product, and he therefore substituted a solution of potassium permanganate, which produced the same tinge and proved less injurious to the size. His confidant in much of this experimenting was his stooge Gallagher, a fellow Bowery habitué who had once been a machinist. For a while, the two men examined the possibilities of making paper from rags of a quality similar to cloth that was in common use a century ago, but in the end Gallagher's mechanical background led him to the conclusion that the equipment needed would be far beyond their combined means.

In marketing his wares, a task that he found almost as pleasurable as manufacturing them, Cosey was more interested in watching the reactions of his customers than in how much money they paid him. It is probable that he could often have got higher prices than he did if he had demanded them and gone in for haggling, but his conservative policy was to accept whatever the buyer offered. He rated his customers in terms of his own estimate of their honesty and discernment. At the top he put the reputable and substantial autograph specialists, like Benjamin, who were hard to deceive but ready to pay fairly for quality. These he approached gingerly and only with what he considered his choicest products. Immediately below these he ranked booksellers who dealt in autographs as a sideline and, being consequently less experienced, hesitated from lack of self-confidence to risk more than a small sum. Cosey unloaded many of his forgeries on this group, but he professed that each time he did so he suffered twinges of remorse afterward for having taken advantage of an honest man. He felt most at home, and his conscience was always clearest, when

he was negotiating with shady dealers, and among these he recognized two distinct types. One was the mere chiseller, who would assume that the document in question was quite likely bona-fide but that Cosey was a simpleton to be taken advantage of, and the other was the out-and-out crook, who suspected it was a forgery and hoped to defraud someone else with it by representing it as genuine.

Although Cosey's conduct, even when he was technically conforming with the law, would hardly have made him acceptable as a Boy Scout leader, his professed ethical beliefs were not a great deal more anti-social than those of many pragmatic-minded citizens who have never so much as seen the inside of a courtroom. Concerning theft in general, he felt that it might be better not to indulge in it but that it was not particularly reprehensible provided one stole from some impersonal institution that could afford the loss, and he once said, upon being asked about the thirty thousand dollars' worth of bonds he had made off with while working as a runner in Philadelphia, "Yes, in a way I suppose it was wrong, but no one would have been hurt even if I hadn't been caught. After all, the bank was insured." Cosey insisted that he had a deeply compassionate streak in his nature, and to prove this he used to tell about an experience he had had in disposing of a Poe forgery. "I went around to this bookstore with a Poe letter," he once told a newspaper reporter. "The owner was out, but his secretary told me she was a student of Poe and would be thrilled to see something in his handwriting. I finally sold it to her for three dollars, but only because I was broke. Well, my conscience bothered me about it for weeks, and the first time I had three dollars I went back to the shop to tell her it was a counterfeit, and buy it back from her. But when I heard her talk about how much pleasure that letter had given her, I didn't have the heart to disillusion her. So I walked out and let her keep it and believe in it." For his latter-day thefts from libraries, Cosey put up a rather listless and puerile defense, but this, too, was more or less in line with a fairly widely held point of view. Years after he slipped the Franklin pay warrant out of the Library of Congress, he claimed he could see nothing especially unprincipled in his action. "After all, the library belongs to the people," he said. "And I'm one of the people." But when, in 1941, the *New York Sun* reported in a story describing the Cosey Collection

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that it was a Lincoln letter Cosey had stolen from the Library of Congress, he swiftly put aside all such fuzzy intellections and, his pride of scholarship and craft aroused, stomped into the editor's office to protest against this and other inaccuracies in the article. "I didn't steal a Lincoln letter from the Library of Congress," he was quoted the next day as saying. "It was a pay warrant signed by Benjamin Franklin. And you said I got as high as thirty dollars for some of my fakes. That's wrong, too. I've sold some of them for as much as fifty dollars."

One of the many dealers with whom Cosey's sales technique was effective was Henry C. Roberts, familiarly known, because he once specialized in second-hand radio parts, as Radio Roberts. His current specialties include second-hand books, back numbers of magazines, old prints, phonograph records, and miscellaneous bric-a-brac, and the display window of his shop, at 380 Canal Street, is piled high with these wares. Roberts is an arresting personality. He claims to be the reincarnation of the sixteenth-century French prophet Nostradamus; as president of Nostradamus, Inc., a one-man corporation devoted to disseminating "the message that Nostradamus and other great adepts have for a groping humanity," he sells by mail, at four dollars a copy, his own translation and interpretation of Nostradamus's prophecies. "Nostradamus—greatest seer of all time, dontcha know?" Roberts says. "Everything that ever happened, everything that's gonna happen, he called the turn. Just ask me." Roberts' book, which was published in 1949, predicts Hitler's return to earth alive seven years after his death, a universal revolution in 1999, and in the year 7000 the destruction of the earth by the sun. A short, gnarled, nervous man, with the habitual expression of a disgruntled troll, Roberts putters around amid his chaotic stock in a grass-green artist's





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smock and, in defiance of a sign on his wall that reads "ONLY LOW CONVERSATION PERMITTED," rarely drops his voice below the level of a drill sergeant's.

Cosey ambled into Roberts' shop one day and, assuming his role of a W.P.A. house wrecker, showed him half-a-dozen items, which the avatar bought for trifling sums. This small collection, it turned out, represented Cosey at his best; at any rate, two of the items in it have since become the subject of some chitchat in autograph circles because of the circumstances that led to their eventually being identified as forgeries. One of these was the Cosey Lincoln document that Parke-Bernet later appraised at fifteen hundred dollars. Charles Eron, who had a bookstore at 89 Chambers Street, bought it from Roberts, and presently turned it over to the galleries to be sold at auction. The catalogue for the sale described it in detail as a remnant of a court calendar on which Lincoln had made notes about cases heard before the Eighth Judicial Circuit of Illinois in 1858. Among the names on Parke-Bernet's mailing list was that of the Abraham Lincoln Association, of Springfield, Illinois, whose secretary, upon scanning his copy of the catalogue, noted three discrepancies in the dates given in the calendar, and wrote to the galleries calling attention to them. The calendar went back to Eron, who gave it to Bergquist.

The other item, and the masterpiece of the collection Cosey sold Roberts, was an ambitious Poe document. For this, Cosey used a hard-back account book bearing the stamp "Henry Anstice, stationer, cor. Cedar and Nassau Streets, opposite the Post Office, New York," an establishment that Poe might easily have patronized, since he once lived in that neighborhood. The book itself, with its stamp, was thought to be authentic, although where and how Cosey got his hands on it has never been ascertained. On the opening pages of the book, Cosey, imitating Poe's handwriting, listed sums the poet owed to various friends and neighbors. Then came several pages that were devoted to an analysis of "The Raven," and the rest of the book was given over to half a dozen verses from the poem itself. Roberts consigned this item to the Crown Art Galleries, on West Twenty-second Street, where the estate of the renowned trial lawyer Max Steuer was about to be auctioned off. The Crown people, in accordance with the standard gallery practice of disposing of individual items from various

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sources by putting them on the block at the same time that large estates are being auctioned off, listed the Poe book in their catalogue of the Steuer sale. At the auction, the bidding on it ended at a hundred and fifty dollars. This was only a fraction of what comparable Poe material had brought elsewhere, and the happy purchaser, a corporation lawyer named Jacob J. Podell, who had only recently taken to collecting, congratulated himself on having bagged a sleeper, as they say in the trade. Presently, however, he began to have misgivings, for he realized that his own judgment in such matters was still rather shaky, so he consulted a friendly bookdealer, who sent him to Miss Benjamin. She broke the sad news. Podell demanded his money back from the Crown Galleries, which readily refunded it and returned the forgery to Roberts. "I authorized Crown to pay the man," says Nostradamus redivivus. "He wasn't satisfied, so why argue? That's the way I believe in doing business. I sell my stuff fair and square, admitting frankly that I can't give no guarantee. That's the way it's got to be with autographs. *Caveat emptor*, dontcha know?"

At the peak of his productivity, during the middle thirties, Cosy found a patron. Setting out from the Bowery one morning with a Lincoln document of recent vintage, he strolled north until he came to the shop, on Fourth Avenue, of a dealer in autographs and used books who will here be known as Calvin Bonnell. Cosy produced his Lincoln and shyly placed it on the counter in front of Bonnell, saying that he had found it in the attic of an aunt who had just died. Bonnell offered him five dollars for it, which Cosy gratefully accepted. A few days later, Cosy returned with several more Lincolns that he claimed to have salvaged from the same attic. Bonnell, who had made a hundred-per-cent profit on the earlier document, bought these, too, and shortly sold them at similarly inflated prices. When Cosy dropped around for a third visit, with still another Lincoln, Bonnell looked at him searchingly. "I began to wonder," he has since said. He began to wonder so much, in fact, that he bluntly accused Cosy of fakery. Instead of risking trouble by protesting that the letters were genuine, Cosy modestly accepted the tribute, and proved himself worthy of it by executing another Lincoln on the spot. Bonnell was enthralled.

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Ruel was to the French modernists, Bonnell became to Cosey. A tall, stringy man with a pleasant smile that inspires confidence, Bonnell virtually subsidized him for some time, buying his work as fast as the artist could supply it, and gradually amassing a reserve stock of some four hundred specimens. Once, when Bonnell acquired a first edition of "Mein Kampf," he suggested to Cosey that the author's autograph would greatly increase the value of the book. Cosey assured him he could do better than a simple autograph, and, modelling his penmanship and phraseology on an inscription he had seen in a copy of "Mein Kampf" that was on display in the show window of a West Side bookseller, he wrote on the title page, "*An Meinen Kameraden, Benito Mussolini, von Adolf Hitler*," in a script that might easily have issued from Berchtesgaden. Bonnell displayed it noncommittally in his window with a price tag of fifty dollars. It was bought by a Yorkville admirer of *der Führer*.

How Cosey kept at his work for Bonnell so steadily and with such persuasive results is a mystery, in view of the fact that not long before the two men met he had become a hopeless drug addict. Sometime in the early part of 1935, he had taken a few tentative shots of heroin, and soon he could not leave the stuff alone. As the shots became more and more frequent, he developed a tremor of the hands that made it impossible for him to write except when he was drugged. In September of that year, a detective from the Narcotics Squad arrested him in front of the Windsor House after finding a fifty-cent deck of heroin in his pocket. Cosey was committed to the Hart Island workhouse for an indefinite term, and from there, during the twelfth month of his imprisonment, he addressed an appeal to the chairman of the Parole Commission, John C. Maher, which is one of the few known examples of his natural handwriting. "Ordinarily, I shall be released on the 17th or 24th of November 1936," he wrote, in a neat and graceful script, not unlike Lincoln's. "Now here is my request, Mr. Maher. I haven't been out for a presidential election since Woodrow Wilson was elected to his first term, not that I have been in all those years but I was no doubt unfortunate around election time. I am asking for only a couple of weeks, and I am in my 50th year and no telling where I'll be in 1940. . . . [He was in jail again.]" Cosey may have forgotten about the election of 1932 or, while the voters were going to the polls that year,

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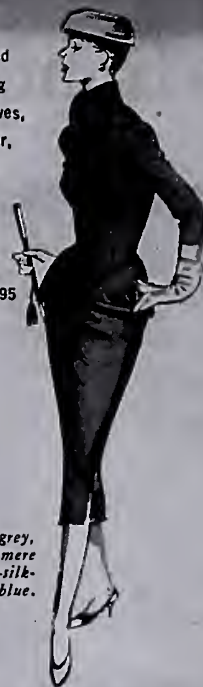
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he may have been recovering from a hangover in the jail of some remote town where the record of his Election Eve conduct would get no further than the local police blotter; in any event, he was still in the workhouse when he either celebrated or lamented Franklin D. Roosevelt's election to a second term. Presumably, he just wanted to be free on Election Day so that he could share in the general excitement, since, in view of his criminal record, he would have committed a felony by casting a ballot himself.

Cosey was released from Hart Island in late November, 1936, as scheduled, and during the next decade he became the concern of a succession of parole officers, who knew him as Martin Coneely, Martin Conelly, or Frank Conelly, and would doubtless have been startled to learn of his activities as Joseph Cosey. "He was unemployed the past eighteen months, and his means of subsistence is open to question," one of them reported. Another looked upon him as a man "of superior intelligence . . . a likable, ingratiating fraud." Although he was growing old and wasting away—his hair had turned gray and his cheeks were hollow and chalky—his eyes preserved their sparkle, but some of this may by then have been attributable to drugs. His outlook was philosophic. "One must expect occasional hardship," he once wrote to a parole officer.

On the morning of January 25, 1937, Cosey entered the shop of a stamp dealer named Walter Gisiger, at 80 Nassau Street, in the heart of the philatelic district, with a Lincoln letter commenting on a decision by the Illinois courts against the Wells Fargo Express Company and enclosed in an envelope postmarked Springfield, Illinois. He was far from his old self. His clothes were rumpled and dirty, and he badly needed a shave. ("Health: poor," his parole officer of the moment reported a few days later. "Unfit for work.") His usual caution, moreover, had deserted him. He not only declared the letter to be genuine but put a price of a hundred dollars on it. Gisiger dealt exclusively in stamps, but he had a friend down the street, on the tenth floor of 116 Nassau, who dealt in both stamps and autographs, and he sent for him. The friend, Herman Herst, Jr., was twenty-six years old and a comparative novice in the business, and he accepted Cosey's Lincoln forgery at its face value. "I had the feeling I was dealing with a reputable person," Herst says. "I'll admit there was nothing at all about his ap-



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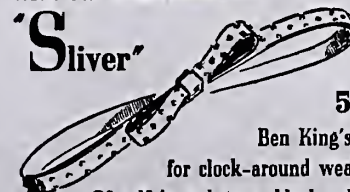
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pearance to make me think so, but he did seem to have considerable knowledge of Lincoln. I didn't stop to ask myself how someone looking like a down-and-outer would come to have a Lincoln letter in his possession, or why, if he did know anything about Lincoln, he would be willing to sell the letter so cheap." With youthful candor, Herst told Cosey that the letter was probably worth two or three times as much as he was asking. He gave Cosey a check for a hundred dollars, with the understanding that the money would be refunded if the letter failed to stand up under examination, and said that he would send Cosey another check if it did stand up. Cosey pocketed the check, gave Herst an address on Third Avenue, and departed.

Herst returned to his office and examined the letter more carefully. Almost at once, he realized that it was a forgery; for one very obvious thing, it was dated December 2, 1846, whereas the paper it was written on was watermarked "1860." He wrote a note to Cosey, gently informing him that it looked as if they had both been badly misled and asking him to return the check. "Of course, I could have stopped payment on it," Herst says. "But somehow I still believed he was an honorable fellow who had been just as fooled as I'd been." Herst's note to Cosey came back unclaimed, but even this did not embitter the young dealer. He framed the forged Lincoln letter and hung it in a prominent place in his office as a permanent reminder of the perils of over-enthusiasm in his business.

The story of how Herst had been taken in spread quickly through the stamp district, and one of the people who heard it was a friendly competitor named Elliott Wilson, a partner in the Island Stamp Company, with offices two floors below his. Herst had just opened for business one morning a fortnight or so after his visit from Cosey when he received a telephone call from Wilson, who told him in a muffled voice that a little old man had just entered his shop with a Lincoln letter he wanted to sell. Herst urged Wilson to engage the visitor in conversation until he could get there, hung up, and put in a call to Police Headquarters, which promised to send two detectives over at once. Herst went downstairs and waited outside Wilson's office until the detectives arrived, and then ushered them in. The little old man was Cosey, all right, and on Wilson's counter lay a duplicate of the letter he had sold Herst. Upon recognizing his erstwhile customer, Cosey seized

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the letter, tore it into shreds, and tossed them behind the counter. One look at Cosey was all the detectives needed to suspect that he was a drug addict, and, rolling up his sleeves to confirm their diagnosis, they found that his arms were speckled from wrists to biceps with the punctures of a hypodermic needle. A moment later, they found the needle itself and some decks of heroin in his pockets.

Cosey was taken to the Oak Street police station, where he fell back on one of his time-tested alibis; he had found both Lincoln letters, he said, while cleaning up the basement of a house for a woman who lived in Jamaica. But when the detectives intimated that he might be allowed a shot of heroin if he told them the truth, he confessed that he had forged the letters, and agreed to sign a confession. Herst, who was present as the complainant, says that Cosey's hands were so shaky that he could barely hold a pen, and that the signature he finally managed to produce was illegible. Cosey bore no hard feelings against his accuser, according to Herst; in fact, he recalls that the old man said to him, "I'm grateful to you for your fairness. I really hated to cash your check, because you didn't try to swindle me on the transaction, and even offered to pay me more than I was asking." On February 24, 1937, in Special Sessions, Cosey pleaded guilty to petty larceny and was sentenced to an indefinite term in the Rikers Island workhouse—his first and only conviction in the role of an archeological forger. The record is not clear as to when he was released, but one day about a year later he dropped in at Herst's shop. "Don't be alarmed," he said, with a smile, to the startled proprietor, whose first thought was that his visitor might be contemplating revenge. "I just wanted to thank you again for not trying to cheat me while I was cheating you."

ON April 17, 1939, Cosey voluntarily appeared before the New York City Parole Commission and asked to be cured of the drug habit. He was admitted to the Rikers Island Hospital and given the withdrawal treatment, which lasted thirty-seven days. But he was soon back on the needle. During the next four years, he was arrested four times on the Bowery with heroin in his pockets, and spent a total of thirteen months on Rikers Island, some of them in the hospital and the rest in the workhouse. In the spring

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HAT BY MR. JOHN

of 1943, he called on Bergquist at the Public Library and announced that he planned to give up forgery. A steady job as a floor sander was waiting for him in New Haven, he said, but he didn't have the necessary train fare. Bergquist gave him three dollars. Cosey handed his friend a note, dated August 5, 1907, which read, "Taking the pledge will not make bad liquor good, but it will improve it—Mark Twain."

"It's not very well done," Cosey said. "Still, I thought you might like to have it."

"As a matter of fact, it's very well done," said Bergquist. "And thank you." He has not seen Cosey since.

It soon appeared that if Cosey was sanding floors the work did not require his entire energies. First a bookstore in New Haven, and then one in Springfield, Massachusetts, sent Lincoln autographs to Miss Benjamin for authentication, and from these she deduced that the Old Master had not laid down his pen after all. In 1945, Cosey's field of operations appeared to have shifted to his native upstate New York. From Albany and Troy came reports that a man variously described as "short and wizzled-up," "very small and light-complexioned," and "about five feet four or five inches and rather lightweight" was scattering a trail of Lincolns and Franklins. Then, in 1947, the flow abruptly stopped. Six years elapsed, during which nothing further was heard of anyone anywhere who might be Cosey. With a collective sigh of relief, the majority of the nation's autograph dealers concluded that he must have died. He would be sixty-six, it was argued, and that was an advanced age for a man who had long subsisted mainly on alcohol and heroin. Moreover, no convictions had been added to his police record in ten years—a hiatus that, in the light of his past performance, suggested either a miraculous reformation or the grave. His prolonged absence from Book Row—always his best market—and his failure to revisit the Cosey Collection or to communicate with Bergquist (who had left the Public Library to become a director of the Readex Microprint Corporation) tended to confirm the consensus that the end had come. But the sigh of relief proved to be quite possibly premature. In 1954, an elderly man—frail and shrivelled and with an Irish brogue, the descriptions ran—sold, for less than five dollars each, a Mary Baker Eddy letter to a woman Christian Science practitioner in Schenectady, a Lincoln brief to a pawnbroker in the



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same city, and two Lincoln letters to an antique dealer in Burnt Hills, near Schenectady. In each case, an expert expressed the opinion that the document was a forgery and identified it as a Cosey. Both the Lincoln letters concerned Confederate prisoners and were addressed to Stanton. "Dear Sir," the more self-explanatory of the two read. "The bearer of this, Mrs. Craddock, tells me she has a nephew, Edwin Selvage, who is in the rebel service, made a prisoner, and is now at Fort Delaware; that he has two brothers in the Union Army, is yet under twenty years of age; and wishes to take the oath of allegiance and be discharged. Upon reasonable proof of all this, let him take the oath and be discharged—Yrs. Truly, A. Lincoln."

Since 1954, Cosey's trail—or that of the man resembling him and seemingly well supplied with Coseyana—has again grown cold. Meanwhile, early Cosey material continues in circulation. It shows up at auctions of autograph collections, in antique shops, and in second-hand bookshops. Not long ago, Bonnell sold a Franklin pay warrant and a check endorsed by General Grant to a young lady for a total of ten dollars. "I'm not swearing they're authentic," he said with his reassuring smile, as he handed them to her. "They might be real and then again they might not. You never can tell in this business."

Time has bestowed upon Cosey the ultimate distinction to which the archeological forger can aspire: Even when his work is known to be pinchbeck, there is a steady market for it. The prevailing rate for it fluctuates between three and five dollars per forgery. —JOHN KOBLER

The deliberations of these faculty teams so far have been vastly stimulating. The Humanities team is considering such aims and objectives as the development of intellectual consistency, the creation of aesthetic awareness, the liberation of the personality, the awakening of non-verbal and non-rational sensibilities to amplify adult experience, and the structure of an insight into the eternality of human aspiration and frustration.—*Report of the Brooklyn College Experimental Degree Project for Adults.*

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What Was Fate of Gifted Lincoln Writing Forger?

By PAT REDMOND, Staff Reporter

FT. WAYNE, Ind.—Enshrined here in one of the finest Lincoln collections in the world, is a handwriting forgery by a Bowery derelict.

A faded "legal document" at the Lincoln National Life Foundation was first thought to have been written by Abraham Lincoln when he was a lawyer in Illinois.

But it was found to be a forgery of Joseph Cosey, an alcoholic, drug addict and New York City derelict. He dropped from sight 17 years ago in upstate New York and hasn't been heard from since.

Cosey dumped hundreds of nearly flawless handwriting forgeries on the public. His favorites were Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Edgar Allan Poe, Rudyard Kipling and Mark Twain.

"We paid \$75 for this one," said Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, director of the Lincoln research center here. "It's one of Cosey's best."

Dr. McMurtry, a Lincoln authority, said it is almost impossible to tell the difference between Lincoln's handwriting and Cosey's imitations.

"Only when Cosey wrote in a way he thought Lincoln should have written does the forgery become apparent," he said.

At his peak in the 1930s, working under impossible conditions in Bowery flophouses, he turned out forgeries good enough to fool many of the nation's leading authorities on archeological documents.

Today the New York Public Library has a collection of Cosey forgeries. One authority said if Cosey's imitations were authentic historic documents, their worth would be about \$100,000.

It is said Cosey, a student of American history, began his career in forgery because a dealer in antiquities refused to buy an original document by Franklin which Cosey had stolen from the Library of Congress. The dealer, so the story goes, told Cosey the document was a fake.

Incensed, Cosey forged several Franklin documents and sold them to the dealer as originals.

Although he was convicted as a check forger, Cosey got by for 20 years without being arrested as a forger of archeological documents.

Authorities said he usually approached a dealer with a plausible story about finding an aged document in an attic or among a deceased relative's effects. He asked the dealer if the paper — which contained perhaps authentic-looking Lincoln handwriting — was "worth something."

An enthusiastic dealer, recognizing the handwriting, would offer a price that would allow him a healthy profit. Cosey accepted all offers . . . many times for as little as \$5.

When — and if — the dealer found he had a forgery, he never went to the police. He, not Cosey, had identified the document as an original. He had offered a price. Cosey had not asked for one. His reputation was at stake — certainly not Cosey's.

As late as March, 1961, a leading New York gallery dealing in antiquities had to withdraw several Lincoln letters because they were found to be forgeries — probably Cosey's.

As an itinerant printer in the 1920s, Cosey came across an unused ledger containing paper identical to that used by Lincoln as a lawyer. Cosey used this paper, writing with a solution of water and iron rust filings.

The result — after yellowing the paper by soaking it in a tobacco-and-water solution — looked for all the world like an aged, authentic document.

Another group of forgeries which found their way into many Lincoln collections came from William P. Brown, who served as a coachman for Mary Todd Lincoln for a time.

Brown, who moved to Livonia, Mich., allowed many of the mementoes given to him by the first lady to be autographed with a forged Lincoln signature and passed off as original Lincoln documents.



JOSEPH COSEY . . . had the touch of Lincoln.



Dr. McMurtry Dr. Warren

Dr. Louis A. Warren, who established the Lincoln Life Foundation, says even the federal government has been taken by an unknown Lincoln forger.

On display in the Library of Congress is a textbook Lincoln was supposed to have given to Ann Rutledge, his childhood sweetheart. In it is inscribed, presumably in Lincoln's hand, "Ann M. Rutledge is now learning grammar."

"This is not Lincoln's writing," said Dr. Warren. "Real students of Lincoln laugh when they see this."

Dr. Warren also pointed out that some of the best-known lithographs of Lincoln are forgeries of sorts.

Because the lithographer didn't want to spend the money on new plates, many just engraved the head of Lincoln on his predecessors. The foundation has examples of Lincoln's "head" on the bodies of Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun and James Buchanan.

Dr. McMurtry said the foundation never has been "taken" by a forger.

"That, perhaps, is because we want to know all about the Lincoln item before we buy it . . . where it came from, what kind of paper and ink were used . . . the date of letter . . . its literary quality."

He's at a loss, however, to explain a strange phenomenon on one bit of crude forgery.

"We know it's a fake, and a crude one, at that. But in the corner of the paper, a likeness of Lincoln's head had appeared. Each year it becomes more pronounced."

6a
JG 2/10/62
BY BOWERY DERELICT

LNL Foundation Has Forgery

The Lincoln National Life Foundation has one of the finest Lincoln collections in the world — but among the masterpieces is a faded “legal document” with a handwriting forgery by a Bowery derelict. It was thought to have been written by Lincoln when he was a lawyer in Illinois.

Joseph Cosey, an alcoholic, drug addict and New York City derelict, dumped hundreds of such flawless handwriting forgeries on the public. Cosey enjoyed signing the names Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Edgar Allan Poe, Rudyard Kipling and Mark Twain.

However, the Fort Wayne museum wanted this forgery. Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, director, said that the museum had paid \$75 for

the forgery because it is considered one of Cosey's best.

According to Dr. McMurtry, there is little difference between work done by Cosey who vanished from sight 17 years ago in upstate New York and hasn't been heard of since.

The difference does appear, according to the director, when Cosey wrote as he thought Lincoln should have written. When Cosey reached his peak, he turned out forgeries good enough to fool many of the nation's leading authorities in archeological documents. The New York Public Library sports a collection of Cosey masterpieces.

Apparently Cosey began his “business” when a dealer in antiques refused to buy an orig-

inal document by Franklin which Cosey had stolen from the Library of Congress. The dealer told Cosey that the document was fake. Cosey's “business” boomed. He forged several hundred Franklin documents and sold them to the dealers as originals.

Although he was convicted of forging checks, he was never convicted during his 20 years of forging documents. When he wanted to sell one of his “hand-written” works, Cosey would tell the dealer that he found the relic in his attic or among deceased relative's papers. Cosey never hesitated about the offers, accepting as little as \$5.

If the dealer discovered he did not have an original, he did not go to the police. For in accordance with Cosey's scheme, the dealer

had bought it as an original. Cosey had merely suggested that it might be worth something. The dealer was embarrassed for not knowing it wasn't original — not Cosey.

Dr. Louis Warren, who established the Lincoln Life Foundation, said that even the federal government had been fooled by various Lincoln forgers.

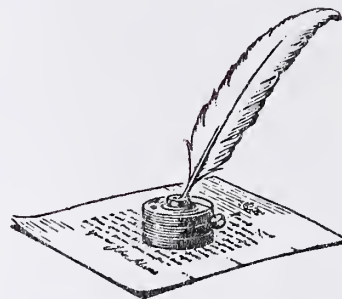
However, Dr. McMurtry said that the foundation itself has never been “taken” by a forger. The museum wanted the Cosey work. However, he admits that the collection includes one piece of forgery which he is unable to explain. He knows that it's fake. In the corner of the particular paper, a likeness of the Lincoln head appeared. Each year it becomes more pronounced.

See index for references on Cozey, Joseph

AUTOGRAPHS:
A KEY TO COLLECTING

BY

MARY A. BENJAMIN



CORRECTED AND REVISED, WITH A NEW PREFACE
AND A SELECTED LIST OF REFERENCE WORKS

NEW YORK
WALTER R. BENJAMIN AUTOGRAPHS

1963

AUTOGRAPHS & MANUSCRIPTS

LIST NO. 1

WILLIAM H. ALLEN, BOOKSELLER

Firm Established 1918

2031 WALNUT STREET

(215) 563-3398

PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103

#33 x 1204
placed in forgery file
R.C.
1-10-82

4 Patent Granted to a Pennsylvania Canal Engineer

1. ADAMS, JOHN QUINCY. Partly engraved vellum D.S. as President, Washington, D.C., 10 July 1826. 1 p., folio (37.5 x 27 cm.), with a second sheet of vellum, same size, attached. Countersigned by HENRY CLAY as Secretary of State and WILLIAM WIRT as Attorney General. \$650.00

A patent issued to Simeon Guilford for an improved "mode of preserving Timber used in the construction of wooden Locks for Canals." The schedule on the second sheet contains a description of the patented improvement. Guilford worked on the Pennsylvania Canal system, serving, just after this patent was issued, as chief engineer of the Susquehanna Division. Fine condition. All signatures dark. With white paper seal and with ribbons attaching the two sheets. An excellent display piece, tipped into an acid-free mat.

2. (AFRO-AMERICANA). Langston, John Mercer. L.S. to Henry Jerningham, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 12 March 1881. 1 p., 4to. \$115.00

A prominent black abolitionist, Langston was apparently the first black elected to public office in the U.S. when he was chosen clerk of Brownhelm, Ohio, in 1855. He established the law department at Howard University, served in the U.S. diplomatic and consular service from 1877-85, and was later a Republican Congressman from Virginia [DAB, X, 597-8]. This letter, written while Langston was U.S. minister to Haiti, refers Jerningham and his inquiry to Langston's private secretary. Very Good condition, with a fine, bold signature.

3. (AFRO-AMERICANA). Washington, Booker T. L.S. to Mrs. J. G. Walker, Tuskegee, Alabama, 27 January 1912. 1 p., 4to, on letterhead of the Tuskegee Institute. \$60.00

The most influential black leader of his day, Washington thanks Mrs. Walker for her gift of \$25.00 "I believe that the results which our graduates and former students, in the face of considerable difficulties, have obtained throughout the South will convince you of the wisdom of your investment." Very Good condition.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.S. (Autograph Document Signed); A.L.S. (Autograph Letter Signed); A.Ms.S. (Autograph Manuscript Signed); A.N.S. (Autograph Note Signed); A.Q.S. (Autograph Quote Signed); D. (Document); Ds. (Documents); D.S. (Document Signed); L. (Letter); Ls. (Letters); L.S. (Letter Signed); Ms. (Manuscript); n.d. (no date); n.p. (no place); T.L.S. (Typed Letter Signed).

4. AGASSIZ, ALEXANDER. A.N.S. to [Charles] Eliot, Castle Hill, Newport, [R.I.], 19 June [18]90. 1 p., on card (7 x 13 cm.) \$40.00

Zoologist and oceanographer, Alexander Agassiz succeeded his father, Louis, as curator of the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology in 1874. This note to the president of Harvard concerns appointments to the faculty or staff. Very Good condition.

5. AINSWORTH, W. HARRISON. A.Ms.S., n.p., n.d. 1 p., 8vo. \$75.00

Fair copy of three stanzas entitled "The Dirge of Bourbon" by the 19th century English novelist, best known for his very popular historical romances. Very Good condition. Small marginal tear repaired with tape on verso.

6. AINSWORTH, W. HARRISON. Signature, n.p., n.d. On a decorative card (5½ x 14 cm.) with a lace-patterned border. \$17.50

Very Good condition.

7. BARRY, JOHN. A.L.S. to Jonathan Dayton, Philadelphia, 7 June 1799. 1 p., 4to. With postmarked address panel. \$1000.00

The Revolutionary War naval hero who later held various commands in the U.S. Navy, Commodore Barry writes to Jonathan Dayton, U.S. Senator from New Jersey who had previously been a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and a New Jersey Congressman [DAB, V, 166]. Being "always ready to promote the views of young Gentlemen, who are anxious to enter into the service," Barry requests Dayton to "send them forward immediately; your recommendation being sufficient for me to receive them on board." Very Good condition. Mounted on slightly larger sheet with address panel mounted on verso of same sheet. Ink has bled or smudged slightly on some words, but letter is clear and legible.

A 19th Century New England Shipping Agent

8. BATES, JOSHUA. 12 A.L.S., various places, 1817-1849 and n.d. 13¼ pp., 4to and 2 pp., 8vo, 5 with integral address leaves with remnant of seal and/or postmark. \$750.00

Financier, philanthropist, and the principal founder of the Boston Public Library, Joshua Bates served from 1816-26 as general agent in Europe for William Gray, New England's leading shipping merchant. In 1828, Bates joined the international banking firm of Baring Brothers & Co., becoming eventually senior partner and "probably the most influential foreigner in private life in the British Isles" [DAB, II, 52-3; DNB, III, 398]. Eight of these letters document Bates's activities as European agent for William Gray. They contain his instructions and reports back to England while handling Gray's interests elsewhere and his comments on the general state of business; one has especially good information on the financial situation on the continent in January 1819. The remaining letters concern varied

social and business matters. All Very Good or Good condition, except one letter which is Fair-Good. Many with paper or tape repairs to small holes or marginal tears, usually on verso. 2 letters with very minor loss of text due to tears.

9. (BELLOSO, JUAN). 3 Ds. Chiconautla, Mexico City, 7 September 1616-27 January 1617. 40 pp., folio. \$300.00

An inquiry concerning the request of Sr. Belloso, a rancher in Ecatepec, for a license to maintain 200 head of dairy cattle on his two *estancias*. The testimony gathered provides information about Indian and church land holdings in the region. This is the retained copy of Licentiate don Francisco de las Casas, sitting judge in the inquiry and corregidor of Ecatepec. Very Good condition. Some tears in inner margins and to middle of first and last leaves, slightly affecting text.

Original Manuscript of a Pioneering Bibliography on Tea

10. BERGSMÄ, CORNELIO ADRIANO. Ms. Book: "Catalogus Auctorum qui de Thea Scripserunt." N.p., n.d. [ca. 1823-24]. 137 pp., folio. With 5 leaves of manuscript laid in, and with 3 small manuscript notes inserted in text. \$1000.00

The original manuscript for Bergsma's bibliography of writings on tea, which was published under the same title in Utrecht in 1825. The manuscript is unsigned, but a comparison of it with the printed version shows clearly that this is the author's working manuscript. On the recto of each page is a first draft, usually with extensive corrections, and additional entries or comments are written on the verso of many pages. The approximately 300 entries are in order by their date of publication up through 1824, as in the printed work. The 5 unsigned manuscript leaves laid in are in a hand different from that of Bergsma's manuscript, and they constitute 5 pages in Dutch on the subject of tea. Very Good condition. Original marbled boards. Uncut. Legibly penned on rectos, with added notes on some versos.

Mueller, *Bibliographie des Kaffee, Kakao, Tee* ... (1960), p. 19; Besterman, IV, 6014.

11. BIDDLE, CLEMENT. D.S. [Philadelphia], 15 September 1787. 3 pp., folio. With 7 paper seals, 5 in shape of stars. \$75.00

A power of attorney concerning the trading firm of Clement Biddle, a Philadelphia merchant who held a series of posts in the quartermaster's department during the Revolution and who was the first U.S. marshal in Pennsylvania [DAB, II, 239-40]. Biddle witnessed the document, which is also signed or witnessed by 8 others, including Charles Pettit who was assistant quartermaster general of the Continental Army, a member of the Pennsylvania assembly and the Continental Congress, and an original director and president of the Insurance Company of North America [DAB, XIV, 517-8]. Good condition. Two sheets partly torn along centerfold. Small holes or breaks along folds, with very minor loss of text, some repaired with archival tape or paper. All seals in Very Good condition.

correspondence, she discusses social engagements, asks for assistance in sending a manuscript from Rome to Florence, and describes a three day celebration, the "Popes fete," in Rome [DAB, V, 1-2]. Very Good condition. One letter with small marginal tears at fold.

27. (DANIELIS, PIETRO ANTONIO). Ms. Book: "Prove di Legitimità e Nobilità de D. Pietro Antonio Danielis Siracusano." [Italy, 18th century]. 93 pp., folio. \$200.00

A collection of proofs of legitimacy and nobility concerning Pietro Antonio Danielis of Syracuse in Sicily. All are copied in the same 18th century hand from 17th century documents, on paper with the Picador water mark. Verified in margins and notarized with seal at the end by the archivist F.A. Longo. Very Good condition. Contemporary half vellum. With the armorial bookplate of the Earl of Guilford. From the Library of Sir Thomas Phillips, MS 5821.

28. DRINKWATER, JOHN. A.Q.S. [Birmingham], January 1919. 1 p., 4to, on stationery of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. \$25.00

English dramatist, poet and critic, Drinkwater was a founder of the dramatic group that became the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. The quote is 12 lines from his "Abraham Lincoln." Very Good condition. Matted, framed and glazed.

29. EINSTEIN, ALBERT. T.L. Signed "A.E." to L.M. Ettlinger, Le Coq-sur-mer, 4 May 1933. 1 p., 4to. \$375.00

The letter, in German, makes an appointment for 6 May in Brussels and explains that Einstein has initiated steps to get a Belgian visa for Mr. Lasareff. Signed "A.E." with the signature weak, as Einstein used a nearly dry pen. Very Good condition. Left margin uneven where torn from notepad. A few very slight marginal tears.

30. (ENGLISH ARTISTS). 8 A.Ls.S., 1 signature, 1 engraving, 1 photograph, by or about 19th century British artists. Various places, 1858-1889, and n.d. Various sizes, ranging from 4 x 8 cm. to 4to. \$85.00

Materials include signature and photograph of John Everett Millais; 7 A.Ls.S. (15 pp. total) by Frederick Leighton, Edward M. Ward, George C. Stanfield, and Richard Westmacott (1799-1872, son of Sir Richard Westmacott); 1 A.L.S. (4 pp.) by James Nasmyth, English inventor, engineer and astronomer, whose father Alexander and brother Patrick were painters; engraving of Frederick Leighton. All but one item in Very Good condition. Letters previously mounted, with tape or residue of paper on verso. 1 letter in Fair-Good condition, with numerous tears repaired with archival tape and with several small holes, slightly affecting text.

31. (ENGLISH THEATER). 5 A.Ls.S. by individuals connected with the 19th century English theater, various places, 1817-1854 and n.d. 11 pp., 8vo. 2 letters with integral address leaves and 1 with paper seal. \$35.00

Materials include a newsy letter by the English comedic actress Fanny Stirling, letters by playwrights James Sheridan Knowles, Joanna Baillie, and John Banim, the "Scot of Ireland," and a letter by English theater manager Alfred Bunn. Very Good condition. All but one letter laid onto a larger sheet. One letter with small piece torn from second sheet, not affecting text, and with small marginal tears and a few holes caused by ink.

32. ETTY, WILLIAM. A.L.S. to Mr. Varty, "14 Buckingham Street, Strand," July 1845. 1 p., 8vo. \$40.00

An English painter of historical and mythological subjects, Etty sent this letter with his gift of a portrait: "You saved this Head from being painted out. I know no one who has a better right to it than yourself. Please then to accept it. . . ." Very Good condition. Two small pieces torn from left margin, not affecting text. Remnants of album page from prior mounting on verso.

33. (FORGERY). Lincoln, Abraham. Forgery by Joseph Cosey of A.L.S. by Abraham Lincoln to Henry Clay Whitney, City Point, Va., 2 September 1862. 1 p. (12.5 x 20 cm.). \$100.00

The letter requests the Paymaster General to give back pay to the bearer, if his claim is found valid. It is almost certainly a Cosey forgery. Very Good condition. One small tear at top along center fold and a few very minor marginal tears.

34. FORREST, EDWIN. A.L.S. to E. Sargent, n.p., 1838. 1 p., 4to. \$100.00

The celebrated American actor agrees to read Sargent's adaptation of "Philip van Artevelde," an historical drama by Sir Henry Taylor, published in 1834: "I have long entertained the opinion that a most successful stage play might be wrought out of the ample and excellent material which Mr. Taylor has furnished." The recipient is probably Epes Sargent [DAB, XVI, 356-57], a prolific writer, editor and journalist who began writing and publishing plays in the mid-1830's. Very Good condition. Laid onto a larger sheet; corners trimmed, with loss of month in date. With an engraving and a lithograph of Forrest, each laid onto a larger sheet.

35. FRANKLIN, WILLIAM. D.S. [Burlington, N.J.], 26 September 1772. 3 pp., double folio. \$300.00

Son of Benjamin Franklin, William Franklin was appointed the royal governor of New Jersey in 1763 and took a pro-British stance during the controversies leading up to the Revolution [DAB, VI, 600-1]. This document is an act authorizing the landowners along English's Creek in Burlington County, New Jersey, to build a dam, and it is typical of the practical improvements in which Franklin took a special interest as governor. The document is also signed by the clerk and speaker of New Jersey's House of Representatives and by the speaker of the council. Very Good condition. All pages strengthened on verso. One signature, of the speaker of the House of Representatives, partially lost due to ink acidity and paper tears.

36. [FRIENDS, SOCIETY OF. PENNSYLVANIA AND NEW JERSEY YEARLY MEETING]. Ms. Book. N.p., n.d. (ca. 1750-1760). Small 4to, 51 pp. (+ 4 pp. index). \$700.00

A copy of the Book of Discipline drawn up in 1719 at the Yearly Meeting for Pennsylvania and New Jersey, along with additions to the discipline made by the 1747 and 1749 Yearly Meetings. The Book of Discipline sets out the right method for conducting religious and personal affairs, such as proper meeting structure and the settlement of disputes over worldly goods. It also lists individual "Disorders, or unbecoming practices," against which overseers and other Quakers must take action. These include nonattendance at worship services, excessive drinking at weddings and burials, meddling and backbiting, "the practice of Giving Rum to Excite people to bid" at auctions, the importation of Negro slaves, and the sale of liquor to Indians. Very

Good condition. Contemporary wrappers bound in. Late 19th century half calf, worn. Top and bottom margins closely trimmed.

37. FULLER, GEORGE. A.L.S. to Benjamin, Deerfield, [Mass.], 14 July 1857. 3 pp., 8vo. \$30.00

An American artist whose works had an elusive and mystical quality [DAB, VII, 54-6], Fuller discusses the visit of a cousin, mentions spending the winter in Mobile, and adds that " . . . the Country of Deerfield was never looking so finely." Very Good condition. Two very minor fold breaks.

38. GODKIN, E.L. A.L.S. to [Charles] Eliot, [Cambridge, Mass.], n.d. 2 pp., 8vo. \$40.00

Founder and editor of the influential weekly *The Nation* (1865-1899), Godkin was also editor-in-chief of the *New York Evening Post* (1883-1900). He asks the president of Harvard in this letter to meet with M. Carey Thomas, president of Bryn Mawr College, and to advise her "about the filling of a vacant chair there, in the Biological department, I think." Very Good condition.

39. GRAMMONT, ANTOINE, DUC DE. A.L.S. to the Marquis of Poyanne. Paris, 13 June 1634. 3 pp., 4to. \$325.00

A Peer and Marshall of France and Viceroy of Navarre, Grammont thanks the Marquis, who was serving as a lieutenant general in Navarre, for his advice and sends him urgent instructions as to the military conduct of the province during "the difficulties." Fine condition. Inlaid on a sheet of small folio, and bound, along with five engraved portraits, in deluxe, full, straight grained, brown, flexible morocco, gilt ruled and with inner dentelles. A.e.g. A very fine example, complete with original wax seals and silk threads, of this rare signature.

40. HARPER, ROBERT GOODLOE. A.L.S. to Mathew Carey, Baltimore, 8 January 1823. 1½ pp., 4to, with integral address leaf with postmark and remnant of seal. \$75.00

A prominent Federalist Congressman from South Carolina (1795-1801), Harper established a significant law practice in Baltimore beginning in 1801 [DAB, VIII, 285-6]. In this letter, he tells Mathew Carey [DAB, III, 489-491], the Irish-born Philadelphia publisher and economist, that he expects to read two of Carey's pamphlets "with much profit . . . for though I hold different opinions from you, on some very material points of political economy, I have great pleasure in acknowledging, that your writings tend much to the elucidation of this most important branch of science, in its application to our situation and affairs." Very Good condition. Two sheets almost completely separated along center fold, with two small tape repairs. Seal tear on second sheet repaired with paper, causing some offsetting on first sheet. Two marginal tears, one, on second sheet, repaired with tape.

41. HOFMANN, JOSEF. A.L.S. to [Charles] Eliot, North East Harbor, Me., 29 August 1918. 1 p., 4to. With envelope. \$30.00

Pianist and composer, Hofmann thanks Eliot, the retired president of Harvard, for attending a recital and urges him to publish a recent address on music. "At the present crucial time in the musical life of this country an admonition coming from a man of your achievements and authority would be of the utmost importance and ought, therefore, to be given to the public at large." Very Good condition.



A U C T I O N
Number 149

NEW

YORK

SHERATON

7th Avenue at 56th Street

SEPTEMBER 16, 1982

97 KOKOSCHKA, OSKAR. Austrian painter. A.Ms.S., seven lines penned on a card, 1959. "A visit to...Pompeii or the paintings from the basilica at Herculaneum, all done by ancient Greek painters, ought to make us conscious of the savage trend in the arts in modern society...The low level, I mean, of our time." Fine. With original envelope addressed in his hand, and a newspaper clipping about him. Three pieces.(100/150)

98 LINCOLN, ABRAHAM. President. Partly-printed D.S. as President, about 1 full page, oblong large folio, Washington, July 16, 1861. Appointment of Wm. H. DeCosta as deputy postmaster at Charlestown, Mass., countersigned by Wm. H. Seward, sec. state, and bearing large

Abraham Lincoln

U.S. white-paper seal. Minor fold breaks, and a few slight marginal defects, otherwise about fine, the signature bold and dark.(750/1000)

16 13 82

99 (LINCOLN, ABRAHAM). Forgery by JOS. COSEY of a purported A.D.S. of Lincoln, four lines on an oblong narrow 8vo sheet, Executive Mansion, Jan. 20, 1865. Order suspending clearances for the "exportation of hay" from the U.S., bearing a forged counter-signature of E. M. Stanton. With a carte photo of Lincoln. An interesting example of Cosey's work.(75/100)

100 (LINCOLN, ABRAHAM). Group of six pieces. Comprises: EDWIN MARKHAM (poet), printed broadside of his poem, "Lincoln, the Man of the People," as read at the Lincoln monument dedication, signed and dated 1927 ☐ LINCOLN ANCESTOR, manuscript deed, Hingham, New England (Mass.), 1722, conveying to John Beale two shares of, "the undivided Common Lands of Hingham...formerly the Estate of my late husband Caleb," signed with an "L" mark by MARGARET LINCOLN; witnessed by Sam. Maxter J.P., Elisha Leavitt and Ben. Loring, and certified by Ezekiel Goldthwait, recorder, 1753 ☐ FORGERY, genuine contemporary copy of War Dept. Special Order #126, Mar. 24, 1864, dishonorably discharging Lt. Hiram Weed of the 52nd Penna. at Lincoln's order for, "rendering false and fraudulent accounts," genuinely signed by Weed's regimental adjutant, Geo. Sterling, but also bearing a *forged* ("Approved./A. Lincoln") endorsement at top, probably by Joseph Cosey ☐ D.S. (by mark) of soldier Wm. Parie, Co. K, 104th N.Y., Petersburg, Va., authorizing Jas. Johnston of Troy to cast his vote at the Presidential election of Nov. 8, 1864, witnessed by a captain ☐ R. E. Raymond, A.L.S. as editor of the *Morning Advertiser*, London, 1883, to Robert T. Lincoln asking for the "Records of the War" ☐ ASSASSINATION, L.S. of attorney Thos. I. Hughes, N.Y.C., Apr. 27, 1865, to his partner Maj. Lewis Stegman, "...Republicans and Democrats are all in mourning for the Murder of our Constitutionally elected president...I never was his friend politically but he was president..." Mostly good to very good. Together, six pieces.(90/130)

101 (LINCOLN: DEATH OF E. E. ELLSWORTH). JOHN G. NICOLAY, Lincoln's private secretary and biographer. Historic A.L.S., 1/2 page, 4to, May 24, 1861. To Capt. (later Admiral) Dahlgren: "The President desires that the funeral of Col. Ellsworth take place from the Executive Mansion. For this reason it will be necessary to remove the body early in the morning. Please afford Major Sherman all the facilities you can in this." Minor foxing, otherwise fine. Elmer E. Ellsworth was briefly a student and clerk in Lincoln's law office, campaigned for his election, and served as

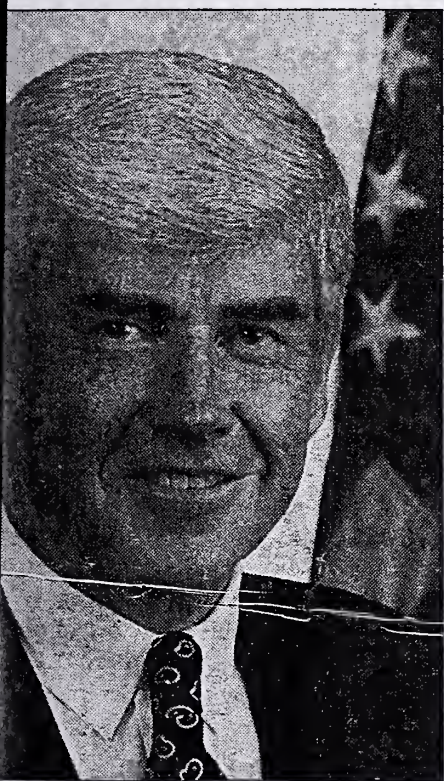
Autograph TIMES

The Newspaper for
Autograph Collectors

Vol. 1, No. 4
May/June 1994

Autopen signatures

through contact with other collectors. Unfortunately, some celebrities have "one autograph only" policy even



1996 presidential candidate, Jack Bush, has a high demand among autograph collectors. Usually receive this photo, signed by

When sending autopen signatures, which makes them more difficult to detect.

(Continued on page 22)

Private signing

Arrangement with ice skater Tonya Harding. The agreement was signed shortly before the 23-year old athlete entered a plea bargain which may end

Cosey forgeries still causing headaches for collectors

by Barbara Pengelly

Joseph Cosey, a small, slender man of nondescript appearance, was perhaps the greatest forger of historic manuscripts and signatures in this century.

From the early 1930s until shortly after World War II, he "papered" the country with his forgeries of Lincoln, Franklin, Poe, and many other well-known Americans. Cosey material continues to show up in autograph and manuscript dealers' catalogs and at auctions around the country.

Sadly, I'm well acquainted with Cosey forgeries. It's not pleasant to find out your \$7,000 Lincoln partial legal document was created by Cosey and really worth about \$300. (Fortunately, we had proof from an unimpeachable source — The Lincoln Library in Springfield, Ill. — to back us up, and the dealer immediately refunded our money.)

Since then, I have studied Cosey's work and the many books containing mention of this interesting forger and am reasonably confident this will not happen to me again.

Born Martin Coneely (sic) in Syracuse, N.Y., on February 18, 1887, he

(Continued on page 3)

River Phoenix fakes surface



Ever since his death, numerous forgeries have appeared of actor River Phoenix. In some, the signature looks nothing like his real scrawl, shown here in an in-person signed photo. See story page 13 for details.

Michael Jordan got us started

by Kim Janssen & class

Who would have thought that a letter to Michael Jordan a few years ago would have resulted in such a collection!

Four years ago, my Intermediate Hearing Impaired class at Jefferson Elementary School in Charleston, Ill., wrote a letter to Michael Jordan using an address we had found in *Dynamite Magazine*, a kid's magazine published by Scholastic.

When he sent each student an 8x10 signed colored picture the class was so excited that "it just got us started!" From then on my interpreter, Jacquie Hortenstine, and I used writing letters as part of our regular lesson plans. We call our program "Writing for a Reason." Our

(Continued on page 12)

Cosey forgeries still causing headaches...

(Continued from page 1)

was the son of an Irish cabinetmaker. School came easy for him, and he ranked near the top of his class. But something happened when he was 17. He quarreled furiously with his father and left home, never to return.

From an older brother he had picked up a rudimentary knowledge of printing, and he wandered about picking up work first as an apprentice printer and then as a typesetter. Later, Cosey became unemployed because of the increasing use of the newly developed Linotype machine. He tried Army life for a while but was dishonorably discharged in 1913 after fighting with the company cook. In fact his first venture into forgery might have been the Certificate of Honorable Discharge he used when applying for work.

Cosey knew how to keep from being arrested. He strictly avoided misrepresenting the documents he faked. Playing on people's greed, he would approach a dealer with a document and casually ask if it was "worth anything." Cosey let his victims set the price, and they usually paid him less than what they would have given a seller they thought was knowledgeable.

"I take pleasure in fooling the professionals," he often said. Cosey sold his fakes for more than 20 years and was convicted only once. His audacity knew no bounds. Within a short period, he was forging whole letters and other manuscripts, becoming so familiar with the style of some of these historical personages that he improvised the text. He admitted to getting as much as \$50 for some of his fakes. This, of course, was when Lincoln documents sold for a tiny fraction of what they cost today.

Many famous collections at one time contained a Cosey or two; even the Parke-Benet Galleries once scheduled a Cosey Lincoln for sale. Fortunately, it was discovered to be a forgery before the auction started.

In 1934, the New York Public Library set up a special file known as the Cosey Collection. It was soon composed of Lincolns, Poes, Franklins, Rittenhouses, Eddys, Washingtons, Stantons, Jeffersons, as well as a Patrick Henry, Alexander Hamilton, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Sir Francis Bacon, a Button Gwinnett and more. If this collection had been genuine, in today's markets it would have been worth millions. It's known that Cosey often stopped by the library to check on

the progress of this collection.

Suddenly, in 1947, the forgeries stopped appearing. Dealers and auction houses assumed he had died, and relaxed. He would have been about 66

then, and had been known to be both alcoholic and a drug addict.

However, one day in 1954, a frail, elderly man sold a Mary Baker Eddy and three Lincolns in upstate New York — all definitely Cosey forgeries. That was 30 years ago and he's undoubtedly dead now, but his material continues in circulation as a trap for the unwary.

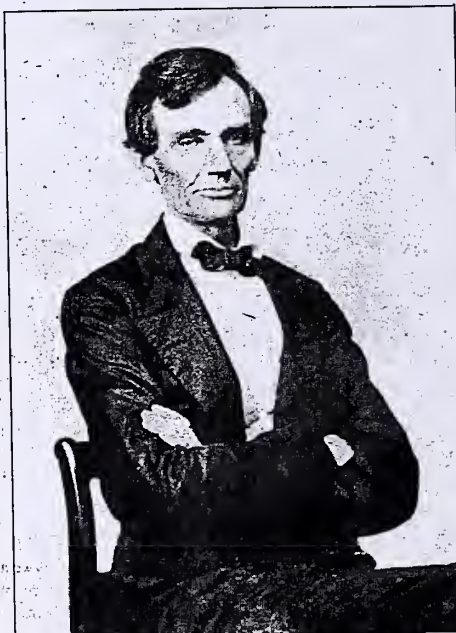
To protect yourself against buying a Cosey forgery, purchase material only from dealers who guarantee the authenticity of their material forever.

Know a little about what to look for. If the "In" in Lincoln is NOT about 1/16 of an inch higher than the "Li," you may be looking at a Cosey forgery. Old Ink is hard to duplicate. The ink in Cosey forgeries has a characteristic "sheen" absent from authentic documents. Also, look for oddities in the text. Ben Franklin & George Washington, for instance, never ended their letters with "Very truly yours."

Be aware, though, that the paper of the more ambitious forgeries is almost always correct for the period. Cosey often embellished real documents with short notes and fake signatures and cut out blank pages from books to use for other forgeries, especially if the paper had the watermark of T. Edmonds, a stationer of the mid 19th century whose paper was known to have been used by Lincoln.

As with all historic documents, be cautious, ask questions, and get that guarantee!

(Barb Pengelly and her husband John are autograph dealers in Fort Washington, Penn. They guarantee all purchases and preach conservation of your paper treasures. They can be reached at 502 Madison Ave., Ft. Washington, PA 19034, 215-643-5646.)



Ab Lincoln
Atty. for Plaintiff

The signature above was examined by the Lincoln Library, which determined that it was actually a forgery by Joseph Cosey.

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JOSEPH COSEY

Cosey was a 'tramp' printer from Iowa who lost his job to advanced technology, the linotype. He drifted into crime and accumulated a list of convictions ranging from vagrancy to forging checks.

He was the aristocrat of forgery. He specialized in Lincoln signatures and was convincing because of his careful attention to paper, ink, and historical facts. He would pilfer flyleaves and margins from old books and dilute iron rust filings to make it appear to be old ink.

Cosey sold hundreds of nearly perfect handwriting forgeries. He was an alcoholic, drug addict, and derelict. His 'masterpieces' were created in Bowery flophouses in New York City. His fate is unknown.

I HAVE a letter from an old friend "Doc," otherwise Harold D. Willis of Eureka, Ill. He propounds a question that I haven't succeeded in answering. Perhaps some one can help me out. "Doc" asks: "For whom, what newspaper or printing plant did one Joseph Cosey work when he was a resident of Peoria several years ago?"

This man was a clever forger of old, valuable and historic documents and one of the aristocracy of the literary underworld. "Joseph Cosey" was but one of the seven aliases he used. His specialty was, and so far as I know, still is, making copies of Lincoln letters and documents and selling them to gullible bibliophiles and collectors.

He was a tramp printer from Iowa and, while working in Peoria, ran across a ledger of paper watermarked "Moinier's 1851." He knew that Lincoln, while practicing law in Illinois wrote his legal briefs on this type of watermarked paper. He persuaded the owner of the ledger to sell it and has been using it ever since. He also uses the flyleaves of old books and dilutes iron rust to use for ink.

It seems this Cosey can fool the best of collectors with his copies of old letters and documents and made his living for years at this trade. He does not make any claim that his papers are genuine, so has not been convicted of forgery. He lets the buyers fool themselves.

John Kobler had an interesting story in the Saturday Evening Post of March 13, in which he described the work of G. William Bergquist of the New York library. It was: "Trailing the Book Crooks" and told how Bergquist trapped some of them.

I wish that anyone who knew Joseph Cosey, if that were the name he used in Peoria, would get in touch with me.—C. B. S.

