

Pre-Printed and Rubber Stamped Signatures

By: Brian G. Kathenes

Many letters from Presidents, statesmen, and popular celebrities are not really signed at all. They may have been signed with a rubber stamp, or written on pre-printed stationery. Your ability to spot these letters can save you time, aggravation, and money.

Rubber stamp signatures are used extensively today and were even used in the mid 1800's. The most well known rubber stamp is that of President Andrew Johnson. It is commonly found on military appointments 'signed' as President. Many also contain the rubber stamp signature of Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War. As Governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson used a rubber stamp signature on many occasions. Bing Crosby used a stamp that secretaries used to sign "Bing" on many responses to fan letters.

Some rubber stamp signatures are quite clean and difficult to detect, unless you know what to look for. In the illustrations provided, notice how the ink fills the valley where the lines cross. Ink 'fill-ins' are a major clue to stamped signatures. Similar void-fills are present in most stamped signatures.

Pay special attention to the ink intensity. Stamped signatures usually have a uniform tone, but they may become evenly lighter or darker from one end to the other. This is due to the way the stamp is pressed onto the paper. Sometimes a "Ghost image" can also be detected. The "Ghost" is a second stamp, usually very lightly pressed on to the paper. It is caused by a shake or shift of the stamp while the impression is being made.

In addition to rubber stamps, several Presidents including Truman, Coolidge, and Harding used pre-printed stationery with the words; "The White House / Washington" on the top and their signature at the bottom. Thousands of this pre-printed stationery were used to respond to inquiries, letters of support and complaints. A secretary would type a response between the heading and the signature, and with a little practice, could make it look like the real thing. Several clues will make this type of non-genuine letter easy to spot. The ink color of the heading and signature are identical because the signature and heading were usually printed in one pass of the printing press. Ink voids in the signature and the heading, may be apparent, because the process used to print this stock, was of lower quality than usual. The body of the letter may appear cramped and full, because it needed to be 'squeezed' into the area available.

The phrase "knowledge is power" is only half right. The knowledge must be applied in order for it to be beneficial. So keep your eyes open, inspect all letters closely, look for the characteristics described above, and use your Autograph Detective knowledge to build a solid collection of genuine autographs.

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ILLUSTRATIONS
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