

Civil War Collectors Have a New Source

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 must-haves, along with such biographical dictionaries as Mark Boatner's *Civil War Dictionary* (1991) and Stewart Sifakis' *Who Was Who in the Confederacy* (1989) and *Who Was Who in the Union* (1989). These titles have been long 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.

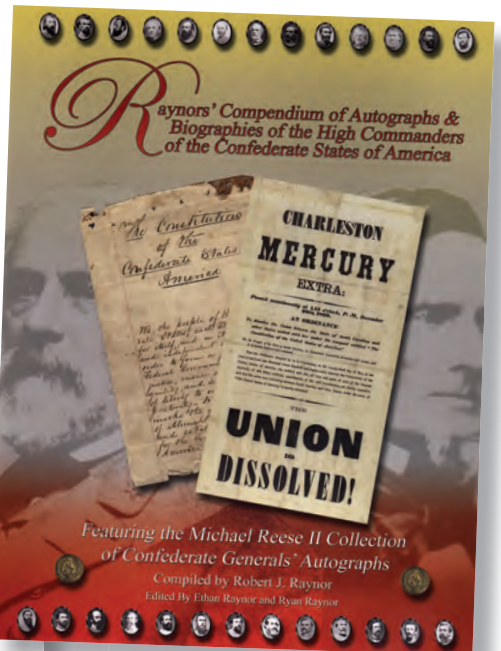
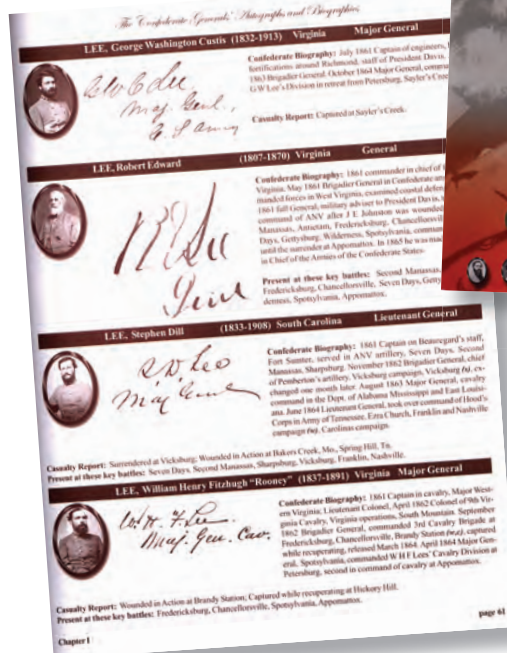
Bob Raynor, president of Raynors' Historical Collectible Auctions, has utilized the Michael Reese II collection, repackaging it and adding considerable new material. The resulting *Raynors' Compendium of Autographs & Biographies of the High Commanders of the Confederate States of America* is appealing and accessible, and at \$69.95, it's money well spent in this costly field.

In his foreword, Raynor gives some background on the well-known Reese collection: "In the mid 1970s 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."

Almost half of *Raynors' Compendium* consists of biographical entries on the 427 Confederate generals. Some potential buyers of the book may quibble with the number 427 because 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

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.

The layout in chapter one shows a portrait and biography of each general and a signature exemplar.



or other verbiage in the signer's hand. Having the signature exemplar next to 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.

Comparing *Raynors' Compendium* to Reese's *Autographs of the Confederacy* shows the strengths and weaknesses of each. Both are the same 8½x11 trim size. Raynor has four biographical entries and signature exemplars per page, while Reese only has three. But more importantly, the Reese signature exemplars quite often include fragments of sentences preceding the signature—critical material for any collector wanting a handwriting and signature exemplar. Raynor routinely edits out this extra material, illustrating only the signature and rank—presumably to keep down the number of pages and thus, the book's cost.

Also, the Reese volume doesn't usually "drop out" the look of the paper on which each signature is penned. Sometimes, the original writing is on lined, tinted, splotchy or stained paper, or it has some show-through from the writing on the verso. Thanks to technical advances, it's easier today to eliminate such "back-

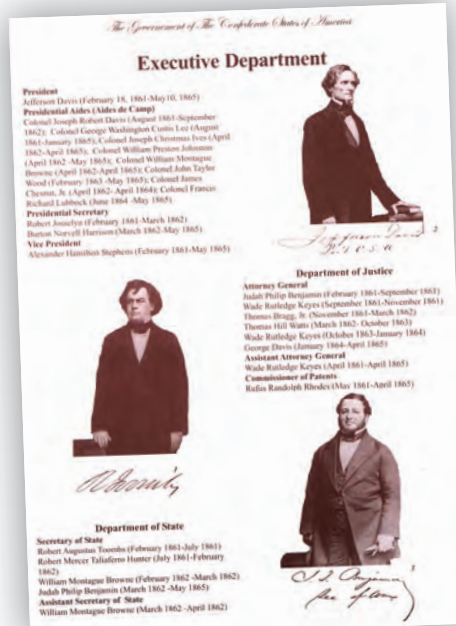
the brevet generals. However you interpret the number, this is probably the most complete gathering ever found.

Raynors' Compendium is printed entirely in a deep brown tone, reminiscent of sepia, 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 presents each general's birth and death year, state of birth, highest rank and brief recap of the battles and campaigns in which he participated. A "Casualty Report" lists any battles where wounds were received. Also included is a small oval image of the general and a clear signature exemplar, quite often including the rank, salutation

ground noise” in order to make these signatures more legible. Raynors’ signatures display none of this background—one sees the signature and only the signature. Some prefer it clean and without distraction. Others, myself included, would much rather have their exemplars *in situ* (the natural setting) of their paper and all its flaws and idiosyncrasies.

The last 40 pages of *Raynors’ Compendium* consists of lists that cover the 427 generals. One of these lists, “The Ten Most Costly Battles Based on Total Casualties [*sic*],” shows the Confederate generals who participated in each battle. Apparently our Trivial Pursuit culture demands that a book must contain lists upon lists in order to be relevant. Some find such data interesting or entertaining. Normally I find such lists to be pure space-fillers that I generally skip over, but their saving grace is that they’re illustrated with additional documents and signature exemplars.

The useful second section covers “The Political Leaders” with entries and signatures of the Executive Department and all Confederate governors. Once again, a



A page showing the signatures of the members of the Executive Department.

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 questionable usefulness, yet it also includes more exemplars than Reese and is a stronger volume in other respects. The best bet, assuming a collector starts out with no reference books in this field, is to obtain the Raynor volume before it goes out of print and begins to jump in price on the secondary market. A beginning collector should then keep an eye out for the elusive and expensive Reese and Hayes volumes, which range from \$100 to \$350, to supplement Raynor. *Raynors’ Compendium* is strongly recommended, as it is a handsome, worthwhile addition in a field noticeably lacking in reliable reference works. **A**

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