

A very rare, collection of Presidential autobiographies in signed limited editions, from Calvin Coolidge to George HW Bush.

By Jim Hier

As the world awaits publication of Bill Clinton's much anticipated presidential memoirs later this year, it seemed appropriate to review the history of presidential autobiographies and the various editions available to autograph and book collectors.

In recent years there has been an increased interest in the collecting of signed books and, in particular, signed presidential books. The writings of American presidents have been published since the time of George Washington. Most of these early works take the form of speeches or dissertations on political issues of the day. To date only thirteen of our 43 presidents have actually penned their memoirs. The first to write and publish his memoirs was Ulysses S. Grant in 1885. However, it was not until Theodore Roosevelt that former presidents began the modern "tradition" of writing, for posterity, the history of their life and presidency. Every president since Roosevelt, with the exception of those who either died in office or were too ill upon leaving office, have taken the time to write the history of their life.

It is a consensus among autograph collectors that the three most important considerations when determining the value or desirability of a particular autographed item are: 1) Content, 2) Condition, and 3) Scarcity. With the recent trend towards displaying favorite autographs, there is, arguably, a fourth standard – visual appeal.

While books (particularly presidential memoirs) are typically produced in large quantities, only a relatively small number actually end up being signed. The scarcity increases (as does the visual appeal) when those books are available in special, limited editions. Fortunately, there are usually enough

copies of signed books available on the market for collectors to easily assemble an impressive collection.

When considering "content," imagine the appeal of a letter from any American President discussing his childhood, family, entry into politics, the challenges faced while running for president, the key decisions of his presidency and any other important events that may have occurred in his life. At a time when the mere mention of some famous person's name or specific event passes for "great content," a letter dealing in depth with any of these subjects would be considered highly desirable. With a signed presidential memoir, you get all that and more.

Signed books are also fairly easy to care for, making the issue of "condition" less of a concern for collectors than other forms of autographs. This is particularly true today since most books are usually produced using archival quality paper that is not as susceptible to the acid related toning found in books produced in the first half of the 20th Century. Whenever possible, collectors should try to collect these books in their original dust jackets. Not only does the dust jacket increase the value of the book, it helps protect the book from exposure to sun and, of course dust. To protect the dust jackets collectors should enclose them in a Mylar cover and, if possible, stored in a dust free environment, such as a glass front bookcase.

Which brings me to the fourth consideration – visual ap-

peal. What could be more appealing (and impressive) in your home or office than a shelf (or an entire bookcase) filled with signed presidential memoirs?

To help those interested in starting such a collection, I have prepared the following checklist of presidential memoirs, along with information on the various editions available and their relative scarcity. Many of the presidents listed here have written books, in addition to their memoirs, about particular “chapters” in their lives. For the purpose of the article, I am only focusing on those books considered their “official” autobiography.

Ulysses S. Grant

Ulysses S. Grant was the first president to write his autobiography. Unfortunately, Grant died just days after he finished writing his life’s story and the book was published posthumously. As a result, it is impossible

to find a signed copy of this book. Volume I has a dedication hand written by Grant that is reproduced in the front of the book. It reads “These Volumes are dedicated to the American Soldiers and Sailors U.S. Grant New York City May 23rd 1885.” Collectors need to be careful of unscrupulous or unsuspecting sellers who try to represent this as an actual signed book.



Ulysses S. Grant printed “inscription”

- **Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant** (two volumes), New York: Charles L. Webster, 1885.

Theodore Roosevelt

Theodore Roosevelt was the most prolific presidential writer with dozens of books to his credit. In addition to writing what would become the first of the modern presidential memoirs, Roosevelt also wrote a number of books dealing with various aspects of his very active life.

- **An Autobiography**, New York: Macmillan, 1913; 647 pp. Because of the enduring fascination with Roosevelt, signed copies of this book are extremely difficult to find.

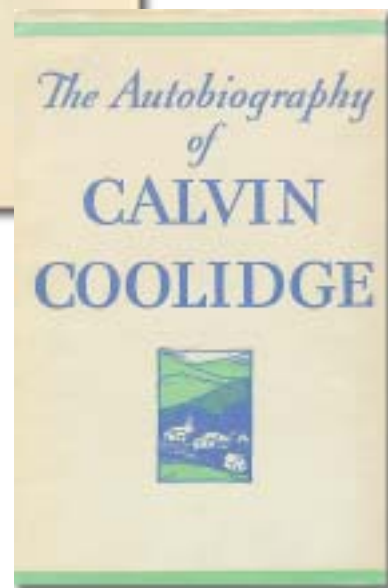
Other books by Roosevelt that deal with important events in his life include **The Rough Riders**, **Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail**, **African Game Trails** (available as a two volume signed limited edition of 400 copies), **Big Game Hunting In The Rockies And In The Great Plains**, (available as a signed limited edition of 1000 copies), **Through The Brazilian Wilderness** and **The Wilderness Hunter** (available as signed limited edition of 200 copies).

Calvin Coolidge

Calvin Coolidge has the distinction of being the first president to produce a special signed, limited edition of his autobiography. The limited edition (limitation of 1000) includes a matching slipcase. Interestingly signed copies of the trade edition of Coolidge’s *Auto-*



First edition of “The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge” with an uncommon inscription.



biography are actually less common than the limited edition. Due to the increased interest in collecting signed presidential books, demand (and the cost) of this book has increased significantly.

- **The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge**, New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1929.

Herbert Hoover

Herbert Hoover’s three volume memoirs is the lengthiest presidential memoir to date. In addition to dealing with his presidency, it also reflects on his very active public and private career before becoming president (the only elective office he ever held). While signed copies of these books are generally available (usually inscribed), it is surprisingly difficult to find a complete set of true first editions, signed by Hoover.

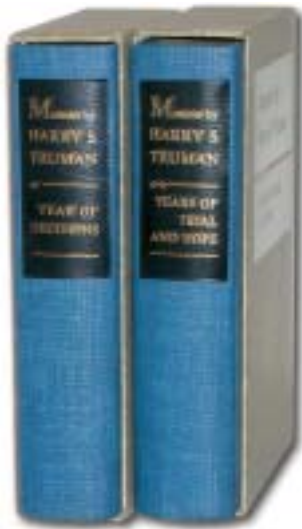
- **The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Years of Adventure 1874-1920** (Volume I); **The Cabinet and the Presidency 1919-1941** (Volume II); **The Great Depression 1929-1933** (Volume III), New York: Macmillan Company, 1951-1952.

Like Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover wrote a number of other books, though most of these deal with specific issues of the day or are collections of speeches Hoover gave over the course of his long career. One interesting book that collectors may consider adding to this “collection” of presidential memoirs is the biography Hoover wrote about his predecessor, Woodrow Wilson, who was too ill, upon leaving office, to pen his own autobiography. **The Ordeal Of Woodrow Wilson** is

available in a trade edition, as well as a signed limited edition (limitation of 500 with a matching slipcase)

Harry S Truman

Harry Truman's presidential memoirs were actually published in three unique editions – the trade edition, the “limited” Kansas City Edition (Volume 1 had a limitation of 20,615. Volume 2 had a limitation of 11,500) and the very scarce Author's Edition. The “Kansas City Edition” has unique end papers depicting a map of the state of Missouri. The dust jackets of this edition also have the words “Kansas City Edition” on the spine. Finally, Truman produced a special Author's Edi-



Author's Edition of Harry S. Truman's "Memoirs" inscribed to a member of his Cabinet.



tion (limitation unknown) as gifts to friends and members of his cabinet. Each of these specially bound books has an individual slipcase. In addition to inscribing each of the books, Truman also inscribed each of the slipcases.

- **Memoirs: Year of Decision.** Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1955

- **Years of Trial and Hope 1946-1952.** Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1956.

In addition to his memoirs, Truman also wrote *Mr. Citizen* that tells of his transition from the presidency to civilian life after leaving the White House. This book is also available in three unique editions – the trade edition, signed, limited edition (limitation of 1,000 with a slipcase) and a specially bound Author's Edition (limitation unknown, includes a slipcase).

Dwight Eisenhower

Dwight Eisenhower continued the tradition of issuing a signed limited edition of his memoirs. Because his two volume memoirs were published at separate times, the publisher allowed people interested in pre-paying for the second volume to reserve the same limitation number as they had in the first volume. As a result, a matched set of numbers in these books carries a slight premium among collectors. The limited edition, which includes a special slipcase for each volume, consisted of 1,500 books, of which 1,434



Dwight Eisenhower's limited edition memoir, with scarce personal inscription.



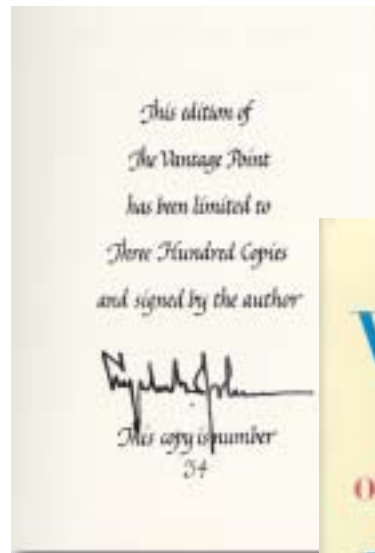
were available for sale to the public.

With the increased interest in WWII, demand for these books has steadily increased. Because of the large limitation, they are readily available. Interestingly, signed copies of the trade edition are tougher to find. When they are found, it is usually with a bookplate that has been affixed to the front of the book.

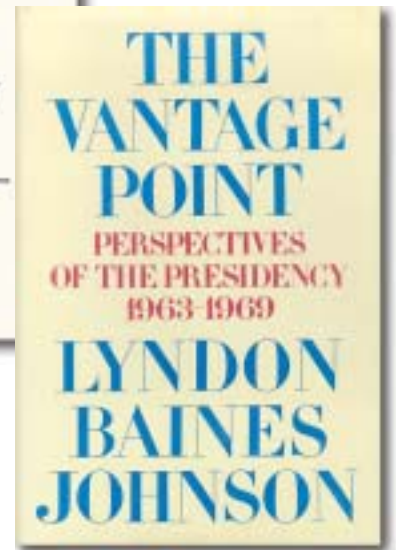
- **Mandate for Change 1953-1956.** Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1963.

- **Waging Peace 1956-1961.** Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1965.

In addition to his presidential memoirs, Eisenhower wrote two other books that dealt with important events in his life - *Crusade in*



Lyndon Johnson's "The Vantage Point" with signed limitation page from scarce limited edition



Europe and *At Ease: Stories I Tell To Friends*. *Crusade in Eu-*

rope is Ike's personal account of World War II and is available in the trade edition and the very collectable limited edition, which includes a signed reproduction of Eisenhower's famous D-Day orders.

Lyndon Johnson

Lyndon Johnson's presidential memoir was produced in both a regular trade edition and a very scarce signed limited edition. The trade edition is generally available, though commonly found with a bookplate affixed to the front of the book. The signed limited edition is a true rarity in the presidential memoir collection. Despite a limitation of 300 books, copies of this book rarely come on the market. Part of the reason for this may be the poor quality of the binding. Bound in faux red leather, with foam padding, this book has not held-up well since publication. Every edition I have encountered has significant problems, usually involving the splitting or separation of the front covers. When these books are found, they usually contain a wonderful inscription to a member of the Johnson inner circle.

• **The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969**, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971.

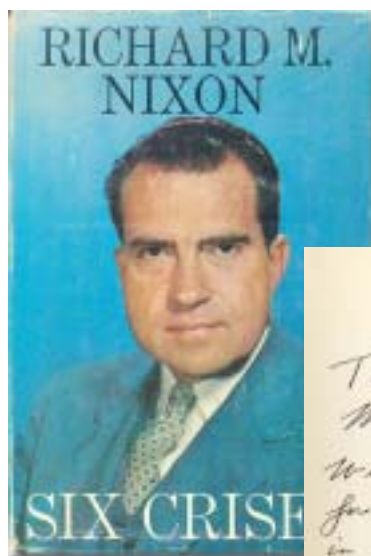
Richard Nixon

After resigning in the wake of Watergate, Richard Nixon was able to rebuild his reputation and establish himself as America's senior statesman in large part through his thought provoking books on weighty political issues of the day. His memoirs, when first published, were highly controversial. Published in three separate editions – trade, deluxe signed limited edition (with matching slipcase, limitation not stated) and “presentation” signed limited edition (limitation of 2,500). A number of people, most of whom felt Nixon could never be trusted no matter what the circumstance, were convinced his signature in the various signed editions was either done by an autopen or was a secretarial (it isn't).

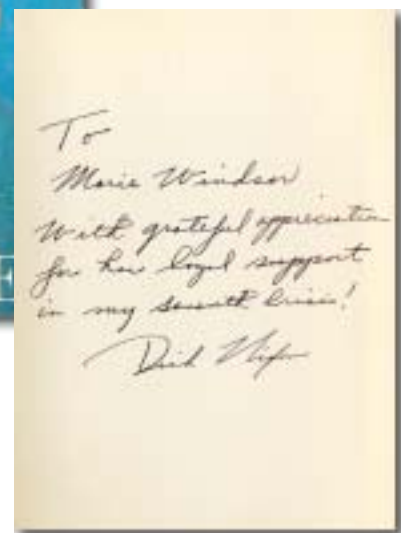
Each of these variant editions is readily available today. The trade edition is often found “signed” with a specially made bookplate that Nixon would send out through the mail. The deluxe-signed limited edition includes a matching slipcase. Collectors interested in this particular edition need to be mindful of the book's susceptibility to sun fading on the spine of the book. The presentation edition is beautifully bound in blue leather.

• **RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon**, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978.

Nixon published two other books dealing with important chapters in his life, *Six Crises* deals with



Nixon's "Six Crises" with an inscription referencing his 1962 California Gubernatorial defeat



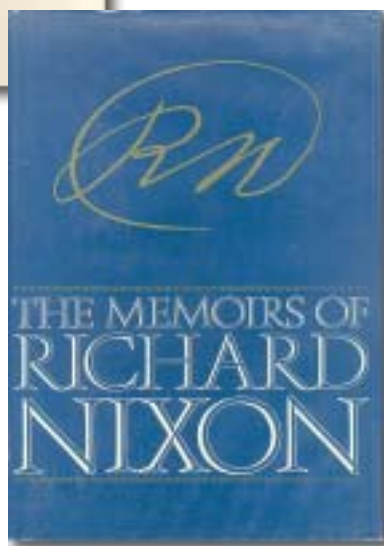
personal crises in the early part of his political career, including the events leading up to the famous “Checker's Speech” and his defeat against John F. Kennedy

in 1960. Collectors need to be weary of autopen signed copies of this book. It is commonly available and often offered as authentically signed. The other book, *In The Arena*, deals with his “resurrection” after Watergate. This book is available in a trade edition (commonly found signed with the bookplate of the Nixon Presidential Library) and a signed limited edition (limitation of 500, with matching slipcase).

Richard Nixon also has the distinction of being the first president to have his memoirs republished in a highly collectible leather bound edition by Easton Press as part of its *Library of the Presidents* series. Book collecting purists do not usually consider these reprints worthy of collecting, but given the increased popularity of these beautiful books, I felt it was necessary to mention it here.



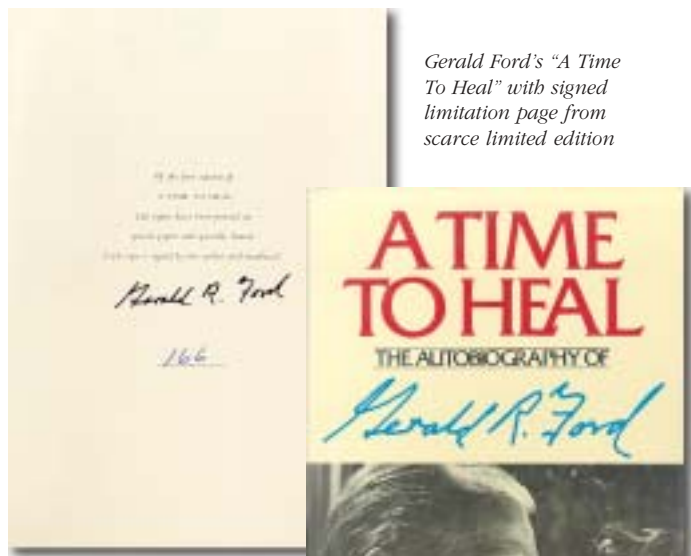
First edition of Richard Nixon's "Memoirs" with an uncommon inscription, often found with a signed bookplate



Gerald R. Ford

With a limitation of only 250 books, the signed limited edition (with matching slipcase) of Gerald Ford's *A Time To Heal* is one of the scarcest of presidential autobiographies. Signed copies of the trade edition are readily available, often found signed with a bookplate that President Ford's office readily sent out to all when the book was first published. *A Time To Heal* is also available in a Easton Press edition.

• **A Time To Heal. The Autobiography Of Gerald R. Ford**, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers and The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1979.

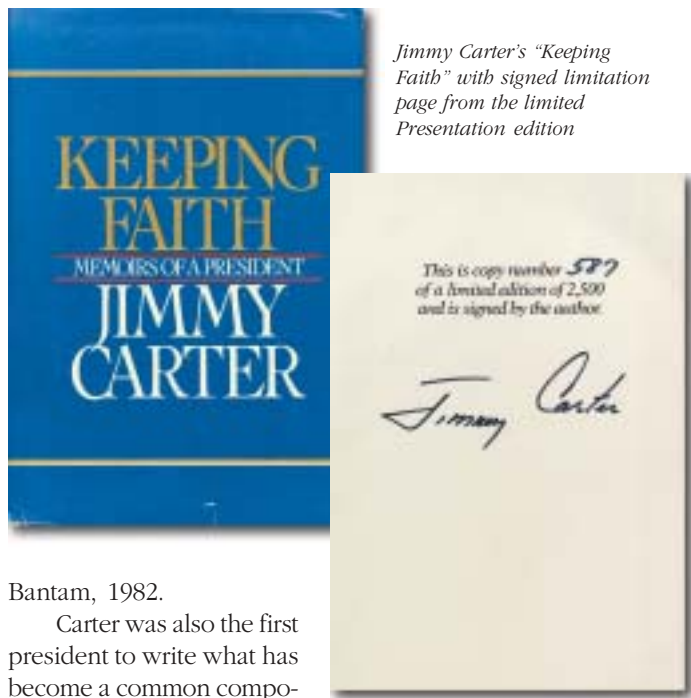


Gerald Ford's "A Time To Heal" with signed limitation page from scarce limited edition

Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter is the most prolific presidential author in the last half of the 20th Century. His books run the gamut from memoirs, speeches, poetry and even a children's book. Carter's presidential memoirs, **Keeping Faith**, are available in three separate editions – trade, deluxe signed limited edition (with matching slipcase, limitation not stated) and "presentation" signed limited edition (with matching slipcase, limitation of 2,500).

- **Keeping Faith. Memoirs Of A President**, New York:



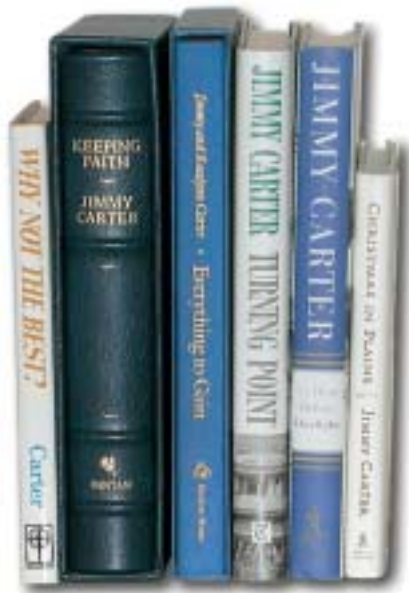
Jimmy Carter's "Keeping Faith" with signed limitation page from the limited Presentation edition

Bantam, 1982.

Carter was also the first president to write what has become a common component of today's modern presidential elections – the campaign autobiography. His book **Why Not The Best** was used to help introduce the American people to the then relatively unknown Governor of Georgia.

Why Not The Best is available in three separate editions – the trade edition, the Presidential Edition (bound in faux green leather) and the so-called limited Signature Edition (which is not actually signed by Carter, with a limitation of 5,000).

The former president has also been very successful writing a number of books that serialize important episodes in his life and career. Those books include; **Everything to Gain**, co-written with Rosalynn Carter, deals with their life after the presidency (available in the trade edition and a signed limited edition (limitation of 500), with slipcase); **Turning Point**, the story of Carter's first run for elective office; **An Hour Before Daylight** Carter's childhood in rural Georgia; **Christmas in Plains** a collection of favorite Carter family Christmas stories. Easton Press has also republished most of Carter's books in signed, leather bound editions.



Jimmy Carter collection of all of his autobiographical writings

Ronald Reagan

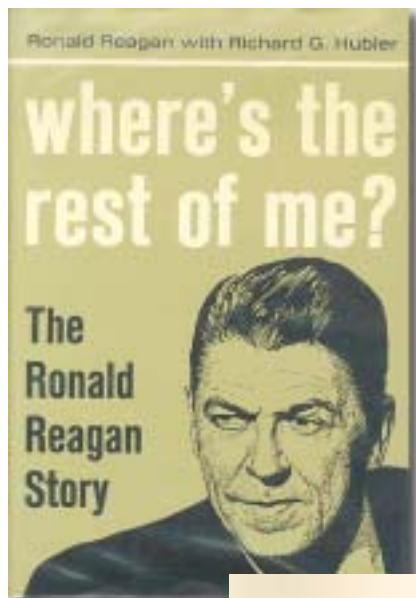
In recent years, books signed by our 40th president are in high demand among collectors and individuals who admire one of the most popular presidents in recent memory. Reagan's presidential memoirs are available in two separate editions – trade and signed limited edition (limitation of 2,500).

- **An American Life**, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990.

The trade edition is often signed with a variety of different bookplates, though when the book was first published, Reagan generally accommodated requests to sign the book. Because of Reagan's enormous popularity, these books generally sell for around \$300 - \$500 and are likely to hold their value as his legacy continues to grow. Collectors, however, need to be careful to avoid books containing bookplates signed with an autopen. Reagan's office sent these plates out in order



Ronald Reagan "An American Life" limited edition display with oak presentation box.



First edition of Ronald Reagan's "Where's The Rest Of Me" with the correct "To Nancy" dedication.

to limit the amount of books Reagan would actually have to sign.

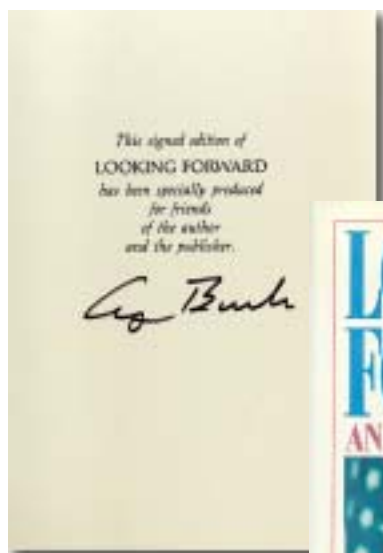
The limited edition of *An American Life* is one of the most beautiful presentations of any of the presidential memoirs. While published by Simon & Schuster, Easton Press actually produced the limited edition, with an



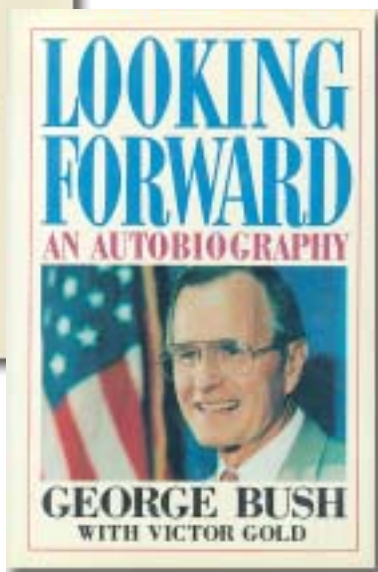
elaborate, velvet lined oak case, emblazoned with the presidential seal and a small drawer containing cassette tapes of Reagan's most famous speeches. For some reason, unknown to this author, not all of the limited editions were sold with the oak case.

Ronald Reagan actually wrote two autobiographies during his lifetime. The first was *Where's The Rest Of Me?* which deals with his successful career in Hollywood. Collectors may

be interested in a wonderful story connected with the first edition of this book. When initially published, so the story goes, Nancy



George H.W. Bush's "Looking Forward" with signed limitation page from the scarce Author's Edition



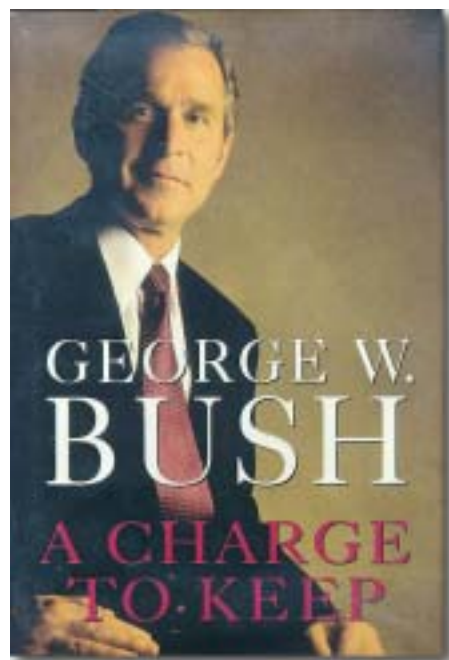
Reagan was upset that the future President used her pet name – "Honey" – in the book's dedication – "To Honey with Love." In all future editions of this book, the dedication reads "To Nancy with Love." To make amends, when signing copies of the first edition, Reagan would often scratch out the word "Honey" from the printed dedication and write in "Nancy". In light of her unselfish devotion to Reagan, especially now, this is a particularly poignant addition to any collection of signed presidential books.

George H. W. Bush

The senior President Bush has bucked the trend of past presidents, making a conscious decision not to write his presidential memoirs, satisfied to leave the assessment of his years in the White House to future historians. Despite this decision, Bush did write a pre-presidential autobiography, while serving as Vice President.

- **Looking Forward**, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1987.

Looking Forward is available in three separate editions – trade, a signed limited edition (with matching slipcase, limitation of 250) and a special author's signed edition (limitation not stated). The signed limited edition is virtually unobtainable. I have personally only seen one copy. The Author's Edition is scarce but does occasionally come on the market.



George W. Bush's "A Charge To Keep" commonly found with a signed bookplate

George W. Bush

The current President Bush has some time yet to decide if he will follow his father's example, or that of his fellow presidents when it comes to writing his memoirs. For those who can't wait, however, they can include the president's campaign autobiography *A Charge to Keep* in their collection.

- **A Charge to Keep**, New York: William Morrow, 1999.

This book is typically signed with a special bookplate, though collectors need to be careful to avoid autopen signatures. Easton Press has also republished this book in a signed, leather bound edition.

Assembling a complete set of signed presidential memoirs can be very rewarding and is not that difficult to achieve. It is also a great way to start building an impressive library of all of the published writings of American presidents.