

A Career in Californiana, a Foray in Forensics, a Detour in Doodling

WILLIAM BUTTS

GREENWOOD, Robert. *A Valiant Enterprise: A History of the Talisman Press, 1951-1993—Printers, Publishers, and Antiquarian Booksellers.* San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 2007. 4to. Green cloth. 383pp. Illustrations. Edition limited to 350 copies. **\$150.00.**

LEWIS, Garland D. *Bates' I.S.Q.D.: Identification System for Questioned Documents.* Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher, 2005. Small 4to. Wrappers. x, 102pp. Illustrations. **\$28.95.**

URIS, Norman Burton. *The Doodle Book.* New York: Collier Books, 1970. 16mo. Wrappers. 176pp. Illustrations. Published at **\$1.25**, now out of print.

I loved this book. In almost 20 years of reviewing a wide range of books for many publications, I have never bluntly used those four simple words to describe any book—until Robert Greenwood's *A Valiant Enterprise* crossed my desk.

The 82-year-old Greenwood's tale represents a type of antiquarian bookselling and book publishing experience seldom captured in a memoir. Bookseller's accounts more often chronicle the absolute highest end of the market—Edwin Wolf's

Rosenbach: A Biography, H.P. Kraus's *A Rare Book Saga* and David Randall's *Dukedom Large Enough* are three noted examples, each radically different from the others. Fewer memoirs concern the mid-range of the market captured by Greenwood. No one can rattle off a string of jaw-dropping museum-quality showpieces the likes of which made "Dr. R." a newsworthy celebrity from the teens through the 1930s—but Greenwood does detail many a superb Western Americana rarity unearthed between the 1950s and 1990s.

From a middle class upbringing in Kansas, Greenwood learned old-fashioned printing, typesetting and linotyping. A stint in the Navy and one library science degree later he finds himself a librarian in Denver, meeting lifelong partner Newton Baird. Soon they're in San Jose, haunting the bookshops and turning up "Over a period of six years... six copies of William Lewis Manly's *Death Valley in '49*" at a Goodwill for twenty-five cents each."

Greenwood and Baird began publishing their own little magazine, *Talisman*, in 1952. Fatefully, "Newt and I began thinking about launching our own book publishing business, building up a list of titles, combined with buying and selling scarce and rare books, so that one day both of us might work full-time at the press." And that's precisely what they did for the next few decades.

Ann Stanford's *Magellan*, a book-length poem, became Talisman Press's first title in 1958, and in 1960 they published William Stafford's first book of poetry, *West of Your City*. But reprints of historical Western Americana titles soon took over. These proved quite successful and became their niche, starting with C.M. Clark's 1861 *A Trip to Pike's Peak* in 1958.

Original research rolled off their press, too. In 1963 they published Dale Morgan's *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail*, "the most important book of Western Americana we would publish." Then there was Hensley C. Woodbridge's 1966 *Jack London: A Bibliography*, which "did create new interest in Jack London, especially among rare book dealers." Greenwood himself compiled "our most ambitious project," the 1961 *California Imprints, 1833-1862: A Bibliography*, today an important standard reference. Greenwood's detailed account of undertaking this difficult project will fascinate all Californiana



collectors. *A Valiant Enterprise* actually represents a must-have sequel to *California Imprints*, for Greenwood “continued to collect information on unrecorded California imprints, thinking that

some day I might publish a supplement. Somewhat belatedly, this supplement appears as an appendix in this book.” Talk about value added!

The first in a string of rare book catalogues appeared in 1960, selling almost 75% of its 128 items totaling \$1,200—a percentage which booksellers today would consider, as did they, “quite successful.” Great-find anecdotes too, too numerous to recount naturally pepper this chronicle. Typical (if that’s possible) would be: “On the table were what appeared at first glance to be old ledgers, all folio size” in the dusty back room of a bookshop in Stockton. “The first one I picked up was a manuscript account book for a general store... for the years 1861-1863... But what made it interesting was 90 percent of the entries were for Chinese customers...” And further along among the ledgers “was the best Wells Fargo manuscript item I’d ever seen....” Sigh.

Autograph finds abound in *A Valiant Enterprise*. Much of it is paper Americana, groups of letters from forty-niners and pioneers, early business ledgers and such. Sometimes the great names of California history make an appearance, though. At the home of one old-timer in the northern California town of Placerville, Greenwood recalls:

Wondering what else might be in the envelope, I slid out the remaining items. A card caught my eye, larger than the conventional business card. I knew at once what it was.... It was the signed autograph card of James W. Marshall, the gold discoverer. Pictured in the upper left corner of the card is a small engraving of Sutter’s Mill, and in the center, a ruled line, over which Marshall wrote his signature. He sold these cards later in life, when he was almost destitute, usually for fifty cents or a dollar.... In the 1960s, we were fortunate to find several of these signed cards, all in El Dorado County, and we sold them for \$50 or \$60 each. Today that seems like an absurdly low price.

The San Jose and San Francisco of Greenwood’s early years turned up many a find, and Greenwood recalls some fond memories of its bookshops. At one thrift shop he discovered “*History of San Jose and Surroundings*, by Frederic Hall, San Francisco, 1871... One day when I was in San Francisco, Warren Howell showed me an interesting copy of this book. It was a presentation copy inscribed: ‘To Gen. U.S. Grant, with the compliments of Frederic Hall.’ This copy was presented by the author to General

Grant when he visited San Jose in the 1870s. It was in a custom-made half morocco slipcase with black leather corners and label. I bought it for \$35.”

As dealers, Greenwood and Baird were often ahead of the curve. Notes Greenwood, “In 1960, there wasn’t a great deal of interest in photographica”—yet Talisman Press was picking up rare early Western Americana photographs by pioneering photographers for what seems like a song—and also selling them for prices that today seem like a song. The same for postcards. Greenwood’s partner Baird collected mysteries when interest in the genre was slight. His collection of first editions in jackets, many signed, will make whodunit buffs green with envy and teary-eyed at the prices paid in the early 1970s.

Heartbreaking are the tales of the ones that got away—or more often which didn’t survive the whim of fate or their owners. There was the old northern California old-timer who had in his barn the massive archive of an important early utility company: “a row of some ten heavy oak filing cabinets... These contained hundreds of manuscript maps having to do with water resources, plans for construction of dams, engineer’s reports, annual reports, conveyances, rights of way... dated from the early 1870s through the early 1920s...” But he wouldn’t sell, he died, the house was sold and the new owners held a garage sale:

Holding my breath, I pulled open one of the drawers. Empty. All of them were empty.... “Do you know what happened to all the papers in these files?” I asked.

“Oh, those,” she said. “They were here when we took possession of the place. We didn’t want them, so we hauled everything out to the dump and burned it.”

I didn’t say anything.

“But the filing cabinets are for sale. You can have them cheap. Are you interested?”

“No,” I said, “but I would have been in what they contained.”

“Those old papers? They weren’t worth anything.”

Greenwood befriended former producer and screenwriter George Yohalem, for instance, who

had built quite a nice collection of first editions, including signed firsts of novels by Thomas Wolfe, Scott Fitzgerald, John O’Hara, William

Faulkner, and others, all of which were lost when a fire destroyed his home. He told me of having attended a party one evening in 1934 at Pickfair, Mary Pickford's home, when he noticed Scott Fitzgerald sitting on a couch signing a copy of Tender is the Night. George had several Fitzgerald firsts at home, including Tender is the Night, and asked Fitzgerald if he would sign all of them if he rushed home and fetched them. He did, and Fitzgerald signed them, only for them to be destroyed in the fire.

Greenwood and Baird visited the deserted ghost town of Spanish Flat, where they were told one of the few remaining buildings used to house “the old Justice Court records... a few broadsides on the walls, and several boxes of books and papers.” The old caretaker Quincy didn’t recall this material, but later another old-timer told them that he “had burned what he described as ‘a lot of rubbish.’ Quincy had made several trips to the bonfire, and it burned all day. Curious, the neighbor had walked down to see what Quincy was burning, and pulled out of the fire an old book of stock certificates. These were for the El Dorado Mining Company, dated in the 1860s.... I asked if he saw anything else in the fire. He replied a lot of old ledgers... These were very likely the Justice Court docket books....”

All serious dealers will have tales of what they *should* have done. Greenwood is no exception. There was the bookshop in Monterey in 1956 with “a signed first of *The Sea of Cortez* in dust jacket, priced at \$30... There were first of *Tortilla Flat*, *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Red Pony*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *The Moon is Down*, *Wayward Bus*, and *East of Eden*. Several of these were signed by Steinbeck, and a few were presentation copies... I don’t remember anything over \$200. We should have bought them all....”

A Valiant Enterprise is disappointingly light in illustrations. Readers would like to see Greenwood as a young Kansan...some of the eccentric characters that peopled his formative years, such as Alan Swallow... some of the interesting abodes that Talisman Press operated out of... some of the choice Western Americana rarities that passed through their hands... a whole shelfful of Talisman Press publications....

I would’ve liked to see the role of Greenwood’s partner Newton Baird fleshed out. Given his importance to Greenwood’s personal and professional life, their deep commitment to each other, his close involvement with their publishing and booksell-

ing operations, Baird remains a hazy figure.

Greenwood's tendency to cite a recent internet price when comparing how much an item sold for in their catalogues I find problematic. The internet being today's Wild West, with large price disparities almost the norm and non-booksellers complicating the market, makes it more crucial than ever that internet prices quoted be *qualified*. An internet price coming from, say, an experienced specialist bookseller is more revealing and interesting than an internet price from a consignment shop in Hoboken.

A Valiant Enterprise vividly recalls a not-too-distant time when a couple of enterprising booksellers could have it all: buy and sell exciting scarce and rare specialist material in a field they loved and publish similar exciting material under their own imprint. In another sense Greenwood's time feels far distant, with today's internet bookselling world making the feasibility of both of these endeavors more challenging than ever.

With a press run of only 350 copies and a price point high enough to give pause, *A Valiant Enterprise* can only reach a finite audience. As fine a production as it is, let's hope an inexpensive trade edition lies in *A Valiant Enterprise's* future.

Foray into Forensics

Let's return to our occasional foray into forensics. Forensic document examination is a field obviously germane and worthwhile for collectors and dealers in historical autographs, but through long custom has been largely overlooked and relegated to various law enforcement specialists. High time for the autograph world to take heed and dig into the literature.

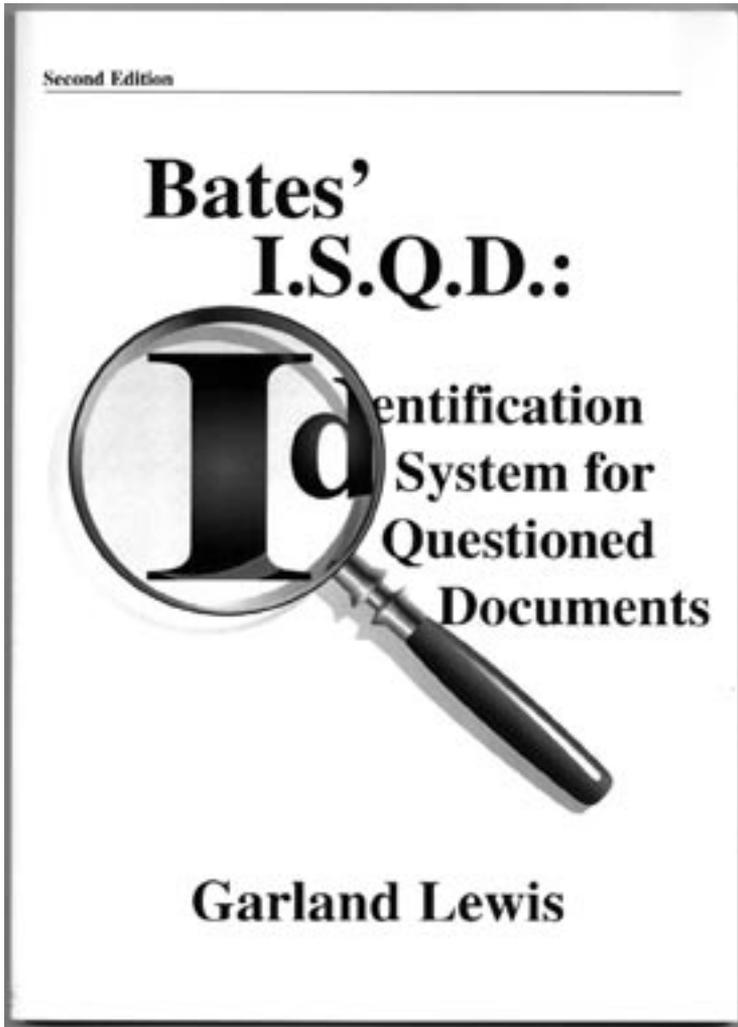
Garland Lewis's *Bates' I.S.Q.D.* represents something of an anomaly in a field chock full of texts of varying technicality that make for slow slogging for the average intelligent lay person. Call it a crash course... *Cliff's Notes... Forensic Handwriting for Dummies...* a just-the-facts-ma'am primer... Lewis's slim second edition of this 1970 text introduces the non-forensic person to one particular basic approach to forensic document examination.

"The purpose of this book," Lewis hastens to note in his preface, "is to put at the fingertips of the investigator a scientific method of discovery of the fact and of proving it.... this Second Edition...continues to assist the investigator or examiner in

the discovery of truth and fact.” It is *not*, he stresses, a forensics manual, but rather a guide to help understand some of what an FDE (Forensic Document Examiner) does. The rear book cover pointedly disclaims: “In and of itself, it is not intended in any way to qualify an individual as an expert, but is to be used as a tool with which to assist in the discovery and proof of fact.”

The Bates system boils down to an organized method of studying the conspicuous and inconspicuous characteristics of handwriting when compared with “genuine standard writing.” Lewis elaborates the twelve steps:

1. Uniformity (“Does the questioned writing have a smooth, rhythmic, free-flowing appearance?”)
2. Irregularities (“Does the questioned writing appear awkward, ill-formed, messy, and slowly drawn....?”)
3. Size and Proportion (“the overall relative size and relationships of letter formations may be sufficiently observed to form an opinion”)
4. Alignment (“Irregularities in alignment may be imperceptible until measured systematically with a precision ruler”)
5. Spacing and Pen Lifts (“A careful observation of the general spacing of the writing on a page should be made, and the width of margins determined”)
6. Degree of Slant (“A systematic comparison of the slant of the questioned writing should be made with that of genuine writing”)
7. Weight of Strokes (“Strokes in a handwriting may consist of very fine, medium, or thick lines”)
8. T-Bars and I-Dots (“One of the most telltale strokes which will give away the forger... he will have a hard time not leaving his own characteristics behind”)
9. The Needle, the Wedge, the Round, the Flat (“A careful examination of the strokes... will disclose a consistent formation of one or more of the above types”)
10. Loops (“Curved strokes, combined to form what is known as a loop, may occur below the baseline of the writing, or above the baseline”)
11. Circle Formations (“A single curved line occurring at the baseline is known as a circle formation”)
12. Initial and Final Strokes (“Perhaps the most inconspicuous characteristics, and those the most difficult for the forger to duplicate, are found in the initial and final strokes of a handwriting”)



Each of these is adequately explained by Lewis and well illustrated with clear enlarged illustrations.

The second section of *Bates' I.S.Q.D.*, titled "Proof of the Fact," shows how conclusions gained through these twelve steps can be presented "in such a manner that a judge and jury will also reach the correct conclusion." There's the language employed to accurately describe handwriting and the careful terminology used

to state the level of certainty—from “Identification” (“the highest degree of confidence expressed by document examiners”) to “Elimination” (“the questioned and known materials were not executed by the same writer”) and many shades between. Lewis discusses the proper use of digital images, the incredible importance of superb illustrations, even details on how to mark evidence, the right and wrong way to present enlargements, and how to use transparencies and overlays. It’s all material meant to aid in the courtroom, but the savvy autograph collector will not skip over it: Consider *yourself* the judge and jury who must be persuaded and learn from its lessons.

The third and last section consists of “A Sample Demonstration”—a good opportunity for the reader to hang over the shoulder of an experienced FDE (Lewis) as he considers the signature of one “Hildegarde M. Olsen” on a legal document and takes it step-by-step through the twelve steps of comparison, explains what illustrations would be prepared for court, how they would be presented and how the argument would be presented. Nothing like a hands-on demonstration to show the principles he has laid out in use.

Lewis is no literary stylist, to be sure, and confuses “it’s” with “its” repeatedly, but in *Bates’ I.S.Q.D.* he presents his material in a concise, organized, no-nonsense fashion. Billy Prior Bates’ original edition has long been out of print, and finding a copy can be difficult and expensive. To have it back in print in this updated, attractive and affordable format benefits the law enforcement and now the autograph collecting community. Every autograph collector will gain a more sophisticated approach to studying the documents in their collection and documents they’re considering purchasing by reading it.

Detour in Doodling

Time for another retro-review: Must book reviews cover strictly new or newish titles? Should a worthy title that collectors might not know about and may well learn from that’s out of print be ignored? I think not—especially in our internet age when an out-of-print title can usually be located and purchased online as easily as an in-print title. In that spirit:

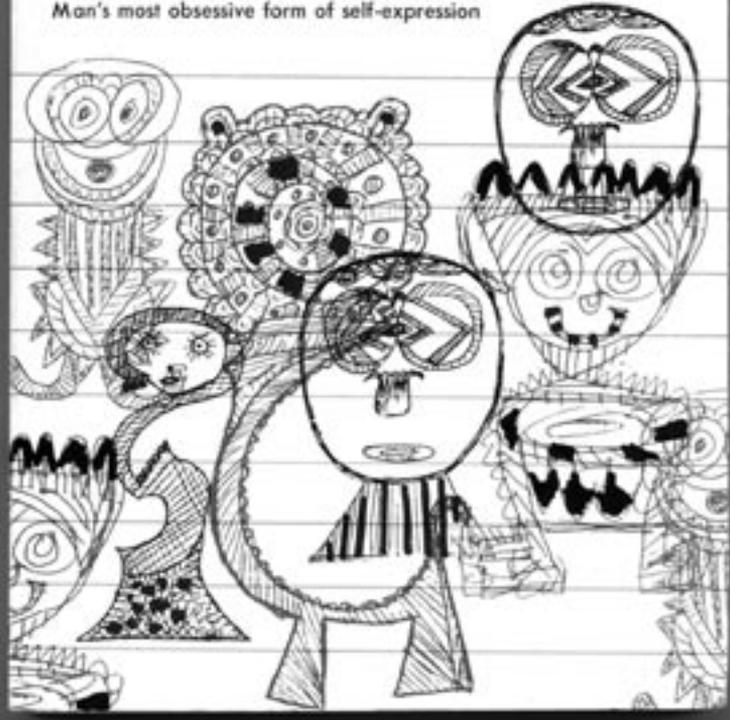
The World's First and Only!

the doodle book

By Norman Burton Uris,
lawyer and doodler

Illustrated by—Ted Williams, Hubert Humphrey, Paul Newman,
Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, Duke Ellington, President Nixon,
and others

Man's most obsessive form of self-expression



If my review of David Greenberg's *Presidential Doodles: Two Centuries of Scribbles, Scratches, Squiggles & Scrawls from the Oval Office* (see last *Manuscripts* issue) piqued your interest in this sub-subcategory of autograph collecting and you seek further literature on the subject, you will quickly discover that you can count on one hand, with fingers to spare, the number of titles to be collected.

The front cover of Norman Burton Uris's *The Doodle Book* proclaims it "The World's First and Only!"—and this may well be more than sales pitch talk. If other, earlier publications on the topic exist, this reviewer has yet to unearth them. Any tips from readers welcome.

Unlike *Presidential Doodles*, which is an insightful survey of one specific type of doodle, *The Doodle Book* is the personal chronicle of one doodle collector's passion. Identified as "lawyer and doodler" on the book's front cover, Uris began as an inveterate doodler: "I doodle anywhere on almost anything," he writes, "from scraps of paper while riding the bus to paper napkins in a restaurant to programs at the circus"—and his own pleasing little creations decorate this book.

Uris seems to have written to a wide, eclectic array of celebrities in the 1960s to add their doodles to his collection. The response was startling. Not only do their signed doodles pepper *The Doodle Book*, so too do their notes explaining their habit or their replies declining his request and explaining why they don't doodle. (*Presidential Doodles* borrowed some of its best anecdotes from the Uris book, quoted in my review of that book.)

But Uris is far from a collector of celebrity doodles. "For me, the search for interesting doodles and their origin is never-ending." Even his definition of doodling is broad, incorporating not just mindless sketches on paper but other forms that some might term *graffiti*. He includes line drawing copies he has made of doodles found on buildings overseas, in an ancient cave in Jerusalem, on limestone flakes in Egypt. He organizes the material loosely by topic—"Stories to Doodle By," "Our Ancestors Doodled Too!," "Children Doodle Too!," "Doodles—Art Forms," "Famous Doodlers" and "Everyman's Art."

The large central chapter "Famous Doodlers" will most attract autograph collectors, of course. Actors, politicians, authors, singers, artists—look for no rhyme or reason here, just a delight-

ful hodgepodge of Uris's best examples. Keep in mind, though, that there are as many doodles in *The Doodle Book* not of interest to autograph collectors as there are those of interest.

The Doodle Book isn't a methodical study or survey of doodles so much as a casual, subjective account of one doodler's thoughts of why, when and how people doodle. It was never intended as any sort of reference work for autograph collectors—nor was Greenberg's *Presidential Doodles*—but any enterprising collector will want to exploit it for its many fine and unusual signature and handwriting exemplars. My superb first edition of this paperback (it was never issued in hardcover—and apparently never went into a second printing) cost \$6.91 postpaid online—a bargain for a useful reference work to sit alongside Greenberg's *Presidential Doodles*.

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