

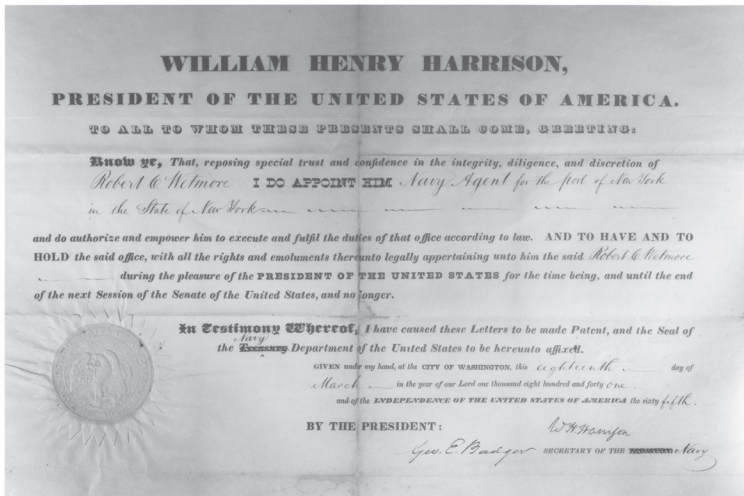
Harrison as President

JOE RUBINFINE AND JOHN M. TAYLOR

Historian Glenn Tucker has characterized William Henry Harrison as “one of those thin, wiry men who... live frugally, eat and drink sparingly, [and] establish their own strict ideas of integrity and abide by them.” We will never know what type of president Harrison would have made, however, because he died only a month into his term.

Until his fatal illness, fortune had smiled on Harrison with some regularity. A lackluster term in Congress and a controversial period as minister to Colombia made little impact on his image as the “Hero of Tippecanoe.” In 1840 he was chosen to lead the Whig ticket in a year when a Whig victory was correctly viewed as a near certainty.

Collector interest in Harrison derives largely from the extreme rarity of his autograph while in office. The prohibitive cost of even the most mundane White House example has made it impossible for most presidential collectors to obtain examples of every president while in office. As a dealer, Joe Rubinfine has handled a number of presidential Harrisons. As a collector, Jack Taylor has deplored the fact that he will never own one! To date, however, there appears to have been no systematic cataloguing of Harrison items available to collectors.



This appointment of a naval agent for the port of New York was a key appointment in Harrison's brief administration.
Courtesy of the authors.

Research by Joe and his staff has produced the following list of presidential Harrisons that have appeared over the past three decades. Where possible, we have noted the hammer price of the item on its most recent appearance at auction.

Dated Items

March 5, 1841 – LS to B. F. Butler. Sold at Christie's in March 2002 for \$110,000.

March 10 – Pardon for Elijah Rhea. Sotheby's, June 2001, \$110,000.

March 10 – Appointment of William Barron as U.S. marshal. Sotheby's, October 1984, \$37,500.

March 10 – ALS to Robert Buchanan. Christie's, October 2002, \$240,000.

March 10 – Presidential frank on letter to Robert Buchanan. Siegel, December 2002, \$52,500.

March 15 – Frank on cover of letter to grandnephew. Sotheby's, December 1998, \$6,500.

March 15 – Appointment of Henderson Taylor as U.S. attorney. Sotheby's, June 1974, \$9,250.

March 16 – Appointment of W. L. Maury as lieutenant in the U.S. Navy. Paul Richards catalogue 248, c. 1989, \$125,000.

March 18 – Warrant for an exequatur to George Chacon. Rubinfine catalogue 128, 1995, \$120,000.

March 18 – Appointment of Robert Wetmore as naval agent. Superior, 1991, \$85,000.

March 18 – Appointment of W. B. Smith as collector at Machias, Maine. Hamilton, October 1974, \$7,500.

March 19 – Warrant for a pardon for James P. Smith. Christie's, December 1995, \$70,000.

March 22 – ANS to Commissioner of Public Buildings. Christie's, December 2002, \$100,000.

March 23 – Warrant to pay James H. Birch. Christie's, December 1997, \$40,000.

March 25 – Warrant for a power of attorney to Welles and Co. Rubinfine catalogue 91, 1988, \$75,000.

March 29 – Ship's passport for the *Virginia Trader*. Christie's, May 1996, \$75,000.

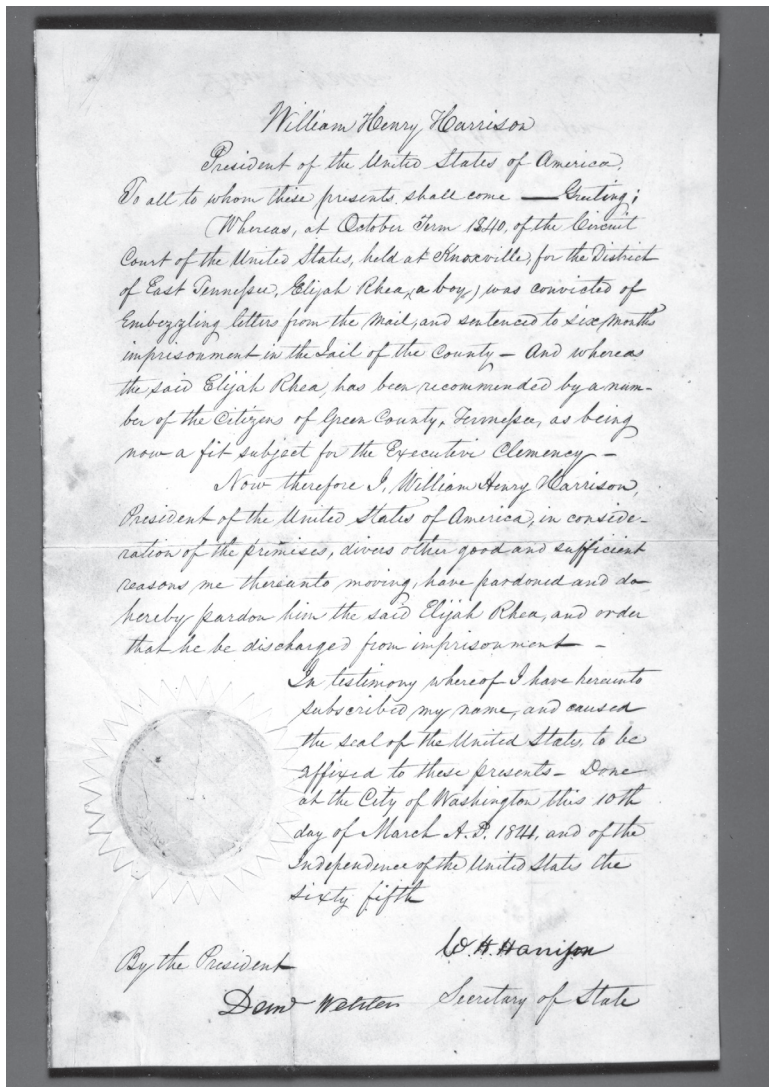
March 31 – Unsigned autograph endorsement on a letter related to an appointment. Christie's, December 1993, \$5,000.

Undated Items

Ship's passport for the *Hydaspe*, issued on April 20, 1841, after Harrison's death. Sotheby's, May 1997, \$65,000.

Ship's passport for the *Agate*, issued April 30, 1841—again after Harrison's death. Sotheby's, May 1990, \$80,000.

Ship's passport in blank. Sotheby's, October 1985, \$37,000.



Here President Harrison pardons “a boy” who was convicted of “embezzling” from the U.S. mails. Courtesy of the authors.

Small fragment of a ship's passport. Robert Batchelder catalogue, 1986, \$15,000.

The foregoing add up to 21 items: 1 ALS, 1 LS, 14 DS, and 5 miscellaneous. It appears likely that a few items have escaped our net, suggesting that as many as 25 presidential Harrisons may be in circulation.

And what of institutions? The Library of Congress has a fine Harrison ALS, and the Truman Library owns a ship's passport. There are probably a few other presidential Harrisons in institutions, but we suspect not very many. The total number of Harrison autographs while in office is probably no more than 30 to 35.

NOTES

Joe Rubinfine is a long-time dealer in American autographs. John M. Taylor is a historian and a past president of the Manuscript Society.