



Paul Newman:

By: Tricia Eaton

A Signature Study



To Ronnie
Best wishes
Paul Newman

1/2
1/2

Paul Newman. His iconic baby blues and charismatic persona captivated generations of moviegoers during a career spanning an impressive 55 years. Paul's passing in September 2008, at the age of 83, marked the end of an era in the entertainment field.

Yet Newman was so much more than just an actor. He was a wildly successful entrepreneur, an ardent philanthropist, a skilled director and producer, even an accomplished racecar driver – not to mention a father of six and loving husband to actress Joanne Woodward during an unheard-of 50-year Hollywood marriage.

I've found that there are a lot of misconceptions about Paul Newman. It may come as a surprise to some that throughout his acting career, he was continually overlooked at the Oscars. Although he was nominated for the Best Actor Academy Award eight times – the third highest male nomination record in the history of the awards – he won only once, for *The Color of Money* (1986). Upon winning, Paul said "It's like chasing a beautiful woman for 80 years. Finally, she relents, and you say, 'I'm terribly sorry. I'm tired.'"

Perhaps more importantly to autograph collectors, Paul gets a bad rap as being a reluctant signer. After talking to several in-person autograph collectors who met Newman during different stages in his life, I learned that his signing attitude progressed throughout his career. Luckily for autograph collectors, it seemingly improved with age.

Prior to beginning research for this article, I was under the same impression as most in the autograph field. On more than one occasion, "vintage" collectors told me Newman refused to sign for them in the 50s and 60s.

Repeatedly hearing about these experiences, I inferred that Paul was a reluctant signer who could care less about his adoring fans. Fortunately, as my research progressed, I found that preconception couldn't be further from the truth.

Modern collectors shared with me their recent experiences with Paul. One particular collector, Jesse Adams of California, said he met him at the airport in 2006 and asked for his autograph. Paul's answer was, "Okay, one per customer," and he signed for five people.

Fellow autograph enthusiast Steve Grad shared his experience, as well, stating, "Newman would never sign at the [race] track for professionals, but would sign at his hotel. He would normally stay pretty close to the track. Friends also had luck getting him at the private airport or airport entrances where he would go into and come out from his private plane. He was a great signer in person, nice guy, and at times would sign five to ten things. That was in the early and mid 1980's."

PAUL'S ACTING PROWESS

To be honest, being from a younger generation, I had never even watched a Newman movie before starting work on this feature. Half a dozen movies later, I can now say he truly is my favorite actor. Paul's finesse, charm, and ease in front of the camera are nothing short of intoxicating, his famous blue eyes piercingly unmistakable.

If you go back to the very beginning, Paul's star first began to rise on the New York theater scene. His first leading Broadway role was in *Picnic* in 1953. At this early stage in his career, who could have predicted where his career was about to go?

Following a few years of hard work on Broadway, and one box office bust with *The Silver Chalice* (1954), Paul got his big break. He landed his premier silver

screen role as boxing legend Rocky Graziano in *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956), receiving rave reviews. Paul completely transformed his appearance and delivered an outstanding performance.

This movie put Newman on the map, and, naturally, fans began to ask for his autograph in droves. It has been said that Newman was repeatedly mistaken for Marlon Brando early in his career and facetiously signed hundreds of signatures, "Best wishes, Marlon Brando." Interestingly enough, however, RR Auction has yet to see an example of Newman's Brando impression in over 30 years of business.

During the mid to late 50s, leading-man role opportunities began rolling in, and the man with the famous blue eyes did nothing to disappoint. Newman's turn as Brick Pollitt, an ex-football star turned hapless alcoholic, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1959) was electric, resulting in his first Best Actor Oscar nomination. Although a lesser known Newman flick, *The Young Philadelphians* (1959) is a brilliant film chronicling Anthony Lawrence's lifelong endeavor to climb the Philadelphia social ladder.

The absolutely iconic *Hustler* (1961) showcases Paul as up-and-coming billiards master and swindler Eddie Felson, desperate to trump reigning pool master "Minnesota Fats" (portrayed spectacularly by Jackie Gleason). And who could forget one of Paul's most fondly remembered roles as an incorrigible prisoner in *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), spawning the famous tagline "What we've got here is a failure to communicate"?

Paul continued to impress audiences throughout the 60s and 70s with such classics as *Hud* (1963), *Burch Cassidy* and *The Sundance Kid* (1969), *The Sting* (1973), and *Slapshot* (1977). The 80s delivered two of Newman's most critically acclaimed performances in *The Verdict* (1982) and *The Color of*

Money (1986). Throughout the 90s and even into the new millennium, Paul continued to deliver in films such as The Road to Perdition (2002) and by lending his voice somewhat unexpectedly to the animated film Cars (2006).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAUL'S SIGNATURE STYLE

Not unlike other superstars, as Newman's career progressed, his signature changed. However, Paul almost always maintained key points. Overall, his style changed to a more free-flowing, less "straight-on" style. His autograph became altogether more compact and less spread out – rounder and almost "bubbly" in appearance.

In the early examples, take note of the pronounced "N" in Newman, at times stretching across the entire length of his last name. At this point, Paul's

signature maintained very straight, confident lines, something that would loosen up noticeably over time.

Also, Paul's "P" was very elongated – this continued throughout his career. If you notice the "P" shadows his entire first name. Later on, it would encompass his entire name, first and last.

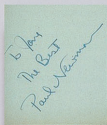
Another unique factor of Newman's early signature – which continued throughout most of his career – was the way he connected the "u" and "l" in Paul. The end of the "u" was noticeably shorter in height and connected to the ending "l," which closely resembled a capital "P." (See early promo photos, which, due to their visual appeal, garner the highest prices at auction).

Paul's favorite sentiment was "Best wishes." In these early promotional

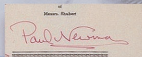
photos, take note of the unique way he connected the "es" in "Best."

Toward the end of his last name, Paul trailed off, most times not fully finishing the "an" in Newman. Apart from very early examples, it was usually no more than a pointy hump. Over time, Newman only formed up to the "w," then simply made a swish afterwards. Toward the end, Paul's last name was pretty much a unique combination of the letters in "New" intricately assembled on top of one another.

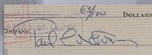
Paul topped off his autograph with a flourish. Early on, it trailed from the closing "n" in Newman and crossed back under his entire name. As, over time, he began to form his last name in a more truncated fashion, he made one or two shorter swooshes instead, which hooked under on the right side. Toward the end of his career, Paul's signature became even more abbreviated and fleetingly penned. See the 2002 example of this signed playbill from



1953

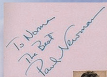


1955

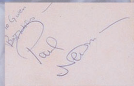


1969

1954



1961



1972

Our Town. Several in-person collectors shared with me that Paul was a particularly accommodating signer when starting in a play.

SECRETARIAL SIGNATURES

My rule of thumb when attempting to weed out the secretarial signatures – which often contain inscriptions – is always to focus on the handwriting. Paul's "T" in "To" was unique and free-flowing. It had a curved top, with the end looping down, barely connecting to the "o." In addition, his handwriting was uniquely small and angular, very easily recognizable to the trained eye.

A wonderful sample of his handwriting is this early letter, dated 1955. RR Auction obtained a few of these priceless letters from Barbara Rushmore, the president of his fan club. These unique, rare letters give us a glimpse into Newman's profound humility, seemingly unlikely humanity, and obviously humorous nature. One particular letter is an interesting glimpse into

Paul's family life – an unexpected role for this larger-than-life megastar.

THE "STING"

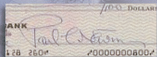
Regrettably, there are so many Paul Newman fakes on the market today – many of them secretarial's – that they clearly outweigh the authentic. Personally, I believe the majority of the forgeries out there are amateurish. In order to infer that for yourself, you truly need correct, authentic examples to educate yourself and aid in your purchase.

In my opinion, Paul Newman's autograph is under-priced in comparison to how beloved a star he was. You can pick up a Newman signature for \$140-200, depending on condition and boldness of ink. A contemporarily signed glossy Newman photo is worth \$250-550, depending on desirability of pose.

However, the big money comes into play with the vintage matte-finish Newman signed photos, which have

been known to sell for \$500-1,200. There are also signed checks available frequently, which seem to satisfy a Newman fan's need for confirmation of authenticity, selling for \$200-450. One of Newman's signed books, such as *Shameless Exploitation in Pursuit of the Common Good*, sells for \$150-300. A rare handwritten letter may bring at auction \$500-700.

Now, armed with the knowledge of what a true-blue Newman autograph looks like, have the confidence to procure an authentic signature for your own collection. Hopefully, the numerous authentic examples shared in this article will finally help to separate fact from fiction when it comes to his autograph. Remember, educate yourself, buy from reliable sources, and don't be "hustled!"



1973



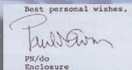
1975



2002



1974



1985



2006