

Autographs of Signers of the Declaration of Independence, and of the Constitution

By Lyman C. Draper

The London *Athenæum* declared, in 1855, that "the story of what history owes to the autograph collectors would make a pretty book." Interesting as this phase of the subject might be made, it is not the purpose of the present paper to attempt its elucidation.

Sir Richard Phillips, whose career extended from 1767 to 1840, claimed in his day to have been the pioneer in the collection of autographs. This *may* have been true so far as England is concerned, limiting his collection to varieties made for the single object of curiosity. An autograph collection, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, should not be confounded with collections of historical manuscripts, made and preserved by governments, libraries, and historians, for purposes of public records, and as materials for historic literature. Such collections date back to the times of papyrus manuscripts, and the Alexandrian Library, long anterior to the discovery of printing.

Some vague references to autographs may be traced back to the palmy days of Greece and Rome. Autograph signatures in albums, we are told, were known as early as 1466; and about the year 1550, persons of quality took about with them elegant blank books for the signatures of eminent persons or valued friends. One of these albums, preserved in the British Museum, bears date 1578. In Germany, over three hundred years ago, the practice of making collections of autographs seems to have been quite common. It began with noblemen, and persons of taste and wealth. The custom soon spread to other countries. Many large autograph collections were formed in the sixteenth century, notably