

June 11, 1974

Miss Susan Colgan
American Heritage
1221 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10020

Dear Miss Colgan:

Naturally I was glad to learn that you plan to use my story about sheet music.

If you should later desire to use original sheets of music, I will send them to you. I may withhold one or two of the most valuable items which I do not like to ship out of town. In such exceptional cases, possibly you would accept "glossies".

Since you asked more information about my biggest scoop and about the \$12,000 purchase, here goes:

My most exciting experience was, as mentioned in the article, the acquisition of the "Star Spangled Banner." In 1938 I had been offered a copy by a New York dealer. The back was torn; I wanted one which was not imperfect, so I told my friend, Elliott Shapiro, about it and he bought it. Elliott then felt obligated to let me know if he ever ran across another copy, which he did about two years later. This copy turned up in Hagerstown, Maryland, located by a "runner" named Eaton. After Elliott had 'phoned me and told me about it, I met Eaton at a Hagerstown hotel and bought the copy from him, with some cash down and a demand note to cover the balance. One detail struck me as a bit peculiar. Eaton had said on the 'phone that the piece was in an old bound volume of music; but when he sold it to me it had been torn out of the volume which was nowhere to be seen. Still, it was almost a "mint" copy except for a couple of ragged edges.

Eaton seemed anxious for me to leave Hagerstown immediately, and was actually persistent about it. However, before quitting the city, I stopped in a second-hand furniture shop which had occasionally displayed volumes of old sheet music. The owner, a man named Knodle, told me that he again had come across some books of music, including an early edition of the "Star Spangled Banner," and that a man had inspected the books that very morning but had not bought anything. I examined the books but could not find the piece he described, until after putting two and two together, and inspecting one of the volumes

carefully, I discovered that Eaton had removed the song from it, for the jagged edges of my sheet fitted into two similar jagged edges in the volume. So I gave it back to Knodle and proceeded to buy it all over again, a deal which took another week and which cost more than Knodle had asked originally, because in the interim he found out something of its value, (which by 1974 has increased one hundred fold). Of course this piece today is my most prized possession. It is one of nine known copies of the first edition of the "Star Spangled Banner." Oh, a sequel. I had 'phoned Shapiro about Eaton and the theft. The following morning our slippery friend called on Shapiro and asked him to cash my note. Instead, Shapiro told him to stand against the wall, and reached for the phone to call the police. Eaton threw the note on the floor, dashed out the door, and was never seen again.

As for the \$12,000 purchase story, there is not too much to add to what I have written.

The end of World War II celebration was held in Dick Townsend's New York apartment. Harry Dichter, Mal Stone, Elliott Shapiro, Lloyd Keepers and several others were there. After a few rounds of drinks, we all began to brag about our collections. One of the "boys" boasted, "I value my collection at \$12,000", whereupon in the flush of excitement I yelled, "Why, I'd give you \$12,000 for it," and he immediately yelled back, "Sold!"

Instantly, we both sobered up when we realized the extent of the transaction. Each of us had our particular cronies, and in each case we were advised, "You've got a good deal. Go through with it." So we did; and that's the story.

Sincerely yours,

Lester S. Levy

LSL:vmm