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## Individuality in Ornamental Penmanship

By WE Dennis

Many fine specimens of ornamental penmanship have of late appeared in the pages of "THE Business Educator," showing wonderful control of band and good conception of form, but there is one comment in particular which might be made in regard to these fine specimens. They all look alike as though done by one person.

Are the penmen all closely copying one another? Such a thing as individuality does not seem to exist, and the work in the penmanship line, both plain and ornamental, has become so stereotyped and so lacking in personality that when you have seen one good specimen you have seen them all, and in that way they cease to be interesting.

Business Writing is a part of commercial education, and no doubt a certain uniformity of style is desirable in training young people to acquire a good rapid handwriting, but ornamental penmanship is an art, or at least it belongs to artistic work. Its object is to please the eye and gratify the artistic sense of form, proportion, elegance and grace. In all artistic work there should be a certain personality to stamp it as the production of someone in particular, and not appearing as the result of a mechanical process, depriving it of that feature so interesting in art work, Individuality.

If the work of all the artists looked just alike we would soon tire of their pictures. If all authors wrote alike, they would soon become very uninteresting, and if all public speakers spoke alike we would not care to hear many of them. It is because the work of artists, authors, Poets\_ musicians, etc., is so varied that we take pleasure in studying them. Visit an art gallery and note the difference in the art creations. The work of no two artists will be found exactly alike. While all may have merit yet each has his particular kind of merit.

Art instructors do not try to hamper individuality but rather to develop it, and originality is one of the strong points they encourage. The artist who told a pupil not to be a servile imitator of any one, but to copy from everybody that which was good, gave the best of advice, because the one who incorporates the good points of other people's work into his own will surely develop a style belonging to himself only.

It seems no one can reach a high grade of success by trying to be just like someone else. We are all made different mentally and physically, and about every one possesses some peculiar merit, which if brought out will entitle him to a certain amount of credit.

It is a pleasure to bring up before the penmanship fraternity a few names of those who were real artists in their special line, chiefly because while they were all masters, they were at the same time all different, one about as good as another, but not in the same way; therefore it would be most ungracious to single out any particular one as the "champion" or to say that In every respect he was the greatest of all.

If we could turn backward thirty-five or forty years we would meet some very fine penmen, who in some ways, excelled those of to-day. Pure unadorned business writing had not taken such a hold on the business educational fraternity as it has at present. There were none like E. C. Mills, whose plain business writing is simply perfection and wonderful for its correctness, a model in every detail. But there were some real artist penmen who seemed to consider beauty as one of the essentials. Many names come up in mind of those whose taste and skill were of the highest order.

P. R. Spencer, Sr. was one of the earliest and who did so much to develop a fine style of penmanship. According to the writer's best knowledge he was not what he would be termed an ornamental penman, yet his writing was a picture, graceful and easy in form, tasty and artistic in arrangement, with shading

distributed in such a manner as to produce a most beautiful effect as a whole. There are still in existence today specimens from the pen of Spencer, Sr., which in their way are unique and masterful.

A. R. Dunton was another of the old timers, who, in his peculiar Duntonian style. had no superiors, if even equals. Dunton was very much of an all round artist with the pen, whose ability was not confined simply to elegant writing, although he could write a style that sometimes would baffle the engravers to equal. He was not so much on the free off-hand kind as in his favorite shaded style, which was in vogue fifty to seventy-five years ago. He used to do his finest script with writing ink, then carefully retouch every down stroke with India ink, giving it when complete the effect and finish of steel engraving.

As the story goes, Dunton at one time exhibit some specimens of his penmanship at a fair in Boston. The judges who were to inspect his work declared that it was not done with a pen but engraved, and therefore would be counted out. This gave Dunton an opportunity to say something very emphatic, and being as proficient in profanity as in penmanship said: "By G-, I'll show you that can be done with a pen." So he stamped the floor, did some more hard swearing, then got his implements together and in a short time produced a sample of his skill fully equal to the disputed specimens.

One of the very best penmen that ever lived, according to the writer's opinion, was the late F. W. H. Wieseahn, of St. Louis. Doubtless there are many of the younger generation of penmen who never heard of him, and still more who have never seen specimens of his wonderful skill. He was unique in his way and different in his style from all others. Decidedly Wieseahn in his style, with a touch European characteristics, he had a hold dash in his work that was original, artistic and beautiful. He was an artist by nature, and according to photographs of some of his pen drawings he had the genius for becoming famous in broader fields of art than penmanship.

Two men, who may be mentioned together because their work was something alike and about equal in quality, are L. P. Spencer and H. W. Flickinger, both yet living, but probably doing very little artistic penmanship at present.

The work of these two masters came about as near absolute Perfection as any the writer has ever had the pleasure of seeing. Though not having the strong individuality of Wieseahn they each reached the very top notch of skillful execution. In the pure Spencerian, characterized by its chaste and elegant forms, grace and Proportion. each displayed a skill that probably has never been attained by any other penman. Certainly in their large pieces of script work, showing hardly a fault, blemish or mis-stroke, it is doubtful if Spencer and Flickinger have ever been equaled.

The Declaration of Independence, done away back in the '70's by Spencer and assisted by Flickinger in certain parts, is, in the writer's opinion, the most perfect piece of skillful pen work in America. It is not a specimen of offhand work, but a replica of steel engraved portraits, and vignettes, with elegant lettering and perfect Spencerian writing, showing the very acme of what is possible for the human hand to do. This large and wonderful piece of pen work is still to be seen at the American Book Company, New York.

G. A. Gaskell, with whose work the writer is familiar, did in his youth, some most remarkable off-hand penmanship, and was in his peculiar, free, unstudied style, one of the very best in the country. Grace, ease and freedom lent a charm to his ornamental work that was unsurpassed, and while not the most accurate and careful worker, he was in many respects, equal, if not superior to any of his time as an off-hand penman.

While Gaskell was spending thousands of dollars advertising his compendium, and receiving still more thousands by mail, he got in touch with L. Madarasz, then a young man of about twenty years, and turned the latter's clever skill to his advantage in circular addressing, etc. For quantity and quality combined Madarasz excelled any penman in the country, and being always in good trim could do just about as well at one time as another. His hand was always steady and his touch light and delicate, with which he developed a style of free, ornamental writing that became immensely popular. His style has probably been copied more than that of any other penman. Some have about equaled him, but none have excelled him in his best off-hand, elegant work.

The name of John D. Williams deserves special mention among these celebrities in penwork, chiefly because he appears to have been a person of much originality. Williams was a wonderful off-hand penman, originating and executing large flourished designs that stand out in bold relief for true artistic merit. Design, composition and remarkably fine execution stamp them as productions of a real genius in penwork. It must have been Williams who introduced a new and more artistic style of flourishing; for previous to his time the style of flourishing appears to have been that of meaningless cork-screw curves, skillful to be sure, but void of design as a general thing, Williams embodied simple and compound curves into bounding stags, spread eagles, graceful birds posing amid branches of trees, etc. that not only showed great skill but represented something. His "Gems of Ornamental Penmanship," long since out of print, contains specimens of flourishing which are pictures, and if Williams designed them he is entitled to all the credit he ever received.

Many more names of penmen deserving much credit for their work could be added to this list, those who were not altogether copyists, but did beautiful artistic work, possessing distinctive qualities and merit peculiar to themselves. There is, no doubt, just as much scope for originality in ornamental penmanship as in many other decorative arts. It should be more encouraged, not as a necessity like business writing, but for the pleasure derived from things artistic.