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Presidential Autographs at Colby College

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PROFESSOR ROTHCHILD’S anterior article and the imminency of a national presidential election conspired to rattle the question: How many autographs of our chief executives does Colby have? The answer, after consultation with card files and a scurry through yet uncatalogued acquisitions, turns out to be fifty-six. More moving than mere number is the variety of the accumulation, which includes eleven holograph and twenty-seven typewritten letters, eleven printed and five manuscript documents, one autographed card and a handwritten telegram draft. These have been garnered over the years through the bounty of alumni with military or diplomatic liaisons and the ever voracious Colby Library Associates.

The majority is represented by one signature each, six by two signatures, Benjamin Harrison and Lincoln by three, and Theodore Roosevelt (mostly by virtue of his correspondence with Edwin Arlington Robinson) by twenty. Of the thirty-three individuals who have presided in the White House, Colby has the signatures of twenty-eight, although that of John Quincy Adams appears subordinately on the document signed primarily by James Monroe. The five which Colby lacks are: Washington, Jackson, Polk, Arthur, and Harding. A permanent exhibit is planned for these memorabilia, contingent on the day some euphoric sponsor helps us complete the cycle. Until that day, and for those who crave a mind’s-eye preview, herewith is a descriptive census of presidential autographs currently in the Colby College Library.

JOHN ADAMS: legal petition entirely in his hand on both sides of a browned and desiccated sheet. Two tiny sections have become detached, taking with them several words, but doing no vital harm to the text, which is readily reconstructible. Adams begs The Honourable his Majestys Justice of the Superior Court of Judicature for the County of Suffolk to permit the sale of some real estate involved in the last will and testament of Jacob Eliot of Lebanon, in the Colony of Connecticut, that the debts of the deceased may be paid off. Dated: the last Tuesday of August, A.D. 1772. Signed: John Adams.
JAMES BUCHANAN: printed document by which, reposing "special trust and confidence in the integrity, diligence and discretion of Jonathan G. Dickerson," he appoints him (with the advice and consent of the Senate) Collector of the Customs for the District of Belfast, in the State of Maine, "TO HAVE AND TO HOLD, the said Office with all the rights and emoluments thereunto legally appertaining" for the term of four years. Dated: twentieth day of February 1858. Signed: James Buchanan.

GROVER CLEVELAND: autograph on a small white card with heading—Executive Mansion, Washington—embossed in blue. This was mailed, apparently on request, to Miss Effie E. Evoy of Woodlawn Park, Illinois. Dated: July 9, 1888. Signed: Grover Cleveland.

Single-page holograph letter on plain stationary from Tamworth, New Hampshire, to Hon. Chas. S. Hamlin in Boston. He thanks Hamlin for writing such informative and instructive letters to the New York Evening Post about the issue of the pending campaign. Cleveland is "almost frightened" when he considers the alternatives presented to the people and the consequences involved in their voting power. The handwriting is minuscule, not unlike that of E. A. Robinson. After retirement from the presidency, Cleveland spent many of his years at Tamworth. Charles Sumner Hamlin, financier, diplomat, and Assistant Treasurer of the US during the 1890s, was appointed a governor of the Federal Reserve Board by Woodrow Wilson. Dated: Aug 14, 1904. Signed: Grover Cleveland.


DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER: single-page typewritten letter on White House stationery to our recently retired college president Dr. J. Seelye Bixler, from our about-to-retire national president, transcribed in full.
Dear Dr. Bixler:

Please give my greetings to the students, faculty and friends of Colby College gathered this Thursday at the dedication of the building in honor of Elijah Parish Lovejoy.

Named for an heroic defender of America’s tradition of freedom of speech and of the press, this building is a fitting addition to the campus of a college dedicated to the teaching of the truth—especially to the college from which he graduated long ago.

Lovejoy gave his life in recognition of the hard fact that to preserve freedom a man must stand bravely for it against all enemies. To him, the victory of principle was more important than the safety of his own person. His service is an inspiration to those who seek to find, study and publish the truth.

I cannot end this letter without reference to your own service as President of Colby College. Fred Scribner has told me of your coming retirement and of the fruitful years you have spent in Waterville. The new campus and strength of the College bear testimony to your splendid leadership.

Congratulations and best wishes.

Sincerely,

Fred Clark Scribner, native of Bath, Maine, has been serving as Undersecretary of the Treasury.

MILLARD FILLMORE: three-page holograph letter on plain stationery of massive size, from Washington, D. C., to James Brown. Fillmore congratulates Brown on his proposal to publish in the US the English Reports “comprising every case reported in England.” Having available to him recently only a condensation of selections from the several cases, he is glad to see the project revived. He apologizes that pressure upon his time prevents him from revising his letter. From 1837 to 1885, Brown was an active member of the publishing house of Little, Brown & Co. Dated: April 13, 1851. Signed: Millard Fillmore.

Two-page holograph letter on plain stationery from Buffalo to Dr. G. Naphegyi in condolence on the death of his child. “None but those who have suffered similar bereavements can
duly appreciate the desolation of heart, at the thought that the beloved one has gone forever.” (Fillmore’s daughter Mary Abigail died July 26, 1854, at age 22.) He continues in a vein of pious sympathy and humility, counseling fervent prayer. Regrets that he was compelled to leave before hearing the finish of Mrs. Naphegyi’s dramatic narrative on the affairs of Mexico, which he has been told is thrilling. Dated: March 26, ’69. Signed: Millard Fillmore.

JAMES A. GARFIELD: two-page holograph letter on House of Representatives stationery to O. H. Marshall at Buffalo. Garfield will cheerfully do what he can to secure the Margery Papers despite the change in political complexion of the House which may result in the appropriation being allowed to lapse. He hopes that Mr. Margery will be urged to complete his part of the contract as soon as possible. In a postscript he explains that after addressing the letter to Buffalo he learned that the addressee lives on “LaSalle among the Senecas.” Dated: Nov 17th, 1875. Signed: J. A. Garfield.

ULYSSES S. GRANT: printed document stating simply, “I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of State to affix the Seal of the United States to a Warrant for the pardon of Lindsay Jenkins.” Who Lindsay Jenkins was, what crime he committed, and why Grant pardoned him must wait the labors of a consecrated sleuth. Dated: April 5, 1872. Signed: U. S. Grant.

BENJAMIN HARRISON: printed document with faded official seal whereby he appoints Wakefield G. Frye, of Maine, Consul General of the USA at Halifax. “Hereby pray and request Her Britannic Majesty, Her Governors and Officers to permit Wakefield G. Frye fully and peaceably to enjoy and exercise the said office, without molestation or trouble.” Countersigned by James G. Blaine of Maine, then Secretary of State. Dated: Fourteenth day of June 1889. Signed: Benj Harrison.

Identical document, except the date, which is Sixteenth day of December 1889. Originally appointed in 1881, Wakefield Frye was joined by his son Robie G. (Colby 1882) as Vice Consul immediately after graduation, in which post he served three years.
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Two-page holograph letter on personal, black-bordered stationery (his first wife died in October 1892) from 674 North Delaware Street, Indianapolis, Indiana, to Commander Charles A. Sumner at San Francisco. Harrison fendsoff an invitation to visit a meeting of the George H. Thomas Post of G.A.R. during his prospective sojourn in California. Does not feel like making any engagements until he arrives in the state, but holds out the possibility that he may be able to spend an evening with them. Dated: February 15th 1894. Signed: Benj Harrison.

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON: manuscript document on browed page, with signatures of subalterns on reverse. "Return for Six muskets and Six Dozens of Cartridges for the purpose of arming a party of men going down to New Orleans with a Barge loaded with public property. The military Store Keeper will Deliver the above mentioned articles." Harrison was Commander-in-Chief of US forces in the Northwest at the outbreak of the War of 1812. Dated: 22 May 1814. Signed: Willm Henry Harrison.

RUTHERFORD B. HAYES: printed certificate of military commission. As are the others of its kind below, this document is topped by a vivid blue official seal and an eagle with distended wings. Below the text is pictured a field redundant with drums, bugles, stacked cannonballs, a helmet with plumes, four furled and tasseled flags, ramrods, knives, tomahawks, bayonets and other instruments of extinction. Convinced of "the patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities" of Nat P. Phister, Hayes commissions him a Second Lieutenant in the First Regiment of Infantry, the commission "to continue in force during the pleasure of the President of the United States, for the time being." Dated: twenty-eighth day of December 1878. Signed: R B Hayes.

HERBERT HOOVER: single-page typewritten note on personal stationery to Edward F. Stevens in Brooklyn. Hoover thanks him for the kind expression of good wishes on his birthday. Edward Francis Stevens (Colby 1889) was Librarian and Director of the Library School at Pratt Institute. Dated: August 18, 1933. Signed: Herbert Hoover.
THOMAS JEFFERSON: document printed in four parallel vertical columns, each in a different language—from left to right, French, Spanish, English, Dutch. However, the entries by hand in all columns are in English. Each column is headed THOMAS JEFFERSON in large capitals, then in lower case, President of the United States of America. He makes it known to all who shall see these presents “that leave and permission are hereby given Samuel Patterson . . . to depart and proceed with his said Schooner” from Boston to Bordeaux. He guarantees that the cargo comprises nothing more lethal than oil, pepper, sugar, tobacco and whalebone, and that the schooner (called by what exquisite coincidence of nomenclature, the Jefferson) “belongs to one or more of the citizens of the United States of America and to him or them only.” This is followed by most florid assurances to the “present belligerent powers” that none of their subjects “have any part or portion therein, directly nor indirectly, so may God Almighty help him.” Throughout his ascendancy Jefferson strove ceaselessly and optimistically to maintain the rights of neutrals on the high seas, and to gain immunity for US trade against the disdainful piracy of both France and Great Britain. Countersigned by James Madison, then Secretary of State. Dated: first day of December in the year of our Lord Christ, 1801. Signed: Th. Jefferson.

ANDREW JOHNSON: printed document with brilliant orange seal at bottom, left, for all the world like a setting sun. Under authority of an Act of Congress, and with the advice and consent of the Senate, he appoints John A. Bolles Solicitor and Judge Advocate General of the Navy Department from the 10th day of July 1865. Dated: Twenty Second day of January 1866. Signed: Andrew Johnson.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: printed certificate of military commission, as described above, whereby F. W. Dickerson is named a Second Lieutenant in the Fifth Regiment of Cavalry in the service of the US. Dated: twenty sixth day of February, 1862, “the eighty sixth year of the Independence of the United States.” Signed: Abraham Lincoln.

Identical document, except that the official seal is pink and Frank W. Dickerson is promoted to First Lieutenant. Dated:
sixth day of June in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty three. Signed: Abraham Lincoln.

Two-page document in the handwriting of Salmon P. Chase, then Secretary of the Treasury, under the letterhead of that department. Addressed to “Gentlemen” at Beaufort, South Carolina, it transmits detailed instructions, by direction of the President, for disposing of lands struck off to the US. “Any loyal person of twenty-one years of age or upwards” who has resided in the district for six months since the occupation by national forces may acquire by pre-emption two tracts of twenty acres each, “paying therefor One dollar Twenty-Five cents per acre.” Dated: December 30th, 1863, and approved the following day. Signed: A. Lincoln.

JAMES MADISON: printed document with two engravings—a three-masted schooner; a lighthouse perched on a tiny island—heading the text. “Suffer the Ship Henry Elijah Moore . . . mounted with no guns, navigated with sixteen men—to PASS with her Company Passengers Goods and Merchandise without any hinderance seizure or molestation the said Ship appearing by good testimony to belong to one or more of the citizens of the United States and to him or them only.” Through these demure certificates of registry, Madison tried as assiduously as Jefferson to eliminate harassment and impressment of neutral American sailors on the high seas. Within fifteen months, the US declared what is sometimes called “Mr. Madison’s War” against Great Britain, avowedly to rid itself of this maritime nuisance. Dated: second day of March in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eleven, in the State of Georgia, District of Savannah. Signed: James Madison.

WILLIAM MCKINLEY: two-page document in the handwriting of an amanuensis, appointing John W. Foster, Charles S. Hamlin and David Starr Jordan delegates of the US to the International Fur Seal Conference. McKinley invests them with “full and all manner of power and authority to meet and confer with the delegates of Japan and Russia to negotiate and sign a Convention for the better protection of the fur seal and sea otter.” A treaty satisfactory to all parties was concluded.
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James Monroe: printed certificate of registry as described above (Madison). The ship indicated here is the schooner Emigrant of North Yarmouth, carrying no guns and navigated with six men. Freedom of the seas was still a prickly issue to this passionate hemispherist, who proclaimed his famous Doctrine in the following year. Countersigned by John Quincy Adams, then Secretary of State. Dated: Fourth day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand Eight hundred and 22, in the State of & District of New York. Signed: James Monroe.

Franklin Pierce: single-page holograph note on plain stationery to Dr. Meigs. "We propose to leave the City this afternoon. Will you do me the favor to send your bill before 2 o'clock?" Dated: Wednesday Mar 2 [n.y.]. Signed: Franklin Pierce.

Franklin D. Roosevelt: single-page typewritten letter on Navy Department stationery, Assistant Secretary's Office, to Hon. C. S. Hamlin at the Federal Reserve Board in Washington, D. C. In compliance with Hamlin's request, FDR is enclosing two pamphlets describing setting-up exercises used in physical training at Annapolis. Excuses his delay in forwarding these owing to press of work and length of time required to get them from the Academy. (For Hamlin, see Cleveland, above.) Dated: Jan. 18, 1918. Signed: Franklin D Roosevelt.

Single-page mimeographed letter on personal stationery to Mr. A. J. Jones at Fairfield Center, Maine. Transcribed in full on pages 143-144.

Theodore Roosevelt: two-page holograph letter on black-bordered stationery (his mother and his first wife died in 1884), letterhead of black helmet and plume with initials T.R. immediately below, from 422 Madison Avenue, New York, to John Torrey Morse. He would be delighted to write a volume for Morse's series. It is a new field of work for him and he is not certain as to his success, but will try his best. In 1888, TR's
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Gouverneur Morris was published in the American Statesmen series, of which Morse was general editor. Dated: Feb 1st 1886. Signed: Theodore Roosevelt.

Four letters on White House stationery, each typewritten in luminous pale blue, strange to our time, addressed to Martha Baker Dunn at Waterville, Maine. Two of the letters are one page in length, two of two pages. TR commends her article on Browning in the Atlantic Monthly and delivers himself of some virile opinions about “Childe Roland,” Longfellow and Julia Ward Howe; he invites her to Washington in an impulsive scrawl between typed lines; he congratulates her on her book Cicero in Maine; is happy that his taste in poetry (including Walt Whitman) is evidently like hers; repeatedly beckons her to the White House; is disappointed that she cannot come and meet Mrs. Roosevelt but looks forward to seeing her son. Mrs. Reuben Wesley Dunn (Litt.D., Colby 1906) was author of four books and published frequently in periodicals. Dates: range from September 6, 1902 to December 24, 1908. Signed: Theodore Roosevelt.

Ten single-page typewritten letters on variant stationery: the White House, Metropolitan, and The Outlook letterheads; one personal with address at Thirty East Forty Second Street—all to Edwin Arlington Robinson. These are for the most part brief notes in which he tells EAR how much he has enjoyed The Children of the Night and asks how the poet is getting along; informs him that he can appoint him to a position as special agent of the Treasury in New York or possibly Boston at a salary of $2000 per annum; is happy to have The Town Down the River dedicated to him; reveals that he is “fondest” of “Twilight Song” and the translations of the Greek Anthology. As is generally known, TR wrote the review which brought Robinson’s poetry into prominence and kept him in employment at the New York Customs House through the end of his administration. Dates: range from March 27, 1905 to March 18, 1918. Signed: Theodore Roosevelt.

Two-page holograph letter on Sagamore Hill stationery to Edwin Arlington Robinson. The poet’s letter has touched him deeply. TR assures him that a devil masters each of us some of the time and that none has never been tempted. But the
man who in the end conquers, shows that he has been tried in the fire and not found wanting. "It is not having been in the Dark House, but having left it, that counts." Reference is to the metaphor in Robinson's "The Dark House," first published in *The Man Against the Sky*, February 16, 1916. Dated: March 27th 1916. Signed: Theodore Roosevelt.

Manuscript draft of a telegram on printed form from the White House to Edwin Arlington Robinson at Yarmouth Street in Boston, inquiring if EAR would consider a position of immigrant inspector at Montreal or in Mexico at six dollars a day. Dated: April 1, 1905 (but no April Fool's Day gesture). Signed: Theodore Roosevelt.

Four-page holograph letter on plain stationery from Nairobi to Lawrence Abbott at *The Outlook* in New York City. TR reports that many of his friends have written, urging him not to return until after the fall elections, but he has answered that such a course is not possible. The more he thinks about it, the less it is possible to stay away any longer. (His bodacious return to politics is familiar history.) Lawrence Abbott, son of Lyman, was president of *The Outlook* from 1891 to 1923, editor and author of books by and about TR. Dated: Dec 18th '09. Signed: Theodore Roosevelt.

Two single-page typewritten letters, one on personal stationery from Thirty East Forty Second Street, the other under Oyster Bay letterhead, to Harold T. Pulsifer at *The Outlook* office. In the first, he is enthusiastic about a poem by Robinson which Pulsifer sent him and promises a good story about another poet with whom he has had an experience. In the second, he thanks Pulsifer for his offer to dispatch fifty dollars to aid an indigent writer, scribbling between lines an invitation to lunch next day. Pulsifer, long on the staff of *The Outlook*, became managing editor and eventually succeeded Abbott as president. Dated: respectively, February 22nd, 1915 and June 1st, 1915. Signed: Theodore Roosevelt.

WILLIAM H. TAFT: single-page letter typewritten in that oddly light-blue hue on White House stationery to Hon. Asher C. Hinds at the House of Representatives. The forcefulness and clearness of Hinds' Lincoln's Birthday address at Portland has delighted him, and he extends hearty congratulations. Asher
Crosby Hinds (Colby 1883) was born in Benton, Maine, and served in Congress from 1911 to 1917. Dated: February 17, 1912. Signed: Wm H Taft.

Single-page typewritten note on Supreme Court of the United States stationery to Godfrey Lowell Cabot in Boston, thanking him and Mrs. Cabot for their kindly Christmas card and good wishes for the New Year, which Mrs. Taft and he cordially reciprocate. Dated: December 23, 1929. Signed: Wm H Taft.

ZACHARY TAYLOR: single-page manuscript document, foxed and deteriorating along two creases, requesting extra whiskey for four men for four days. See frontispiece for reproduction of this “return.” “Old Rough and Ready,” at this time a major, distinguished himself in the War of 1812, the Black Hawk War, the Seminole War and the Mexican War; was elevated to the presidency after a martial career of forty years.

HARRY S. TRUMAN: two single-page typewritten notes on personal stationery from Kansas City and Independence, Missouri, to Mrs. David Terry Martin in Stillwater, Oklahoma. He thanks her for sending him reviews from the London Spectator which contained kind comments on (a) his daughter’s Souvenir, Margaret Truman’s Own Story, and (b) his own second volume of Memoirs. Mrs. Martin has been a constant contributor of letters, manuscripts and presentation copies of first editions to Colby’s Treasure Room. Dated: respectively, November 29, 1956 and April 1, 1958. Signed: Harry S Truman.

JOHN TYLER: single-page holograph letter to General Winfield Scott on plain stationery. He understands from the Secretary of War that Brigadier General Edmund Pendleton Gaines has consented to take the 3rd District Headquarters at St. Louis. He assures Scott that he will do nothing to weaken his authority—“rely on it”—but requests that Gaines be “as tenderly dealt by as we can.” Scott, a Virginian, was Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the US in 1841. Gaines, a Virginian, made his mark in the War of 1812, was brevetted major-general for bravery at Fort Erie, was wounded in action at least twice, was later court-martialed for imprudent conduct but exonerated on grounds of patriotism. Tyler, a Virginian,
comprised the latter half of the lilting slogan “Tippecanoe and Tyler too” which propelled William Henry Harrison to the presidency and himself to the vice-presidency in 1840. He succeeded his running mate when Harrison died within a month of inauguration. Dated: May 1 [n.y.]. Signed: J Tyler.

**Martin Van Buren**: single-page holograph letter on plain stationery from Kinderhook, New York, to Hon. Charles J. Ingersoll in Washington, D. C. Van Buren has offered Lord Morpeth an introduction to Ingersoll, whose knowledge of Morpeth’s character makes it unnecessary to commend him. Van Buren is certain that Ingersoll will be highly pleased with him. The handwriting has a fetching windtossed effect. Van Buren was born and died in Kinderhook, some seventeen miles south of Albany. Charles Jared Ingersoll, lawyer, author and former US District Attorney, was then and until 1849 Congressman from Pennsylvania. Viscount Morpeth was George Howard, sixth Earl of Carlisle. Dated: Dec 7th 1841 (precisely a century before Pearl Harbor). Signed: M van Buren.

**Woodrow Wilson**: single-page letter typewritten in the peculiar azure shade noted above (T. Roosevelt and Taft), on White House stationery to Asher C. Hinds at the House of Representatives. He is grateful to Hinds for his thoughtfulness and sympathy “in this time of my greatest personal trial.” World War I broke out on July 28, shattering his dream of maintaining peace. On August 4 he issued a formal proclamation of US neutrality; on August 5 his offer of mediation remained unattended; on August 18 he pleaded with Americans to be impartial in thought as well as action. (For Hinds, see Taft, above.) Dated: August 17, 1914. Signed: Woodrow Wilson.

Single-page typewritten letter on White House stationery to Hon. Charles S. Hamlin in Washington, D. C. Hamlin’s friendly note of recent date has given him much “cheering and support” in a time when he needed it. (For Hamlin, see Cleveland, above.) By introducing resolutions prohibiting Americans from traveling on belligerent ships, congressional leaders were blurring Wilson’s efforts to induce Germany to abandon submarine warfare. Insisting that he would not consent “to
any abridgement of the rights of American citizens in any re­
spect,” Wilson finally secured the defeat of these resolutions
in March 1916. Dated: February 14, 1916 (ironically, St.

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EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON ON HIGHER
EDUCATION

By Cecil D. Eby, Jr.

In his biographical study of Edwin Arlington Robinson, Herm­
mann Hagedorn records a conversation between the poet and
Barrett Wendell, the distinguished professor of English com­
position at Harvard. Wendell, an admirer of Robinson’s poet­
ry, asked him where he had obtained his education. To Rob­
inson’s reply, “Right here, such as it was. I had to leave after
two years,” Wendell retorted, “You’re damn lucky.”1 Unfor­
tunately Mr. Hagedorn does not provide us with the source
from which he drew this dialogue, but he dates it during Rob­
inson’s sojourn in Cambridge between 1897 and 1898. How­
ever, unless a newly-discovered Robinson letter be wrong, Wen­
dell did not disparage college education in general but only
English composition in particular.

In 1920 Waitman Barbe, then professor of English at West
Virginia University, inquired of Robinson why it seemed that
American universities failed to produce outstanding writers.
In his reply to Barbe, Robinson professed his inability to answer
the question, but he did record his conversation with Barrett
Wendell twenty years before. As a teacher of composition
Wendell was doubtlessly skeptical about the importance of for­
mal instruction in English for the creative writer, but he did
not depreciate the value of higher education. Robinson’s un­
published letter to Waitman Barbe is printed in full.

1 Hermann Hagedorn, Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Biography (New
York, 1938), 138.