

## WHAT IS ENGROSSING?

Wanted: a Name

What is Engrossing? According to Webster's Dictionary, it is "To copy in a large hand" Engrosser "One who copies in a large fair hand."

Now let us see what some are doing who are called "engrossers." They are not only supposed to write a large or fair hand and give it the effect of copperplate engraving, but have at their finger ends about every style of lettering, among which may be mentioned the Roman alphabet, block letters, Old English, German text, Round text, missal text, etc., which are especially difficult and require a great deal of practice. In addition to this, they must know something of antique scroll work, particularly the acanthus leaf, which appears to be the foundation of most ornaments. Up-to-date engrossers must know considerable about illuminating; for much of the high class engrossing at present is being done in the illuminator's style, which was used so much before the art of printing. Engrossers must be skillful with the brush in order to do a neat, effective wash drawing in soft black and white tones, or in harmonious colors. Some of the engrossers are also able to do good portrait work with either pen or brush. They must draw reasonably well almost anything which may be appropriate or emblematic in a piece of "engrossing."

Last, but by no means least, the engrosser must be something of a designer in order to arrange all this work in a manner pleasing to the eye. So it appears that the trade of an engrosser is a sort of combination of many things, and the more he excels in a# of them the higher grade of work will he be able to turn out.

Viewing the work as a whole of first-class engrossers it certainly seems as if they needed a different name from engrosser" Their work calls for a broader and more dignified term than "engrossing." A few have added the word art" to the name- "art engrossing" and while this is quite an improvement it doesn't seem to fill the bill.

Ask any "engrosser" what his business is and it is hard for him to give an intelligible answer which will at once convey a clear and concise idea of his work. If he says "engrosser" it is generally interpreted that he just copies legal documents, etc. If he says "penman" that is but little better, for although he is expected to be highly skillful in about every kind of penmanship, that is really but a small part of the work. If he says "designer," that is very indefinite, for there are about as many kinds of designers as there are trees in a forest. He might say "letterer"- that is one very important part of the work, but how about the rest of it?

So who can invent a name or a term which will express the right meaning without going into a long explanation? I have been doing "engrossing" steadily for thirty years, and have never been able to find a suitable name for this occupation.

Anyone who has followed this line for years and worked in all its different branches will tell you and very truthfully, too, that to make a first-class "engrosser" one must give ten to fifteen years' constant practice, and even then he will find a great deal more can be learned.

If one will reflect a moment on the subject it will be easy to understand why this work is called "engrossing." Years ago, I can't say how many, resolutions and such forms were just written in a "large fair hand," with perhaps a very little lettering, and the work at that time was called by its right name, "engrossing." Then more elaborate lettering, scroll work, ornaments, a little designing; then more elaborate designs, emblematic drawings, portraits, etc., then a little color introduced. More color, and finally illuminating, rich in color, elegant in design and presenting a beautiful pictorial effect. So that at present - engrossing can be rightfully dignified as an art, for certainly without the true touch of an artist such beautiful productions could not be turned out as are at present being done by skilled workmen who are labeled "engrossers."

It will be interesting to hear what others in this line might have to say on the subject. The work is still progressing, constantly requiring a higher grade of skill and more knowledge of the principles of real art; so it is about time we invented another name and discarded that moth-eaten term "ENGROSSING."

W E Dennis,  
357 Fulton St., Brooklyn, NY