

Honus Wagner (aka *The Flying Dutchman*) Baseball Trading Card – Genuine or Fake?

by Jacqueline A. Joseph – Handwriting and Document Forensics

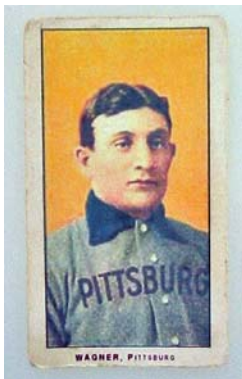
Authentication of sports memorabilia, historical papers such as bonds, mineral rights certificates, foreign currency or vintage paper artifacts may be the result of a simple flip of the switch of my handheld lab lamp with ultraviolet (black light) bulbs to illuminate the item. Additionally, a carefully studied view of the object with my digital microscope magnifies the evidence of the print process to further assist in determining whether or not the item is a fake.

A gentleman, referred to me by the Oregon Historical Society, asked for an examination of his recent discovery. At a local garage sale, he had purchased a dusty shoe box of old postcards. To his surprise, he discovered what he believed could be the Holy Grail of baseball card collecting: a genuine T-206 Honus Wagner (aka the Pittsburg Pirates' *The Flying Dutchman*) from 1909. In researching the item on Google, it was reported that a genuine T-206 Wagner sold to a collector for 2.8 million dollars. It is considered the "*Mona Lisa*" of baseball cards, and according to Wikipedia, it is estimated that only between 50 and 200 were ever distributed to the public at the time. Could he possibly have found one?

My forensic exam, much to the disappointment of my client, revealed the microscopic characteristics of modern day printing process, most likely ink jet, versus evidence of a lithographic or letterpress process used in 1909. To further confirm that his item was a fake, I found evidence of fluorescent brighteners in the paper (not used in baseball card paper in the early 1900's) because the card glowed when viewed with my ultraviolet magnifying lamps. Other testing could be done, but it wasn't necessary.

Though authenticating sports memorabilia is not my specialty, I may be able to provide enough information about the item of curiosity to assist the client in deciding whether or not pursuing the matter with reputable authenticators and more specialized forensic examinations would be worthwhile.

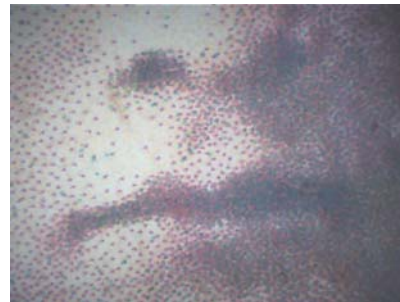
Image of my client's Honus Wagner baseball trading card reproduction



Front



Back



Nose and mouth