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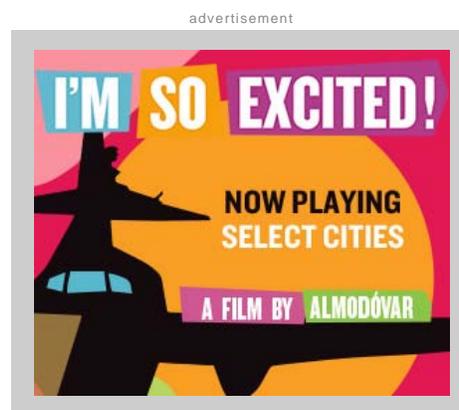
## Alexander Graham Bell auction halted; Smithsonian disputes 'gift'

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Alexander Graham Bell in 1903, holding a tetrahedron, the shape on which he hoped to base a kite-like flying machine. The photo is part of a research archive that was pulled from a historical artifacts auction Wednesday in Westlake Village as questions arose over its provenance. (Profiles in History)

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By Mike Boehm  
July 10, 2013 | 2:03 p.m.

A historic archive documenting Alexander Graham Bell's attempt in the early 1900s to build a kite-like aircraft that would allow humans to fly was pulled back from an auctioneer's gavel in Westlake Village on Wednesday.

The Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic Society joined Bell's heirs in challenging the archive's sale. They raised questions about whether the telephone inventor's family had voluntarily transferred the archive to a Smithsonian curator in the mid-1950s for his personal use.

Profiles in History, a Calabasas auction house specializing in historical documents and Hollywood memorabilia, had



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estimated in the online auction catalog that the 217 pages of laboratory notes and more than 950 unpublished photographs documenting Bell's manned-flight experiments would fetch as much as \$150,000 in the auction at the Hyatt Westlake Plaza hotel.

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Nancy Seltzer, spokeswoman for Profiles in History President Joseph Maddalena, said, "The item is being pulled because Joe Maddalena will not sell something if there is any controversy. That doesn't mean the Smithsonian is right."

The auction catalog says that around 1955, Paul Edward Garber, the first head of what's now the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, "acquired the archive for his personal use from the family of Alexander Graham Bell."

The catalog says that "in 1991 Garber gifted the archive to the current owner," who consigned it to Profiles in History for Wednesday's auction.

A letter sent Tuesday to Maddalena by Judith Leonard, the Smithsonian's general counsel; Terrence B. Adamson, executive vice president of the National Geographic Society; and Bell's great-grandson Edwin S. Grosvenor asked that the sale be delayed to allow further investigation into how Bell's research archive had come into Garber's possession.

Bell's heirs always intended his papers to be available to the public for research and study, the letter said. Much of his archival material was loaned until 1976 to the National Geographic Society, which kept it in a special "Bell Room" at its Washington, D.C., headquarters. The family gave that collection to the Library of Congress, where it now resides.

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The letter says it would have been out of character for family members to have made an exception for Garber, because they, like Bell himself until his death in 1922, "have been meticulous about preserving the papers and historical record pertaining to [his] work and life."

Instead, the family, Smithsonian and National Geographic Society believe that "Garber was loaned the items in his official capacity as head curator of the National Air Museum, precursor to what is now the National Air and Space Museum. We surmise that these items made their way into Paul Garber's home (he was known for taking work materials home with him) where they were commingled with his personal papers instead of being returned to their proper owners and custodians." Garber died in 1992.

Grosvenor, who is president of the American Heritage Society and editor in chief of American Heritage Magazine, contacted The Times less than three hours before the auction of his great-grandfather's archive was scheduled to begin.

He said in an email that Profiles in Heritage "was ignoring" the request he'd made Tuesday along with the Smithsonian and National Geographic.

After The Times sought comment from Profiles in History minutes before the 11 a.m. auction, its spokeswoman said Bell's research archive was being held back from sale because of the questions being raised.

Other items in Wednesday's auction included rare edition books by Charles Dickens, a typewriter that had belonged to Ernest Hemingway and memorabilia of several U.S. presidents.

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