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Stories Through Signatures
An Exhibition Guide

Making THEIR MARK
Making Their Mark: Stories Through Signatures

by: Jennifer N. Johnson

Examining the Records at the National Archives
Washington, DC
About the National Archives

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President Franklin Roosevelt signing the Declaration of War against Japan, December 8, 1941

*National Archives, Records of the National Park Service*
“Making Their Mark: Stories Through Signatures” is based on an exhibition at the National Archives Lawrence F. O’Brien Gallery in Washington, DC. This eGuide is an invitation to explore some of the stories behind the millions of signatures that rest in our holdings. Well-known signatures are found throughout the records of the National Archives. Equally important are the multitude of marks by people unknown to history.

“Making Their Mark” explores signatures in seven different categories:

- **Autographs**
- **Famous**
- **Infamous**
- **Signature Style**
- **Official Business**
- **Power of the Pen**
- **Something to Say**

You can see famous signatures such as those of Magic Johnson and Michael Jackson in “Autographs” and “Famous,” “Infamous” marks such as Adolf Hitler and John Wilkes Booth’s, and in “Something to Say,” there are signatures of boys pleading for President Eisenhower to change their lives and a letter signed by Albert Einstein hoping to garner support for peace. Other stories such as George Washington humbly asking for how he should retire as Commander in Chief are found in “Official Business.”

All of these “signatures” illustrate the many ways people have placed their signature on history, from developing a “Signature Style” to signing groundbreaking policy into law in “Power of the Pen.” The stories in these records, of famous and infamous, known and unknown individuals, are part of our nation’s history, all having made their marks on the American narrative.

A signature can be as routine as a mark on a form or as extraordinary as a stroke of the pen that changes the course of history. Through their signatures, for example, the 56 men who signed the
Declaration of Independence simultaneously committed the brave (or dangerously foolish) act of treason against King George III and created a new nation. However, today, when you make a credit card purchase, sign a mortgage contract, or even a marriage license, your signature is likely to be electronic. Legislation allowing electronic signatures to formalize a contract, or allowing the autopen to authenticate a law is leading us further away from personalized marks, symbolized by John Hancock’s famous and distinctive signature.
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Imagine Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Harry S. Truman sitting at a dinner during the Potsdam Conference in 1945 making decisions for a post–World War II world. At some moment, aware of history-in-the-making or the power assembled in the room, Truman passes his program around to be signed. Even world leaders respond to the lure of an autograph, just as people in all walks of life seek and collect signatures from athletes, actors, and singers every day. What gives an autograph its power?
Truman, Stalin, and Churchill

Taking a moment

Hosted by Crown Prince Wilhelm of Prussia at his palace, Cecilienhof, U.S. President Harry S. Truman, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met in Potsdam, Germany, as World War II was coming to an end. It would be the first and only time Truman and Stalin would meet. The three heads of government needed to agree on a few central issues: the political future of Eastern Europe; Russia’s commitment to help defeat Japan (which happened on Truman and Stalin’s initial meeting before the conference even began); and the future of Germany.

On the fifth night of the conference, the participants took a break from their negotiations to attend a lavish dinner. During the evening, President Truman passed around his program for the attendees to sign. Harry Truman, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin signed the cover. Inside are signatures of many who attended that night.
A Gift of Thanks

A reason to celebrate

For nearly 20 years, Iraq’s national football (soccer) team played under the oppressive and brutal leadership of Saddam Hussein’s oldest son, Uday Hussein. In 2007, under new coaches, the team won the Asian Cup for the first time. The win, which signaled Iraq’s return to greatness on the international football scene, united Iraqi citizens and offered hope to the war-torn nation. This jersey is signed by the 2007 team and other officials. It was presented to President Obama by Prime Minister of Iraq Nouri al-Maliki in 2009.

Iraqi soccer jersey

*National Archives, Courtesy of the Presidential Materials Division*
A First Lady
Collecting

Jackie Kennedy often asked dignitaries to autograph her seating card, a dinner menu, or reading copy of a speech they had just given. This is a reading copy for the speech Shah Mohammad Rezā Shāh Pahlavi of Iran delivered at the State Dinner held in his honor at the White House in 1962. He inscribed and signed it to Mrs. Kennedy.
**Short Snorter**

*Short = less than a full measure*

*Snort = mixed drink*

King George VI of England, the last Viceroy to India Lord Mountbatten, and President Franklin Roosevelt’s son Elliott Roosevelt are just a few of the 90-plus men and women who signed General Eisenhower’s short snorters, a collection of 19 bank notes, representing over 10 countries. Short snorters date to the 1920s, when pilots in the Alaskan bush started the tradition of signing and exchanging currency and then sharing a drink with those they traveled with or met along the way. The tradition was adopted by the military.

*Eisenhower’s short snorter*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives*
Lakers

Showtime

Given to President Reagan in 1988, this Los Angeles Lakers shirt is signed by the team, including Magic Johnson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and James Worthy. Credited for playing some of the best basketball ever seen, the team had the best record in the National Basketball Association for the 1987–1988 season and had just won their fifth championship of the decade.
Famous signatures are scattered throughout the National Archives holdings. Some worked for the Federal Government and can be found in personnel files. Others are signed letters to Presidents or government officials. A notable pop star’s signature is found on patent paperwork. Why did Katharine Hepburn, Jackie Robinson, or Johnny Cash sign their names at the bottom of the following letters. Do their signatures lead to a deeper story?
Actress Katharine Hepburn worked with Ringgold Wilmer “Ring” Lardner, Jr., on the film *Woman of the Year*, for which they were both nominated for Academy Awards, with Lardner winning for best screenplay. Hepburn wrote to the U.S. Board of Parole on behalf of Lardner, on September 1, 1950.

Early during the Cold War, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigated allegations of Communist activity in the film industry. In 1947, Lardner, and 19 others suspected of being Communists were called to testify. After they refused to answer the Committee’s questions, Lardner, and 9 others were found guilty of contempt of Congress. Blacklisted from Hollywood, they became known as the “Hollywood 10,” and Lardner was imprisoned. By signing this letter, Hepburn opened herself to the risk of having her career destroyed. Few who were blacklisted were able to return to Hollywood.
Country music artist Johnny Cash wrote to President Gerald R. Ford on September 10, 1974, expressing support for two of Ford’s recent controversial decisions. Two days earlier, the President had issued an unconditional pardon of Richard Nixon for crimes he might have committed as President. That same day, Ford also revealed plans to introduce an amnesty program for Vietnam War draft resisters.
“Oh no! Not again.”

“17 million Negroes cannot do as you suggest and wait for the hearts of men to change”

Jackie Robinson’s entry into Major League Baseball ended 60 years of racial segregation in that sport. Off the baseball field, Robinson campaigned tirelessly for civil rights for blacks. In this letter to President Eisenhower dated May 13, 1958, Robinson, then vice president of personnel at Chock Full O’Nuts, criticizes comments Eisenhower made urging blacks to have patience in their struggle for equality.

Jackie Robinson, President Eisenhower, and comedian Joe E. Brown at the White House, 1957
National Archives, Records of the National Park Service
Letter from Jackie Robinson to President Eisenhower

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives
Ezra Pound

Mollifying a future father-in-law

In his letter dated March 12, 1914, poet Ezra Pound wrote to the Consul General of the United States in London seeking information that would help him ease the reservations of his future father-in-law that Pound’s marriage to his daughter would be invalid if he returned to the United States. Pound is a well-known and influential poet, but at the time of this letter, he was a struggling artist.
Michael Jackson

Defying gravity

Singer, songwriter, dancer, inventor?

Michael Jackson started performing at age six with his brothers as the Jackson Five, and grew up to become an internationally famous, award-winning star known as the “King of Pop.” This patent for a shoe that allows the “wearer to lean forwardly beyond his center of gravity” was created by Jackson and two other designers, so he could perform live on stage a signature move that he’d previously done in the music video for “Smooth Criminal.” The trick had previously been accomplished for the “Smooth Criminal” video using wires. Jackson was known for using unique moves like this and the Moonwalk to enhance his stage performances.
Infamous

These three examples are a small selection of some of the infamous signatures that are preserved in the National Archives. Each has a unique story. From captured records to a greeting card, read on to find out more about the stories behind their signatures.
John Wilkes Booth

“Don’t wish to disturb you. Are you at home?”

Originally, John Wilkes Booth designed an elaborate plan to kidnap Abraham Lincoln and take him to Richmond. Once a hostage, the Confederacy would demand that prisoner exchanges resume. (Previously, the Union and Confederate armies had an agreement to exchange prisoners. This fell apart when the Confederacy refused to exchange black soldiers.) However, at his second inaugural, Lincoln revealed some of his early plans for Reconstruction, which included giving blacks the right to vote. It was about at that time that Booth’s plans changed from kidnapping to assassination. His plan grew to involve killing numerous high-level individuals.

On the afternoon of April 14, 1865, just hours before he assassinated President Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth left this calling card for Vice President Andrew Johnson at his Washington, DC, hotel. Booth’s co-conspirator George Atzerodt was to kill Johnson that night, but he lost his nerve and did not make an attempt. Historians continue to debate why Booth left his card with Johnson.
Adolf Hitler

“Are you willing to take Our Fuehrer Adolf Hitler as your husband”

In the early morning of April 29, 1945, as Soviet troops closed in on his bunker, Adolf Hitler married his longtime companion Eva Braun. Less than 40 hours after their marriage, the newlyweds committed suicide together. In his will, Hitler states that Eva “goes to death with me as my wife, according to her own desires.”

Marriage certificate:
In this volume is Adolf and Eva Hitler’s marriage certificate signed by them and by witnesses Joseph Goebbels and Martin Bormann, as well as the registrar of marriage they pulled in from Berlin just before 1am to perform the ceremony.

Final will and testament:
Also in this volume is Adolf Hitler’s final will and political testament, signed by him and by witnesses Joseph Goebbels, Martin Bormann, and Lt. Col. Nicholaus von Below. This was created and made official the night he married Eva Braun.

Three copies were made and sent out of Berlin.
Adolph Hitler's Marriage Certificate and Will, signature pages
National Archives, National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized, 1675–1958
Saddam Hussein

“Thank you for your kind greetings”

This card was sent to President George H.W. Bush in February 1989 by President of the Republic of Iraq Saddam Hussein to congratulate Bush on his inauguration as the new President of the United States. Most heads of states send notes such as these as a courtesy when a new President takes office.
Signature Style

From signature looks to signature works, these individuals made their mark in film, photography, politicking, or their clothing choices. General Eisenhower was looking for a practical garment when he asked for the standard issue field jacket to be tailored for him, creating what came to be known as the “Ike jacket.” President Johnson had a unique way of achieving his political goals, and First Lady Michelle Obama is recognized for her own signature style. What qualities makes something “signature”? 
Jacqueline Kennedy

Jackie’s pillbox hat

This pillbox hat, worn during her husband’s 1960 campaign for President, was one of Jackie Kennedy’s signature looks. The First Lady became a fashion icon for women around the world, wearing pillbox hats, gloves above the elbow, A-line dresses, oversized sunglasses, and strands of pearls.
Few personal accessories are more closely associated with FDR than the fedora. This felt fedora, made by Cavanaugh, ca. 1931, was worn by him.
Dwight Eisenhower

The “Ike” jacket

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower considered the Army’s World War II military uniform to be restricting and poorly suited for combat. Instead, he had a standard issue wool field jacket tailored to be “very short, very comfortable, and very natty looking.” The resulting “Eisenhower jacket” or “Ike jacket,” as it came to be known, was standard issue to American troops after November 1944.
Lyndon Johnson

The “Johnson Treatment”

Standing at 6 feet 4 inches tall, President Lyndon Baines Johnson used his imposing stature as one tool in his own brand of political persuasion, known as the “Johnson treatment.” LBJ used his “treatment,” shown in these photographs, to intimidate, badger, flatter, or plead in order to achieve his political goals.
Michelle Obama

Signature style

First Lady Michelle Obama wore this Narcisco Rodriguez dress on the night of the 2008 Presidential election, when Barack Obama was elected as the first African American President of the United States. Since then, the First Lady’s signature issues have taken the spotlight—from helping kids get healthy, to supporting our military families, to ensuring that all our young people work hard to reach their dreams. And her clothing choices have supported her work. As Mrs. Obama said, “I always say that women should wear whatever makes them feel good about themselves. That’s what I always try to do. . . . I also believe that if you’re comfortable in your clothes, it’s easy to connect with people and make them feel comfortable as well. In every interaction that I have with people, I always want to show them my most authentic self.”
Ansel Adams

Activism through art

Ansel Adams’s photographs are some of our nation’s most recognizable images of the American West. Adams was an activist and an artist, and his signature black-and-white photographs were influential in the creation of new national parks and wilderness preservation efforts. In 1941 Adams was commissioned by the Department of the Interior to create a photo mural for its building in Washington, DC, with the theme “nature as exemplified and protected in the U.S. National Parks.” The project was halted because of World War II and finally completed in 2010.

“The Tetons – Snake river,” 1942
National Archives,
Records of the
National Park Service
Dorothea Lange believed that her role as a photographer was to promote political and social change by documenting compelling scenes, as in this photo of jobless men lined up to claim unemployment benefits. Lange worked as a photographer for several government agencies, including the Resettlement Administration (the predecessor to the Farm Security Administration) and the War Relocation Authority. Her photographs of the rural poor and migrant workers during the Great Depression, notably her “Migrant Mother,” are iconic.
Walt Disney

Mickey and Minnie vs. Milton and Mary

Few cartoon characters are more recognizable around the world than Mickey Mouse and his girlfriend Minnie Mouse. This early copyright infringement case came just a few years after Mickey and Minnie Mouse had been copyrighted and trademarked. Walt Disney won his case against the creators of Mickey and Minnie look-a-likes Milton and Mary. The defendants, the Pathé Exchange and Van Beuren Corporation, were barred from ever using Milton or Mary in another animated film.
The day-to-day business of the Federal Government can reveal some surprising finds. Famous names, before they became famous, appear on applications for Federal jobs. The Father of our Country asks for guidance from Congress. Draft registrations were signed by the famous and little-known alike. A famous signature can turn a routine document into a treasure. Which story in these files do you find most intriguing?
Emerson recommends Whitman

A job referral for a poet?

“will you permit me today that he is known to me as a man of strong, original genius, combining, with marked eccentricities, great powers & valuable traits of character & a self-relying large-hearted man, much beloved by his friends; entirely patriotic and benevolent in his theory, talks, & practice.”

In 1863, Whitman sought the aid of fellow author Ralph Waldo Emerson in obtaining a position in the Government. They had maintained contact ever since Whitman asked Emerson for his opinion of “Leaves of Grass.” Emerson’s response to Whitman was, “I greet you at the beginning of a great career.” Later, Emerson wrote on Whitman’s behalf to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. He was not hired, but Whitman obtained a position in the Bureau of Indian Affairs.
Julia Child

From top-secret researcher to cookbook author and TV personality

Before she was a well-known TV personality and cookbook author, Julia Child, worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), precursor to the CIA, during World War II. Known then as Julia McWilliams, she began as a typist, but because of her experience and education was eventually promoted to research assistant. Not only did she play a role in communications between U.S. Government officials and intelligence officers, often having access to top-secret documents, but she was able to travel the world while on different assignments. In 1945, while on assignment in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) she met fellow OSS employee and future husband Paul Child. This application, which is in her handwriting, includes a memo in which she explains her “forced resignation” from a previous job.
Richard Nixon

A future President for FBI special agent

Here we see Richard M. Nixon’s famous signature from a time when his future was unknown. Upon graduating from Duke Law School in 1937, Nixon submitted this application to be a special agent in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). After his interview with the FBI, he never received a response. Assuming he didn’t get the job, Nixon returned home to California, passed the bar, and began practicing law. It wasn’t until Nixon was Vice President of the United States that he learned what happened with his application. Director of the FBI J. Edgar Hoover told him that he had been accepted as a special agent, but that due to budget cuts, his appointment was held back.
Barry Goldwater

From Senators across the aisle to competing Presidential candidates

Signed “Barry,” Senator Barry Goldwater wrote Senator Lyndon Johnson bluntly expressing his disappointment at Johnson’s acceptance of the Democratic candidacy for Vice President. He wrote, “you were intended for great things, but I don’t think you are going to achieve them now.” Goldwater’s prediction did not quite come true, as four years later Johnson defeated Goldwater in the 1964 Presidential election by one of the largest landslides in history.
Selective Service Cards

Registering for the World War I draft

As World War I began, the United States Army was fairly small, and by 1916, it was clear that more troops were needed if the United States were to enter the conflict. Initially, President Wilson desired an army made up of volunteers and wanted 1 million men, but six weeks after declaring war, only 73,000 had volunteered to serve.

On May 18, 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act. It authorized the Federal Government to expand the military. The act provided that all men between the ages of 21 to 30 were required to register for military service. Later, it was amended to include men up to age 45. The significant difference for this draft from the previous one, which was for the American Civil War, was that men were not allowed to hire a substitute if they did not want to serve.

Approximately 24 million men registered, which was almost a quarter of the population in 1918. Not all men who registered actually served. By the end of World War I, 2.8 million had been drafted and 2 million men had volunteered. When the armistice ending the war was signed on November 11, 1918, the activities of the Selective Service System greatly decreased, and by 1919 all activities were terminated.
John Huston

*Let There Be Light* documentary in the dark for years

John Huston’s career as a filmmaker, writer, and actor spanned over four decades. Before becoming an Oscar-winning icon in Hollywood, he made three films for the Army. *Let There Be Light* was his third and final war documentary. Huston used his revolutionary style to create documentaries that are ranked by critics among the finest films ever made about World War II.

Known for unflinching realism—the unscripted interviews featured were uncommon in filmmaking until over a decade later—*Light* followed 75 soldiers suffering from “battle neurosis,” now called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and chronicled the men and their treatment. Huston wanted to convey that men suffering from PTSD were not failures or cowards, but also “were employable, as trustworthy as anyone.”

In 1946 the Army rejected the film and confiscated the prints, fearing the demoralizing effects it might have on recruitment. Suppressed since 1946, it was premiered to the public in 1980, and preserved and restored by the National Archives.

You can view this film in its entirety and learn more about the preservation and restoration from the National Archives’ Motion Picture Preservation Lab, [See the film.](#)
Mint Petition

U.S. Mint Employees

“We do herby promise and engage to return to the service of the Mint”

This petition signed by the employees of the U.S. Mint, on August 31, 1799, was their promise to return to work after the “present prevailing fever is over.” Trying to survive an epidemic, these workers were reluctant to go to their workplace. Just five years earlier, a yellow fever plague took the lives of 10 percent of Philadelphia’s population.
George Washington

The commander in chief inquires how he should retire

Gen. George Washington arrived in Annapolis, Maryland, on December 20, 1783, at the end of the Revolutionary War. He penned this note to the Continental Congress asking how they would like him to officially resign, “whether in writing or at an audience” so that he “may regulate his conduct accordingly.” Three days later, before the assembled Congress, he announced his resignation as commander in chief. Washington set many precedents, but this resignation was a precedent in itself: many believed he could have become a king or dictator, but Washington chose to give the power back to Congress.

Letter from Washington to the Continental Congress, December 20, 1783
National Archives, Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention

See All Signatures
Declaring Loyalty

“I solemnly swear ...”

The very first act signed into law by President George Washington was “An Act to Regulate the Time and Manner of Administering Certain Oaths.” Signed on June 1, 1789, it mandated the actual oath to be recited and how it should be administered. This oath was to be taken by “any person elected or appointed to any office of honor or profit either in the civil, military, or naval service, except the President of the United States ...” and it remained that way until the Civil War.

Due to concerns of sabotage during the Civil War, Federal employees had to take the Iron Clad Oath beginning in 1862. Members of Congress began taking the oath in 1864. At that time, the Senate decided that the Senators should attest to the oath in writing in addition to taking the verbal oath. For that reason, no written, signed oaths exist before the Civil War. The Iron Clad Oath was in effect until 1884, when the law mandating it was repealed. Since 1884, Members of Congress have taken the same oath.

In addition to the Iron Clad Oaths and congressional oaths, also featured are three Oaths of Allegiance from the Revolutionary War for: Alexander Hamilton, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Benedict Arnold.
Marquis de Lafayette

A Frenchman, an American hero

Serving as major general, the Marquis de Lafayette signed his oath of allegiance to the United States on June 9, 1778, with George Washington signing as his witness. Lafayette was a French nobleman determined to have a role in the American Revolution. He was so taken with the American cause that he set sail from France without the king’s permission. Initially, he was a volunteer in the army, serving as Washington’s aide-de-camp, but he soon earned the rank of major general.
Alexander Hamilton

Founding Father at war

Alexander Hamilton was studying at King’s College (today Columbia University) when the Patriot cause against Great Britain was sweeping the colonies. He left school to join the Revolution in 1776, and after two years he caught the attention of Gen. George Washington. Hamilton became an integral part of Washington’s camp, serving as the general’s assistant and trusted advisor. In signing this oath, Alexander Hamilton swore his allegiance to the United States on May 12, 1778. Later in the war, it was Hamilton who helped lead the charge with the French against the British at the Battle of Yorktown, the battle that led to Lt. Gen. Lord Cornwallis’s surrender.
Benedict Arnold

A hollow allegiance

In signing his oath, Benedict Arnold swore his allegiance to the United States on May 30, 1778, at Valley Forge, with Brig. Gen. Henry Knox signing as witness. Just a year later, Arnold was spying for the British, feeding them information, and by August 1780, helping them in an unsuccessful attempt to capture West Point. His disloyalty was discovered, and he fled, narrowly escaping capture. Arnold defected to the British side and by the winter of 1780 was fighting against the United States. With these acts, “Benedict Arnold” has made it into American vernacular meaning “traitor.”
William P. Frye

An Iron Clad Oath

Signed on December 3, 1883, this is the Iron Clad Oath for William P. Frye, a longtime Senator from Maine who was also a member of the commission which negotiated the Treaty of Paris in 1898 after the Spanish-American War. This written declaration of loyalty was added to the traditional, verbal oath that all Federal employees took in 1862 because of fears of sabotage during the Civil War. Members of Congress took it from 1864 to 1884.
John R. McPherson

An Iron Clad Oath

Signed on December 3, 1883, this is the Iron Clad Oath for John R. McPherson, a three-time Senator from New Jersey. This written declaration of loyalty was added to the traditional, verbal oath that all Federal employees took in 1862 because of fears of sabotage during the Civil War. Members of Congress took it from 1864 to 1884.
Signed on December 3, 1883, this is the Iron Clad Oath for James F. Wilson, a two-time Senator from Iowa. This written declaration of loyalty was added to the traditional, verbal oath that all Federal employees took in 1862 because of fears of sabotage during the Civil War. Members of Congress took it from 1864 to 1884.
Daniel K. Inouye

Congressional oaths

Daniel K. Inouye, a Senator and Representative from Hawaii, and decorated World War II veteran, served as a Member of Congress for more than 50 years. This is one of his oaths of office for the Senate, signed January 9, 1963, and is representative of the oaths taken by all Members of Congress since 1884. The Constitution provides no details on how oaths should be given, but in 1789 the First Congress developed procedures for it and the oath has been taken by members since then.
Margaret Chase Smith

Oath of office for Margaret Chase Smith

Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to serve in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, signed her oath on January 5, 1955, which is representative of the oaths taken by all Members of Congress since 1884. The Constitution provides no details on how oaths should be given, but in 1789 the First Congress developed procedures for it, and the oath has been taken by members since then.
Prescott Bush

Oath of office for Prescott Bush

Senator Prescott Bush from Connecticut and father to George H.W. Bush and grandfather to George W. and Jeb Bush signed his oath on January 3, 1957, which is representative of the oaths taken by all Members of Congress since 1884. The Constitution provides no details on how oaths should be given, but in 1789 the First Congress developed procedures for it, and the oath has been taken by members since then.
Power of the Pen

With a stroke of the pen, the President’s signature gives the force of authority to a law. He can extend voting rights to the disenfranchised or build highways across America. Throughout our history and all across the government, a Presidential signature changes the words on a page from an idea into a reality. Sometimes the signature changes lives for the better and sometimes for the worse. As you look at the examples of documents that, once signed, became powerful instruments of change, imagine the moment the document was signed. What did the President think while adding his signature? What effect did the decision to sign have on the lives of Americans?
Recovery and Removal

Same signature, two outcomes

The “Emergency Fund for the President,” called by different titles at different times, is money reserved for a President’s unanticipated needs. The emergency funds have been used under a variety of circumstances that affect national interests such as disasters, security threats, and national defense. In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt used his $100 million “Emergency Fund for the President” to recover, mobilize, and protect the country as it moved from peace to war. As these two records illustrate, with the stroke of a pen, the President can bring welcome relief or implement policies that will drastically disrupt the lives of many.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, shocked and outraged the nation. Congress declared war against Japan the following day. Roosevelt quickly deployed his emergency fund to aid Hawaii and help with its recovery after the attack.

A couple of months later, on February 6, 1942, President Roosevelt’s signature allocated more funds for “the removal of enemy aliens … and for transportation of their dependents, and for the relocation of and temporary aid to enemy aliens or their dependents who have been removed from such prohibited areas or whose normal means of livelihood has been interrupted.”

The damage and upheaval resulting from the attack on Pearl Harbor is shown in both of these photos. On the top, is the wreckage at Pearl Harbor. On the bottom, is a young evacuee waiting to be taken with her family to an assembly center.
Letter signed by FDR that money be disbursed for recovery

National Archives, Records of the Bureau of Accounts (Treasury)

Letter signed by FDR that money be disbursed for the removal of enemy aliens

National Archives, Records of the Bureau of Accounts (Treasury)
Signing Power

This next series of stories are connected. Each one represents a branch of our Federal government:

Acts of Congress are joint resolutions, meaning a majority in both houses voted in favor of them. For an Act of Congress to carry the force of law, it must be signed by the President. (If the President vetoes it, then Congress can override it if two-thirds of both houses pass it. That is for another eGuide though.) The act featured in this guide illustrates an early step that the government took, through legislation, in addressing slavery.

The President can issue an executive order or a Presidential proclamation. Executive orders can only be applied within the Federal Government and Presidential proclamations are aimed outside the government. Read on to see the two examples featured here.

The Supreme Court has nine justices, and each justice is allowed one vote. The Court cannot enforce its decisions. However, some decisions carry their own power. Read on to see how one unanimous ruling resulted in a legal basis for changing the cultural definition of marriage.

President Johnson signing the Immigration Act of 1965 on Liberty Island, October 3, 1965
Lyndon Baines Johnson
Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives
Abolishing the importation of slaves

“The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.” — Constitution, Article 1, Section 9

By the time of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, only Georgia still participated in the international slave trade, which had been abolished during the Revolution as part of the ban against trade with England. Nonetheless, Southern states were determined to protect the slave trade. A compromise, Article 1, Section 9, of the Constitution, placed a possible time limit on the international trade but did not end it.

Twenty years later, President Thomas Jefferson, who himself held deeply contradictory beliefs about the morality and legality of slavery, signed the Slave Trade Act. Jefferson and Congress hoped to finally settle one aspect of the contentious issue of slavery by ending the international slave trade.

The Slave Trade Act imposed heavy penalties on traders but did not end slavery itself. It drove the trade underground, encouraging the creation of a reverse underground railroad. Also, ships caught illegally trading were brought into the United States, and their passengers sold into slavery.
Domestic Slave Trade

“Slave for Life”

This ship declaration from the port of Baltimore, Maryland, dated November 1820, is just one record of the domestic slave trade that continued until 1865. Upon examination of the slave ship, ship inspector Charles Robinson wrote that those aboard, except for one, “acknowledge themselves to be Slaves for Life.” The only other signature on the declaration was George Ellicott, who was a member of the Society of Friends, also known as Quakers. Ardent abolitionists, the Friends were often present at ports, questioning the captain and people aboard to ensure that claims of ownership were legitimate.
Presidential Proclamation

The institution of slavery in a democracy

“it is hushed indeed for the moment. but this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. a geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.” — Thomas Jefferson, April 22, 1820

To achieve an agreement among the states, the Founders did not fully address the issue of slavery in the Constitution but left it for future generations to resolve. As the country matured, the unresolved issue of slavery grew more contentious. The issue came to head when Missouri, which allowed slavery, applied for statehood in 1819. To maintain an equal number of free and slave states, Congress adopted legislation—known as the Missouri Compromise—that also admitted Maine, which had previously been part of Massachusetts, as a free state and prohibited slavery above the 36° 30´ latitude in the Louisiana Territory. The Compromise allowed Congress to continue working and kept sectional disagreements at bay, at least temporarily.

President James Monroe signed, and Secretary of State John Quincy Adams certified, Presidential Proclamation 28 on August 10, 1821, officially announcing that Missouri had entered the Union.
Executive Order

Creating a Federal policy of fair employment

“The head of each department in the executive branch of the Government shall be personally responsible for an effective program to ensure that fair employment policies are fully observed in all personnel actions within his department.” — Executive Order 9980

On July 26, 1948, President Truman signed Executive Orders 9980 and 9981. The more widely known EO 9981 desegregated the Armed Forces. Executive Order 9980 was a mandate to integrate the Federal workforce.

At the time, Washington, DC—our nation’s capital—was a segregated city. “Whites only” or “Negroes” signs designated separate lunchrooms, work places, and restrooms. The Federal workforce was segregated, too, a policy implemented under President Wilson’s administration. When President Truman entered the White House, only one agency—the Department of the Interior—was integrated.

Frustrated by congressional inaction, and armed with documentation from his Committee on Civil Rights that found discriminatory practices pervaded Federal agencies, President Truman issued the executive order. To give Executive Order 9980 strength and ensure implementation, Truman made the Presidentially appointed heads of each department or agency responsible. Within a year, 18 agencies had desegregated, and some agency heads that had not cooperated were removed from their positions.
Supreme Court Decision

Overturning the Racial Integrity Act

“Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay, and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement ... the fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.”— Virginia State Judge Bazile, in his ruling convicting Richard and Mildred Loving

In June 1958, Richard Loving, a white man, and Mildred Jeter, who identified as black and Native American, quietly married in Washington, DC. They returned home to Virginia and woke up one morning with policemen in their bedroom. The Lovings were arrested for violating the Racial Integrity Act of 1924.

Richard and Mildred were found guilty and sentenced to one year in jail, or they could accept a plea bargain and leave Virginia. So they left. But by 1963, tired of visiting family and friends separately, they sought legal help. Attorneys Bernard S. Cohen and Philip J. Hirschkopf took their case to the Virginia Court of Appeals, where Judge Leon Bazile upheld the lower court’s ruling. The case was sent to the United States Supreme Court.

Dated June 12, 1967, and initialed by Chief Justice of the United States Earl Warren, this page confirms the decision the justices reached—they voted unanimously in favor of the Lovings. The Supreme Court Justices ruled that Virginia’s law violated the equal protection clause in the 14th amendment.

After the Supreme Court ruling, the Lovings returned to Virginia.
IN THE
SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

RICHARD PERRY LOVING and
MILDRED JETER LOVING,

) )
) Appellants
) )
) )
) )
) )
COMMOMWEALTH OF VIRGINIA,
) Appellee

NOTICE OF APPEAL TO
THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

1. Notice is hereby given that RICHARD PERRY LOVING and
MILDRED JETER LOVING, the appellants above named, hereby appeal to
the Supreme Court of the United States from the final Order of this, the
Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia, entered herein on March 7, 1966,
affirming the decision of the Circuit Court of Caroline County entered on
January 22, 1965, which decision denied the appellants' motion to vacate
the judgment and set aside the sentence, and further, affirming the judgment
of conviction originally entered by the Circuit Court of Caroline County on
January 8, 1959.

This appeal is taken pursuant to 28 U.S.C., §2253 (C).

Appellants, Richard Perry Loving, a White person, and
Mildred Jeter Loving, a Negro person, were convicted for "unlawfully and
 feloniously taking or carrying out of the State of Virginia, for the purpose of being
married, and with the intention of returning to the State of Virginia...[and]
cohabiting as man and wife against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth.
§ 18-58, 28-59 of the 1950 Code of Virginia as amended.
Something to Say

The boys were counting on a miracle, Einstein was hoping to educate, and the entire Hopi tribe petitioned the “Washington Chiefs” in order to organize how they saw fit. These signatures and the people behind them are captured moments in our collective history. Decades later, why do their stories and signatures continue to intrigue us?
Petitioning the “Washington Chiefs”

“During the last two years strangers have looked over our land with spyglasses and made marks upon it, and we know but little of what this means.” — Hopi tribe

Seeking an answer from the Federal Government, the Hopi tribe in the Arizona Territory petitioned Congress asking that the entire tribe be given land, rather than allotments to individuals as determined by the Dawes Act. The Hopi lived in the arid desert and farmed communally to survive. The allotment process would sell off “excess” lands, reducing the overall acreage the tribe needed to survive. Also, the Hopi were a matrilineal society, meaning they traced ancestry through the mother. They were fearful that the allotment process would eventually cancel out their way of life, and that women would not have control of their own homes. Each pictogram represents a family, and every family in the tribe signed the petition.

The government never formally responded to the petition, and the Hopi’s lands were never allotted. In an annual report from the Indian commissioner, it was recommended that the Hopis be allowed to continue their custom, “it is believed that the best interests of the tribe would be promoted by granting the petition.”
The Rosenberg Boys

“Please don’t leave my brother and I without a Mommy and Daddy”

In a letter to President Eisenhower, 10-year-old Michael Rosenberg and 6-year-old Robert Rosenberg pleaded for the lives of their parents, convicted spies Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, stating, “We love them very much.” Julius and Ethel were U.S. citizens sentenced to death for passing secret information on the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. Supporters of the Rosenbergs lobbied for an executive pardon, but it was not granted. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed on June 19, 1953. After their parents’ deaths, the Rosenberg children were adopted by Abel and Anne Meeropol.

For decades after their execution, many questioned the legitimacy of the Rosenberg’s conviction. Recent evidence indicates that Julius was a Soviet spy. Ethel was most likely aware of her husband’s involvement in espionage, but was probably not a spy herself.
Nakata Declares Loyalty

“I am willing to preserve the principles of democracy and freedom”

In 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which ordered the removal of nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans from the west coast. Osama Nakata was incarcerated at Poston Relocation Camp in remote western Arizona, behind barbed wire and watched by armed guards.

Nakata was required to fill out a loyalty questionnaire which included questions about his relatives, the newspapers and magazines he read, and his ability to read, write, and speak Japanese. The final page of his application is a signed statement answering one of the last questions, “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?”
Einstein Promotes Peace

“If the present bitterness continues ... we face catastrophe.”

Not long after the end of World War II, Albert Einstein founded the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists. He and his co-founder, scientist Leó Szilárd, toured the country to educate the public on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Ironically, an earlier letter signed by Einstein—warning President Roosevelt of the dangers of a possible German atomic bomb—is credited with starting the U.S. drive to establish the Manhattan Project that built the first atomic bomb.

Letter from Albert Einstein
National Archives, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State
Mercury 7

Not in agreement?

“Propaganda-wise, we apparently stand to gain a great deal and could lose little or nothing.” — Memo from NASA regarding exchange of visits with Russian astronauts, October 21, 1959

Selected from 500 applicants, the Mercury Seven were to be the first Americans in space. Introduced to the world on April 10, 1959, the men considered themselves to be military test pilots, but became instant national heroes. However, the men were caught in the middle of the larger Cold War rivalry and space race between the United States and the Soviet Union. NASA sent this memo proposing to publicly work with Russia. Five of the seven astronauts signed the memo.
Geža Bata

Forced out by “political happenings”

“I was a tailor in Vienna and by the political happenings I was forced to leave Austria.” – Geža Bata, in a letter to the U.S. State Department

On the morning of March 12, 1938, the German army marched into Austria, beginning the Nazi takeover known as the Anschluss. German dictator Adolf Hitler followed his army into Austria and was greeted by cheering crowds with their arms raised, and with many holding flowers. After a three-day tour, Hitler declared, “the oldest eastern province of the German people shall be, from this point on, the newest bastion of the German Reich.”

One month later, a Jewish tailor, Geža Bata, who had fled the Nazis to Budapest, Hungary, signed his name to a letter that meant life or death for him, and asked President Franklin Roosevelt for help to join his family in New York. Bata received a response from the State Department notifying him that it would be two-three years before his turn.

Bata eventually made it out of Hungary. He arrived in New York on January 2, 1939. Six months later, in June 1939, he declared his intent to become a naturalized citizen of the United States.
Petition for Naturalization for Geźa Bata, 1944
National Archives at New York, Records of the District Courts of the United States

Declaration of Intention for Geźa Bata, June 1, 1939
National Archives at New York, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service
A Philip Randolph

Mobilizing a march on Washington in 1941

Frustrated by the lack of job opportunities for blacks in defense industries and by racial segregation in the military, labor leader and civil rights advocate A. Philip Randolph wrote to New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia asking for his support. In his letter, Randolph, director of the first predominately black labor union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, also proposed a march on Washington. Randolph dropped the idea after President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, setting up the Committee on Fair Employment Practice. Later Randolph would become a leader of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

A. Phillip Randolph at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington, August 28, 1963

National Archives, Records of the U.S. Information Agency
Initially, he was convicted of murder and sentenced to 12 years in prison, but when his sentence was almost complete, he killed a fellow inmate and was sentenced to death. After his mother wrote to President Wilson asking for clemency, it was commuted to life in prison. While imprisoned at Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, he cared for a family of sparrows. Eventually, he was credited with raising over 300 canaries, and after publishing two books became a respected ornithologist.

In 1942, he was transferred to Alcatraz. Known to be violent, but with an IQ near 130, he was described by a psychiatrist as a man with “supreme intellect” but “dangerous and menacing.” By the time *Birdman of Alcatraz* was published in 1955, Robert Stroud had been in prison for over 40 years. The book was made into a movie starring Burt Lancaster as Stroud. After the movie, a wave of support unfolded to release him. The “Committee to Release Robert F. Stroud” was formed. These two petitions are an example of what was sent in. Most were covered with signatures of support for his release, but some included messages such as the one on the top right.
This guide is based on the exhibition “Making Their Mark: Stories Through Signatures” on exhibit in the Lawrence F’ O’Brien Gallery March 21, 2014–January 5, 2015, at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Visit Us.

Credits

National Archives Staff, Washington, D.C.

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Jennifer Johnson
Curator
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Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum

See All Signatures
President Eisenhower’s Short Snorter, ca. 1944; Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, KS (Identifier 7717455)

Letter from Jackie Robinson to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 5/13/1958; Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum; Abilene, KS (Identifier 186627)

Jacket owned and worn by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, ca. 1944; Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum; Abilene, KS (Identifier 7717661)

Photograph of General Eisenhower wearing an “Ike jacket,” 1943; 63-92 (USA), Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum; Abilene, KS

**John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum**

Reading copy of the speech given by the Shah of Iran, 4/1962; Folder : “State Visit: Iran, April 1962,” Series 1. 1. 1. Mary Gallagher Files, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum; Boston, MA

Jacqueline Kennedy’s pillbox hat, ca. 1960; John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum; Boston, MA

**Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum**

Photograph of President Johnson and Louis Martin at the reception for Democratic National Committee Delegates, 4/20/1996; A2288-9, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum; Austin, TX

Photograph of President Johnson with Senator Richard Russell at the White House, 12/7/1963; W98-30, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum; Austin, TX
Letter from Barry Goldwater to LBJ after the accepted the Vice Presidential nomination, 7/15/1960; Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and Museum; Austin, TX

**Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum**


Letter from Johnny Cash to President Ford regarding amnesty and pardons, 9/10/1974; Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum; Ann Arbor, MI (Identifier 7720078)

**Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum**

Lakers polo shirt signed by team, ca. 1988; Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum; Simi Valley, CA

**George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum**

Card from Saddam Hussein to George H.W. Bush, 2/1989; George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum; College Station, TX

**External**

Photograph “The original Mercury Seven and the only time they would appear all together in pressure suits”, 1960; Courtesy of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)