
It's easy to forget, sitting in front of the computer screen, that handwriting was not so long ago a far more important aspect of everyday life than it is today. At my English primary school in the 1950s we had handwriting lessons, using pencil, and were later entered for external competitions, using ink. At grammar school in the 1960s we were not allowed to use anything but dip pens and ink until we were thirteen, presumably to foster good penmanship. This book shows that the ability to write a "good hand" was prized by society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and could indeed be the route to a better than average job in office-related work. In America the skill was even taught in trade schools and business colleges to rhythmic counting and vocal letter drills, "push-pull, round and round, over down." The results were not only useful but readable, expressive, and even beautiful script. William C. Henning (1871-1972), the father of the author of this book, was a teacher of penmanship. There were books and even journals on the subject at the turn of the last century and he was deeply involved in the work. Henning's son began a study of the subject after his father's death. This book is the result, a collection of his father's writing specimens, notes from his unpublished memoirs, and a guide to his many reference works. Apart from examples of calligraphy script there are flourishes, decorative designs of plants, birds and animals, and drill patterns so regular that they look as though they might have been produced by a machine. The book appears under the son's name, although he died in 1996 and the work of assembling the illustrations, the core of the work, and seeing the completed manuscript through the press has been done by Paul Melzer, a rare book dealer.

This work on the literature of handwriting and the lettering arts is an important chapter in American book history. Its publication has been delayed for many years by the high costs involved in
producing a book like this for the commercial market, given its absolute dependence on copious and good quality illustrations. The majority of the illustrations have been scanned from Henning’s collection of originals. The hundreds of beautiful illustrations make the book, although the historical introduction and essays on seven penmen accompanying the pictures are also important.

The seven are not now household names and yet their stories are compelling biographies of men making their living, and also making themselves famous, by handwriting. Platt Rogers Spencer had never owned a sheet of paper until 1808 when at the age of eight, growing up in the Catskills, he arranged for a lumberman to buy him a single piece of paper on which to write. It cost him a cent, all the money he had. His first efforts were not suddenly and miraculously brilliant, but he progressed and eventually made his living teaching handwriting and evolving the Spencerian System, the basis of many writing systems that followed. George A. Gaskell followed Spencer and became Principal of the Bryant and Stratton Business Colleges in Manchester, New Hampshire, and Jersey City in the 1870s and 1880s. The illustration here of his flourished lion takes the art to unimaginable limits. Louis Madarasz was a pupil of Gaskell’s if only via mail order publications. He earned himself the title of “the wonderful boy penman.” He could write a beautiful and elaborate alphabet of so-called business capitals in only twenty-one seconds. His personal, idiosyncratic ink mixture and pen as sharp as a needle enabled him to produce feather-like ornamentations, though even his everyday postcard notes are beautiful. William E. Dennis was another of Gaskell’s pupils. Photographs of his pens show crude and seemingly clumsy turkey quills, but together with his steady hand they produced impeccably beautiful results, more like elaborate type faces than calligraphy. Austin Norman Palmer was attracted by Gaskell’s ornate birds, snakes, and stags. He developed his own system emphasising lightness, smoothness, accuracy and the importance of muscular movement. He taught huge classes. A photograph shows a room of over a hundred students. Francis B. Courtney is often described as the best of penmen, famous for his multiple styles, flourishes, and interlacings. There are many illustrations of his envelopes and cards, decorated with caricatures and his trademark birds perching on the swirls of the script. The final penman is William C. Henning. His chapters include the afterword by his widow and his unfinished autobiography.
Melzer tells us that penmanship is still alive and well sustained not least and ironically by on-line discussion groups such as Ornamental Penmanship and Cyberscribes.


In his editorial preface David Blewett says that the huge response to the call for papers for this special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* indicates the importance of the link between fiction and print culture. The novel, indeed, owes its existence to the invention of printing. Reading was suddenly a private and solitary affair and, as he says, contributed to introspection, imaginative excitement, and the growth of individualism.

The collection is arranged under three headings: Author and Book, Book Illustration, and the History of the Book. The first section includes essays on *Tristram Shandy*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Frances Burney, and Maria Edgeworth. The essays look at the problems of authorship, not least for women writers, editing, marketing, and the rise of literary reviews. Aileen Douglas’s essay on Maria Edgeworth, for example, looks at her role as her father’s copyist and transcriber, and her resistance to the notion that literary works were different from or inferior to other forms of writing. Douglas links this to Edgeworth’s commitment to literacy in the labouring classes, the copy being the means whereby writing is spread.

The second section looks at the evolution of illustrations in fiction, the link between the text and the illustration, and the relationship of the artist and the writer. As Nicholas Cronk points out, writers have often been suspicious of allowing illustrations into their texts and the intrusion and competition they represent. Nonetheless the illustrated eighteenth-century French novel is widely seen as attractive, and certainly these days collectible. He traces the changing pattern of illustration over the century, from no illustrations, to illustrations in reprints of popular editions, to plates in definitive and revised editions, to an expectation of illustrated first editions. His examples focus on *Manon Lescaut* and *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Another