



HISTORY MADE PERSONAL

Names from the Centuries

By Gene Pisasale



Kids today love to get autographs from their favorite baseball players, sometimes standing in line for hours. Chris Sanderson made autographs a passion and collected hundreds over a period of decades from people who changed the course of history. Inventors, statesmen, Indian Chiefs, Presidents, Wild West horsemen- they're all there on the wall in front of you after climbing the steps to the second floor of the Sanderson Museum in Chadds Ford, Pa.

You can see an enormous variety of personalities captured here, some on note cards, others simply shreds of paper with a signature written centuries ago. There are three wall displays brimming with remembrances. On the left, there's a photograph of Geronimo, whose piercing eyes hold you entranced. He's inches above an autograph by Indian Chief Sitting Bull, signed just three weeks before he was killed. That inscription lies near one by W.F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. A letter to Chris lies prominently in the center of the case, signed "Very Truly Yours, Alexander Graham Bell." This gem is near one signed by Samuel F.B. Morse, the man who invented the telegraph and a new industry- telecommunications- in 1844. Andrew Carnegie and even Grandma Moses are there, just above the signature of another man who changed the world- Orville Wright. There's also a priceless relic from the day our nation was "born"- a note dated July 4th, 1776 describing a business transaction. Other luminaries include Thomas Edison, John Wanamaker and Daniel Webster. Babe Ruth's signature lies near a letter signed by Abner Doubleday, the inventor of baseball- on the 100th Anniversary of the sport.

The center cabinet highlights composers and entertainers, with scripts from Johann Strauss, John Philip Sousa and Irving Berlin. To the right is a cabinet filled with signatures of people whose decisions literally changed the world. Presidential autographs include Teddy Roosevelt, F.D.R., Calvin Coolidge and Grover Cleveland- the only man elected President twice in non-consecutive terms. Nearby is a letter from William H. Taft after his Presidency, the note on the stationery of the United States Supreme Court, where he was Chief Justice- the only President to serve in that capacity. Warren Harding says hello in a letter from The White House dated May 27, 1921.

Nearby are men who put their lives on the line to help save our nation- Generals Phil Sheridan, Ambrose E. Burnside (after whom the slang "sideburns" was developed) and "Fightin' Joe" Hooker, who all served in the Civil War. General Sickles sits on the porch of a house smiling and smoking a cigar, just as he did after his leg was blown off by a cannonball at the Battle of Gettysburg and he was carried off the field. Admiral George Dewey, hero of the Battle of Manila Bay in the Spanish-American War is prominently displayed.

With these signatures the viewer takes away the immense sweep of history, the tragedies and triumphs, great inventions which improved our way of life and heroic acts in battle which preserved it- and sadly, the last vestiges (with Geronimo and Sitting Bull) of a way of life that no longer exists. So, the next time you see a kid eagerly awaiting an autograph at a baseball game, think about the people who made our world what it is today.

The Christian C. Sanderson Museum - A Man's Life, A Nation's History. An eclectic array of art, military memorabilia, presidential artifacts, local history and collectibles. History like you've never seen it before! Open March through November, Saturday and Sunday, 12pm to 4pm. Visit us at 1755 Creek Road (old Route 100), Chadds Ford, just north of Route 1, or at www.sandersonmuseum.org. Also open by appointment, call 610-388-6545. For information on the author of this article, visit www.GenePisasale.com.