

From the Silly to the Serious

WILLIAM BUTTS

GREENBERG, David. *Presidential Doodles: Two Centuries of Scribbles, Scratches, Squiggles & Scrawls from the Oval Office.* Foreword by Paul Collins. New York: Basic Books, 2006. 8vo. Clothbound. 220pp. Numerous illustrations. **\$24.95.**

RAYNOR, Robert (compiler). *Raynors' Compendium of Autographs & Biographies of the High Commanders of the Confederate States of America.* Burlington, NC: Raynors' Inventory Management Services, 2007. 4to. Clothbound, dust jacket. vii, 260pp. Numerous illustrations. **\$69.95.**

TROIANI, Don, and KOCHAN, James L. *Don Troiani's Soldiers of the American Revolution.* Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2007. 4to. Clothbound, dust jacket. ix, 182pp. Extensive color illustrations. **\$39.95.**

Here a doodle, there a doodle, everywhere a doodle doodle.... Take heed, presidential autograph collectors! The most delightfully off-the-wall (or should I say off-the-*pad*?) chronicle of presidential sketches has finally appeared. As specialized as David Greenberg's *Presidential Doodles* may be, this is a surprisingly accessible study that should appeal to the general public (for whom it's written, after all) as much as the presidential autograph collec-



tor (a sliver of the market whose existence likely never crossed the author’s mind). It just goes to show you that, while U.S. presidents are the single most popular category of autographs in the autograph market, books concerning *all things* presidential represent a popular category in the book world.

Paul Collins’ wise and witty foreword begins by explaining what probably wouldn’t occur to the typical intelligent reader, but what autograph collectors would already know: That doodles by the earliest presidents are practically unheard-of for simple mechanical reasons. It was laborious enough to simply *write* with quill pens, much less to playfully, mindlessly scribble sketches. Only the advent of steel-nibbed pens in the beginning of the 19th century, increasing availability of cheap paper and widespread use of simpler handwriting systems made feasible the very notion of “doodling.”

Collins gathers together fun trivia about presidential doodling, much of which rarely appears in standard autograph lore:

Reagan often handed out his correspondence-course-style drawings as prizes at meetings; the Eisenhower administration was so fond of paint-by-numbers kits that an aide prodded the cabinet and visitors into creating a de facto White House gallery of kitsch. (The Eisenhower Library’s paint-by-the-numbers collection includes Swiss Village, painted by J. Edgar

Hoover, and Old Mill, painted by Ethel Merman.) And Herbert Hoover was so well-known for his ornate geometrical patterns that autograph dealers were already scooping them up while he was still in office....

The profession of autograph dealing as we know it today was still in diapers during Hoover's administration (1929-33), with very few players. But what fun to keep an eye out for Hoover doodles in old catalogues from such late greats as Walter R. Benjamin, Thomas Madigan and Forest H. Sweet.

Collins also tackles the dodgy question of whether doodles reveal anything meaningful about their authors. He relates a few anecdotes that shed a less-than-flattering light on graphology (which the graphology opponents among us will cheer) before ultimately concluding: "But what *do* doodles mean? ... Doodles rarely reveal clear insight into a person beyond what is immediately on their mind.... Perhaps this is why doodles are so compelling. If they are significant, it is not because they are great art or the products of great men. It is because they are ordinary...."

Greenberg's introduction provides a thorough, more historical overview of doodling, as enjoyable as it is scholarly. Briefly tracing the history of the term, he quickly moves on to the 20th century concept of it and the few studies devoted to it. He's clearly fascinated with the tendency to interpret doodles psychologically: "...the most popular prism of interpretation has been the psychoanalytic," he remarks, "as aficionados scrutinized doodled for the insights they may offer into the unconscious thoughts lurking in the recesses of the artist's psyche.... It made sense, of course, to regard the doodle as a relative of the Freudian slip or the verbal free association – an articulation of repressed truth unleashed by the unconscious while the ego was looking the other way." And U.N. Undersecretary General Ralph Bunche, whom I've never thought of as particularly amusing, gets the biggest laugh in the book: When Norman Uris, compiler of the 1970 *Doodle Book*, requested a doodle, Bunche replied: "To do a doodle to order would really be faking, because a doodle ought to be spontaneous and subconscious. In fact, since receiving your letter, I have found that my doodling is spoiled because the letter has made me self-conscious about it." Bunche raises an intriguing philosophical point: Is a doodle truly a doodle in the truest sense of the word if created *intentionally*?

Ronald Reagan's "doodling policy," for instance, really highlights the issue. According to Greenberg, "Reagan doodled deliberately for admirer who wrote to him at the White House. His drawings were designed to promote the impression – a contrived one, but not a false one – of a light-hearted president, youthful in spirit, freely and earnestly dashing off drawings for his fans. Reagan was aware of the PR value of these aggressively cute pictures. The White House even compiled some of them for scrapbooks... For Reagan, the knowledge that the press and the historical record were looming over his every move presented a political opportunity." *Wow!* Doodles as "political opportunity" – I'll have to rethink Reagan as a craftier political beast than I'd given him credit for.

Autograph collectors will form their own opinion of Greenberg's disapproval of the buying and selling of presidential doodles. "The commodification of offhand scribbles and similar trivial effects through auctions can strike us as morally dubious," he intones. "It privatizes what should be public (selling off presidents' wares to the highest bidder) and publicizes what should be private (putting on display personal drawings or artifacts)."

Greenberg's comments accompanying the plentiful illustrations that form the bulk of *Presidential Doodles* are likewise perceptive and often as memorable as the illustrations they elaborate. Sometimes, too, he includes tidbits about the presidents' handwriting habits. Regarding some decorative flourishes of George Washington, for instance, Greenberg notes: "'So anxious was he to appear neat and correct in his letters,' said the Philadelphia doctor and revolutionary Benjamin Rush, that Washington would copy long letters he had already written simply 'because there were a few erasures on it.'"

These illustrations, by the way, are reproduced not in actual color, but all are given a uniform pale green hue. Now, green's my color, so I don't find this choice overly distracting – but I'd much prefer to view these documents in their glorious original color, even though most are probably varying shades of white. Others may find this odd palate positively annoying.

Moving chronologically through these doodles, we see a crude geometric sketch by John Adams: "his rough, cantankerous personality reveals itself just as Washington's smooth, cursive curls reveal his suavity and calm." Apparently "Andrew Jackson

seems to be the first president to leave behind full-fledged doodles from his time in office” – how refreshing and humanizing that that stern visage was capable of doodling the military hat, alligator and tortoises shown here! (One wonders whether the time-consuming chore of personally signing thousands of land grants, finally abolished by Jackson, helped free up those fingers enough to allow time for presidential doodles....)

Occasionally an illustration demonstrates a flourish not truly a doodle, but merely a typical decorative mark with an editorial meaning. Even these help educate the autograph collector on the handwriting customs of the day. In one Martin Van Buren “doodle” (though I question that’s the right word for it) he circles several words and uses a flourish shaped remotely like a hand with a pointing finger. “Such pointing fingers,” Greenberg notes, “were used as editorial marks since at least medieval times; readers of illuminated manuscripts used them to denote insertions and corrections, and Bible readers drew them to call attention to important passages. Called a hand, a bishop’s fist, a mutton fist, or a manicule, the icon is a kind of precursor, if you will, of today’s computer mouse pointer.” Abraham Lincoln was no doodler, but Greenberg includes the closing portion of an 1842 legal document. “The closest approximation of doodles in his papers are squiggly circles, sometimes with the word ‘seal’ inside. These hand-drawn seals were common in the antebellum period and were often used in lieu of stamps on official documents.” Good stuff, this!

Some presidents surprise readers with the humorousness of their doodles. James A. Garfield, in an affectionate 1875 letter to a family member, pens “the puckered mouths of all his family members making kisses.” Benjamin Harrison “made little impact as president,” but created “one of the greatest doodles in presidential history” and “emerges as something of a star.” Theodore Roosevelt’s picture letters to his children remind one of Mark Twain, brimming with “unbridled exuberance and slapstick sensibility.”

Surprisingly, the most interesting of 20th century Doodlers-in-Chief is one whose lackluster reputation is matched by few presidents: Herbert Hoover, who is given more pages (16) in *Presidential Doodles* than all other chief executives except Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Reagan (at 22 pages each). “One

of the most prolific presidential doodlers,” Greenberg enthuses, “Hoover drew pictures that are consistently geometric, intricate, and clever in the way they link disparate parts into a larger whole... his doodles hint at elaborate and expansive visions. Alas, the same could not be said for his presidency.” Hoover’s doodling propensity first came to light when autograph dealer Thomas Madigan acquired a Hoover doodle that received much press coverage. “He proceed to sell it for a substantial sum – ‘a fair portion of the President’s annual salary,’ according to one source.”

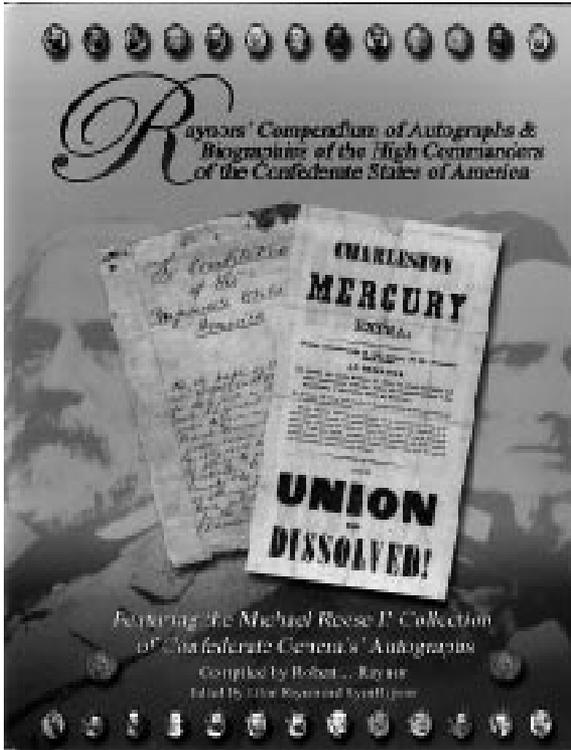
The president whose doodles most surprised this reviewer is Dwight Eisenhower. Ike’s grinning persona and avuncular media image contrasts sharply with these skillful three-dimensional renderings of nuclear bombs, knives and other military accoutrements. His sketch of what appears to be his chief of staff Sherman Adams with a missile striking his head is hostile enough – but in Eisenhower’s case even his doodles of household items – a broken pencil, a zipper, the corner of a table, an umbrella – I find disturbingly, creepily cold and calculating. Greenberg reacts the same: “...in his sketches, even the most quotidian objects sometimes take on a vaguely menacing tone....”

Kennedy’s quickly scribbled sailboats and simple geometric shapes evoke the Camelot image, though I don’t find them especially interesting or revealing. He received much press coverage as a doodler in the wake of the assassination, and 1964 even saw an exhibition of them take place. And such is the demand for JFK autograph material that forgeries of his doodles have turned up on the autograph market – so beware.

Presidential Doodles represents one of the more unusual reference works for the presidential autograph collector. While meant for a general readership, it’s quite informative for the autograph collector and a superb source for a miscellany of presidential autograph history.

Confederate Autographs & Biographies

Collectors of Civil War autograph material have had to cobble together a variety of sources to form a good working library of signature and handwriting exemplars. Jim Hayes’ *War Between the States: Autographs and Biographical Information* (1989) and Michael Reese’s *Autographs of the Confederacy* (1981) are absolute



“must haves,” along with a shelfful of biographical dictionaries such as Mark Boatner’s *Civil War Dictionary* and Stewart Sifakis’s *Who Was Who in the Confederacy* and *Who Was Who in the Union*, among many others. The Hayes and Reese titles are long since out of print and command healthy prices – so virtually nothing has been in print in the world of Civil War autographs to aid the collector.

Until now: Enter Bob Raynor. The president of Raynor’s Historical Collectible Auctions has utilized the Michael Reese collection, repackaging it and adding considerable new material. The resulting *Raynor’s Compendium of Autographs & Biographies of the High Commanders of the Confederate States of America* is appealing and accessible, and at \$69.95 represents money well spent in this specialized and spendy collecting field.

In his foreword (misspelled “Foreward,” notes this former

teacher and editor!), Raynor gives some background on the well-known Reese collection: “In the mid 1970’s a collector, Michael Reese II, discovered a 110 year old collection of Confederate autographs assembled by John F. Mayer, a Confederate clerk in the Adjutant and Inspector General’s Office serving in Richmond during the war years. Mr. Mayer was an autograph collector. Mounds of Confederate paperwork crossed his desk. When a letter or document was redundant, Mr. Mayer would remove the signature and add it to his collection....”

The cornerstone of *Raynors’ Compendium* are biographical entries on the 427 Confederate generals – 106 of the book’s 260 pages, roughly 40 percent. By the way, the precise number of Union and Confederate generals has long been a point of contention among Civil War scholars, depending on how you define the terms and how you count the brevet generals. Some may quibble with 427, but however you interpret the number this is probably as complete a gathering as has ever been found.

Raynors’ Compendium is printed entirely in a deep brown ink reminiscent of sepia tone, which works especially well with the many small oval portraits that lace the volume. It’s easy on the eyes and collectors shouldn’t have any issue with the quality it lends to the signature and document reproductions. Every entry, from Daniel Weisiger Adams to Felix Kirk Zollicoffer, clearly presents each person’s birth and death year, state of birth, highest rank, and brief recap of their Confederate career – battles and campaigns in which he participated. A “Casualty Report” lists any battles where wounds were received. Each entry includes a small oval image of each general, and of course a clear signature exemplar, quite often including the rank, salutation or other verbage in the signer’s hand. Having the signature exemplar side by side with the biographical entry marks a great improvement over the Hayes volume, which lists the generals at the beginning of the volume with a separate illustration section at the end – clumsy at best.

Comparing *Raynors’ Compendium* to Reese’s *Autographs of the Confederacy* page by page shows the strengths and weaknesses of each. Both volumes are the same 8-1/2 X 11-inch trim size. Reese, however, fits a roomy three biographical entries and signature exemplars per page, whereas Raynor comfortably fits four per page. More importantly, the Reese signature exemplars

quite often include fragments of sentences and other verbage preceding the signature – critical material for any collector wanting a handwriting as well as signature exemplar. Raynor routinely edits out this extra material, illustrating only the signature and rank – presumably to keep down the number of pages and therefore the book's cost.

Also, the Reese volume often doesn't "drop out" the look of the paper on which each signature is penned. Sometimes it's lined paper, sometimes tinted, sometimes splotchy or stained, sometimes there's show-through from writing on the verso. Thanks to technical advances, it's far easier today to eliminate such "background noise" than it was in 1981. Raynor signatures display none of this background – one sees the signature and only the signature. Some prefer it thus, clean and without distraction. Others (myself included) would much rather have their exemplars *in situ*, in the natural setting of their paper with all its flaws and idiosyncracies.

The last 40 pages of the large main section covering the 427 generals consists of *lists*: "The Ten Most Costly Battles Based on Total Casualties" [sic!] lists the Confederate generals (and future Confederate generals) participating in each battle. Apparently our *Trivial Pursuit* culture demands that in order to be relevant a book must contain list upon list upon list. Some find such data interesting or entertaining. This Scrooge of a reviewer finds such lists a waste of ink and paper, pure space-filler that generally gets skipped over. The only saving grace is that it's illustrated with additional documents and signature exemplars. Would that the omitted extra handwriting verbage referred to above occupied the space handed over to this fluff!

A useful second section covers "The Political Leaders." Here you'll find entries and signatures of the Executive Department and all Confederate governors. Once again, a slew of lists (such as delegates to the various states' secession conventions) fill out this smaller section. Lastly, a third section called "Collecting Information" rounds out *Raynors' Compendium*. Advice on how to collect, learning the terminology and other ABCs will appeal to the novice.

Raynors' Compendium is a much-needed addition to the library of any collector of Civil War autographs. It adds material to the Reese collection that some may find extraneous or of question-

able usefulness, yet it also includes more exemplars than Reese and is a stronger volume in other respects. Best bet, assuming one starts out with no reference books in this field, is to obtain the Raynor volume while the gettin' is good (that is, now, before it goes out of print and begins to jump in price on the secondary market), then keep an eye out for the elusive and expensive Reese and Hayes volumes to supplement Raynor. *Raynors' Compendium* is strongly recommended — a handsome, worthwhile addition in a field noticeably lacking in reliable reference works.

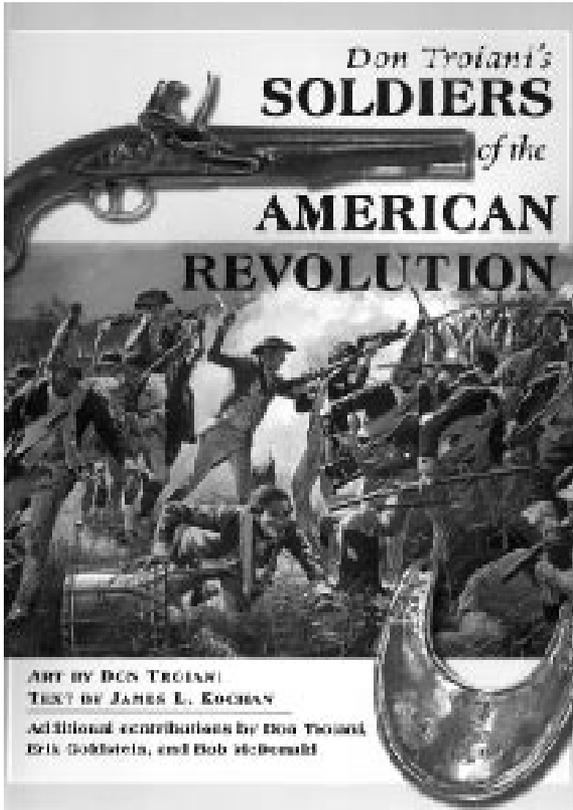
Soldiers of the American Revolution

In the sad-but-true category, it's an unfortunate reality that to most Americans the Revolutionary War is dry-as-dust ancient history — so much so that the Civil War feels positively real and immediate by comparison. (For that matter, others may find World War Two, the Korean conflict or even the Vietnam War ancient history — but let's not date ourselves!)

Fortunately, most of us autograph collectors and dealers (along with book and artifact gatherers) escape this peculiarly American short-term memory. It's a testament to the power of the written word that the handling of original papers and documents from any period of history makes that period vivid and alive. Autographs erase time barriers and bring the past to life.

And this perception of oh-so-distant history (Revolutionary War) versus relatively modern history (Civil War) is a testament to the uncanny power of *photography* as well. The time span between these two wars represents a blink of the eye historically, but to some the distance is vast. There's just something about gazing into a photograph and staring eye-to-eye with Lincoln, Grant or any Civil War figure, as opposed to looking into the oil-painted or steel-engraved eye of any Revolutionary War figure, that truly breathes life into the long dead.

Don Troiani's Soldiers of the American Revolution is an unusual hybrid: a greatly expanded version of the Revolutionary War chapter of his 1998 volume *Soldiers in America*. "We... have add[ed] artwork and photographs of relics, many of which have never been seen before," Troiani writes. "The original black-and-white



photography has been completely redone in color, and the text has been updated to reflect new discoveries that have come to light since 1998... I do hope it provides an overview of how a typical soldier in both armies appeared and illustrates some of the arms and equipment they used....”

Don Troiani's Soldiers of the American Revolution is military history unlike any military history most have read. It's not a chronicle of personalities, clashing ideologies, campaigns and logistics and troop movements and the usual elements of the genre. It's a vibrant picture, both in words and images, of the day to day *things* that surrounded the participants – the things they wore, carried, used in their everyday life.

To be fair, illustrations of documents are few and far between

in *Don Troiani's Soldiers of the American Revolution*. But insofar as documents were an occasional part of the soldier's everyday life, documents do make the occasional appearance. Some are quite incidental: You can't get more ephemeral than a slip dated September 23, 1845 noting "*Button found... at Bunker Hill*" alongside a worn, rustic pewter button. How everyday can you get! "Exhumed among human remains," notes the caption.

Then there's a wide, narrow slip of paper – several lines scratched in rich iron gall ink on heavy laid paper – which Kochan describes as "*Receipt for purchasing three muskets with bayonets for the state of Connecticut in 1776.*" Depicted on the same page as a Pennsylvania rifle with "Liberty or Death" engraved on the patchbox, the two artifacts side by side make a powerful impression. Another small but revealing bit is a piece of colonial currency. A three-pound note of "script" printed in 1776 in red ink with a decorative black border, it is signed by three officials. Best of all is a large framed discharge paper for Corporal Jonathan Swift of the 6th Massachusetts Regiment. Heavily folded, age toned and stained, this entirely hand lettered example thanks Swift for three years' service in the Continental Army. I find it a relic of haunting beauty.

Signers of note do make an appearance here. The partly-printed 1775 officer's commission signed by John Hancock is routine – but that doesn't make it less enjoyable to behold. Likewise the partly-printed 1783 discharge signed by George Washington. Kochan's caption reminds us that "Instead of using a typical pre-printed signature, the commander insisted upon individually signing the more than 8,000 copies needed...." Fittingly, this large image closes out the book.

But uniforms, weaponry and accoutrements of every shape and size, all superbly illustrated in full color, vastly outnumber autographs. Rifles and pistols, knives and swords, coats and head gear, powder horns and cartridge pouches – such things just scratch the surface. More fascinating are the many unusual artifacts that only specialists in this area have encountered. The vocabulary is as colorful as the items themselves: Ice creepers, regimental gorgets, infernal engine, rigging cutters, accoutrement badges, cartridge box badges, spontoon, cartridge pouch plate, "flesh" fork, grapeshot, neckstock clasp...

How better to bring to life these soldiers than to picture the

daily objects that surrounded them? By adding Don Troiani's oil paintings, that's how. Troiani's artwork perfectly accompanies each type of British, Loyalist, German, Native American, patriot and ally soldier discussed. Most are individual full-length portraits, some are small or large group scenes, and all are finely detailed and flawlessly executed.

Don Troiani's Soldiers of the American Revolution is a striking juxtaposition of faithful artistic renderings and first-rate artifact exhibit. The accompanying text is intelligent, well written and enjoyable. Troiani and Kochan wear their broad learning lightly, revealing the use of each item and placing each in context without overburdening the reader. Documents represent only a small percentage of these objects, yet how well they help form the realistic portrait of a typical Revolutionary War participant. Any autograph collector collecting colonial material will appreciate how these papers help illuminate their era; any autograph collector who's never collected colonial material may find the inspiration here.

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