

Collecting Connie

Collecting the collectors—at some point in their development, most autograph collectors become immersed in the history of our hobby. We can learn about the well-known collectors who pioneered new fields and set trends through the groundbreaking books of noted 20th century autograph dealers and the antiquarian booksellers who handled autograph material.

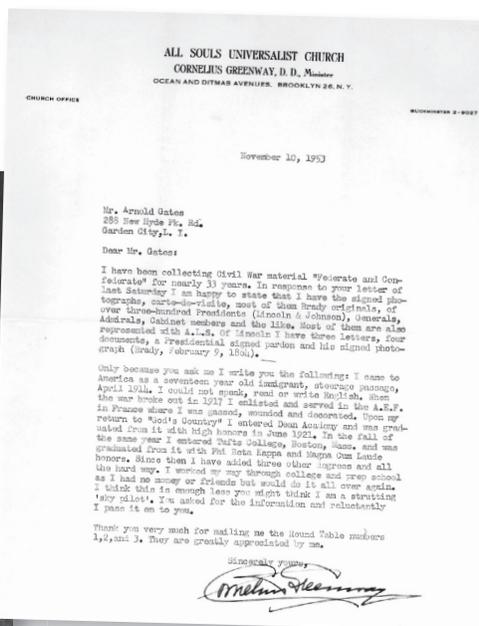
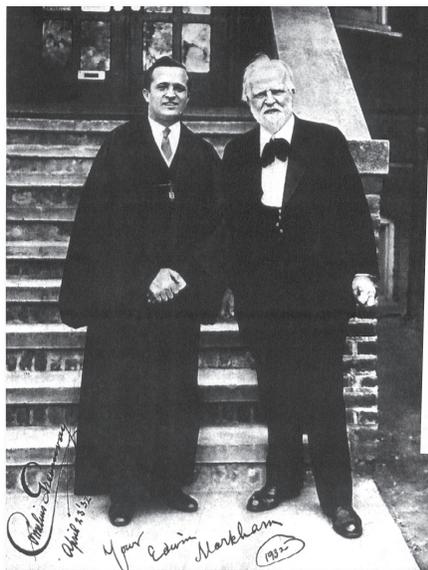
Some of these collectors were of enormous wealth, such as railroad tycoon Henry E. Huntington, but many more were of modest means. Reverend Cornelius Greenway (1896-1968) often appears in the pages of autograph literature. Greenway formed an impressive collection through a combination of perseverance, good taste and foresight in pursuing less-collected areas.

Born in Holland in 1896, Greenway—nicknamed Connie—immigrated to the U.S. in 1914. He gave up a milkman career to study Universalist theology, interrupted by service in France during World War One. Working his way through Tufts University in the 1920s by pulling felt in a felt mill, waiting tables and washing dishes, he finally became a pastor, settling in at All Souls Universalist Church in Brooklyn, New York, in 1929. He spent the remainder of his clerical career there, and retired in 1965.

Aside from his active church life and unhappy personal life involving a messy divorce and a cryptic court case in which his only child testified against him, Greenway collected autographs. He gathered them affordably and wisely—mostly when the gettin' was good.

Connie would be pleased to know that his own autograph, usually in the form of nice content handwritten or typed letters on church letterhead, is often available and at a price that any modest budget can afford. He wrote in a large, handsome, if hurried, script in thick blue or black fountain pen, signing himself either Cornelius Greenway or Connie.

In Connie's letters, he often discussed



Greenway (left) at his church for the 80th birthday celebration of parishioner and well-known poet Edwin Markham • A letter in which Greenway discusses his collection with a noted Lincoln scholar, writing: "I have the signed photographs, carte-de-visite, most of them Brady originals, of over 300 Presidents (Lincoln & Johnson), Generals, Admirals, Cabinet members and the like."

Sincerely yours,

his autograph collection, bringing sighs of satisfaction and attacks of envy to any collector. In one 1958 letter to Arnold Gates, a noted Lincoln scholar, Greenway writes "I'm now exhibiting my original Lincolnia. ... [I] just bought his letter about Ellsworth for \$400, famous Civil War songs in manuscript form... as well as one [carte-de-visite] signed by Lincoln himself and one signed by his assassin. I now own (bought it three weeks ago \$350) a long-hand letter of Col Ellsworth... Last Spring I purchased for \$200 an original letter written and signed by Mentor Graham who was Lincoln's teacher-friend at New Salem; also a very sad letter written and signed by Mrs. Lincoln \$200 about the death of her boy Willie in 1862..."

In a 1956 letter to Gates, Connie shows the common collectors' enthusiasm: "You should see the original letter from U.S. Grant about 'on and take the road straight to Vicksburg' I bought; also Jefferson Davis' A.L.S. about his appointment of Generals—including Lee!! Two gems that made a big hole in my wallet and us may be." And about a year later he adds, "You should see what I have assembled these last three years about Lincoln (originals!) And the Civil War generals' letters."

And a mere couple months later:

"Presently Lincoln College has an exhibit in its U.S. Presidents Hall of 154 individual items [from my collection] covering all the Presidents from Washington to... Eisenhower (photographs, documents, long-hand letters, typed letters) catalogue value \$12,148.00. These 154 items constitute 1/3 of all my Presidentials—the cream of my Am. Presidential Collection."

In 1961 Greenway "secured the vellum document signed by Lincoln, Vice President Hamlin, Speaker Colfax and 31 U.S. Senators, proposing the 13th Amendment to abolish slavery in all the U.S. It was written out by the Secretary of the U.S. Senate and signed on December 15th, 1864. I am in hook until the end of April. The dealer gave me seven months grace. I made a down payment of \$300 and very substantial monthly payments thereafter..."

Connie Greenway shows that regardless of means, the rarest items are attainable. He's an inspiration for every autograph collector, turning his writings into collectibles.

WILLIAM L. BUTTS owns Main Street Fine Books & Manuscripts, Ltd. (ABAA, PADA) in Galena, Ill. He can be reached at 815-777-3749 or william.butts@autographmagazine.com