

Meet Michael Bortner

THIS MONTH WE TRAVEL TO THE Sunshine State to visit Michael Bortner of Melbourne Beach, Florida. Michael is a 51-year-old dentist and has been collecting autographs since the early 1960s. He's also a member of the UACC Speaker's Bureau.

David Grossberg: What first sparked your interest in autographs?

Michael Bortner: I collected various in-person autographs as a kid whenever the opportunity presented itself. At the time most of my autographs were those of local sports heroes. I got serious about collecting 20 years ago when I began to actively acquire signatures of U.S. presidents, Civil War generals, and military heroes from World Wars I and II.

What advice do you have for a beginning collector?

I would recommend that they narrow their area of interest and focus on what they really love. In that way, you can assemble a more interesting and concentrated collection.

What mistakes have you made?

I should have developed a relationship much earlier than I did with a trusted, reputable autograph dealer. There are many pitfalls to negotiate for the novice collector. A good dealer can help to lessen or eliminate the impact of those pitfalls.

What's your most prized item?

I have a war-date A.E.S from Confederate General J.E.B Stuart. He was my biggest hero as a kid!

What item would you most like to obtain?

I would like a war-date signature of Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson.

What is your favorite in-person experience?

In the early 1990s I had the pleasure of meeting Neil Armstrong at a business meeting. I was in a small group invited to speak with Mr. Armstrong. As I approached him to shake his hand I said, "I clearly remember

the day that you walked on the moon!" He smiled broadly at me and said, "Great! I do too!" While the others in the group laughed, I was undaunted and asked Armstrong for his autograph. He was happy to oblige.

How do you explain your passion to someone who doesn't collect?

Nearly everyone knows of my love of history. Because of this I am happy to show people pieces from my collection. Non-collectors



tend to get very excited when they are able to see and touch items that were held by famous personalities. Autographs are palpable pieces of history that provide connections to those event makers, many of whom are long deceased. Autograph collecting has the ability to take the great distances that separate the past from the present and draw the periods closer together. **A**

UACC welcomes Stuart Lutz of Stuart Lutz Historic Documents as the newest member of the UACC Approved Appraisers & Authenticators Program. Stuart has been involved in the field for more than 25 years and is an accomplished writer of many articles of interest within the field. Stuart's specialty is general Americana.

The Universal Autograph Collectors Club was founded in 1965. If you are a collector interested in being interviewed for this column, email David Grossberg at dgrossberg@charter.net. Please include a short biography of yourself and what you collect. Fellow collectors want to hear your story!