

Taken from the July 1924 edition of The American Penman.

OBITUARY

William E. Dennis, Dean of Penmen

Mr. W. E. Dennis passed from this life on June 6, 1924, and the world of professional penmen mourns the passing of a master. Mr. Dennis was born in Manchester, N. H., in 1860.

His interest in penmanship started at the age of fifteen and he practiced industriously for several years without a teacher. At the age of seventeen young Dennis enrolled at Gaskell's Business College, Manchester, N. H., a fellow student of A. N. Palmer. His course at this school completed, Mr. Dennis became an itinerant writing teacher and later took up engrossing under the instruction of A. R. Dunton.

W. E. Dennis

Mr. Dennis taught in Wright's College, Brooklyn, N. Y., for several years and also for a period at Pierce School, Philadelphia, following which he took up the work of pen artist and engrosser and was known best for the artistic engrossing of resolutions, etc. That his work had a high standing is evidenced by the important commissions for resolutions put in his care.

In 1914 Mr. Dennis collected specimens of his best work and these were published in book form with special instructions prepared by Mr. Dennis, under the title "Studies in Pen Art."

My Friend - W. E. Dennis

By A. N. PALMER

While living in Southern California during several winters that have passed, one of my keenest anticipated pleasures has been, on my return to New York City, to visit in his Brooklyn studio my boyhood chum, W. E. (to me Bill) Dennis. On my recent journey from Pasadena, California, to my old home city of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, there floated to me from the east through the ether, peaceful anticipatory thoughts of the pleasant, reminiscently familiar and, altogether happy reunion to which "Bill" and I would treat ourselves over the luncheon table in some quiet corner of some quaint restaurant to which the artistic spirit of "Bill" would lead us.

That, and all future earthly reunions of W. E. Dennis and myself were cancelled automatically when he passed out of this life June 6th. The news of the death of Dennis came to me as a decided shock, when Mrs. Palmer and I were planning the last leg of our journey from Cedar Rapids to New York. Words are inadequate to express my feeling of irreparable personal loss in the passing of "Bill" Dennis.

As an early and constant admirer of his first and only penmanship instructor, George A. Gaskell, of Gaskell Compendium fame, Dennis undoubtedly absorbed some of Gaskell's reticence and apparent timidity in his contact with others, especially strangers, and as Mr. Bartow has stated in his fine estimate of Dennis, "The Man and Penman," "he was reserved, and did not make friends easily, but was always loyal to those he felt he could trust."

Who can say that because Dennis did not bask in the bright lights of Broadway, aspire to social distinction, or often have occasion to change his artist's smock for evening clothes, that he was ever unhappy in his self-

created atmosphere of exclusion, and almost hermit-like existence outside of business hours? At great pains and heavy cost for one of his limited means, Dennis had collected and displayed in his studio a comprehensive exhibit of the old penmanship masters, which he enjoyed with his admirers and friends from near and far who made his studio their Chirographic Mecca.

In a reminiscent mood I wrote a dedication to Pen Art

THE AMERICAN PENMAN FOR JULY 1924

Studies by W. E. Dennis, and as this explains some of the intimacies of our early boyhood days it is republished here.

Dedication

William E. Dennis and I were pupils together in Gaskell's, and Bryant & Stratton Business Colleges, of Manchester, N. H. We were then in our teens, and to our youthful minds nothing else in the world was quite so important or beautiful as ornate penmanship.

No matter how hot the weather, no matter how luring the outdoors with its swimming pool trees and flowers, young Dennis and I from choice, would climb to the fourth floor of the business block in which Gaskell kept school, and revel in the fascinating compound curves, shades and hair-lines that made up the anatomy of birds, which had neither home nor ancestry.

My boy friend and chum, "Bill" Dennis, was grace personified in all his manipulations of the pen. I was the opposite. The strokes I made lacked symmetry and grace. When practicing in my room, seeing only my own work, and having none of my boy friend's penmanship to contrast with it I frequently thought I was doing beautifully. All I had to do, however, to reduce my pride and satisfaction to the ashes of a dead hope, was to go to Dennis' room and contrast my work with what he had been doing at the same time.

Frequently, during that hot summer, Dennis would write a dozen cards which had been ordered; we would deliver them, and with the twenty-five cents thus obtained would buy a watermelon. Young Dennis was generous then. He was always free-hearted, and his purse often was opened too widely for his own good.

I long ago gave up the race for supremacy in this branch of penmanship and turned my attention to the plain, unshaded, coarse-pen style, which I believe everyone should learn. Had my muscles been as supple, my eye as true, and my hand as steady as were those of William E. Dennis, I might at this time be dividing honors with him.

Dennis-The Man and the Penman

By S. E. BARTOW

Dennis-The Man. It is difficult for those who knew Dennis intimately to realize that this likable man, this prince of penmen 'has passed to the Great Beyond "Prom whose Bourne no Traveler Returns"; to realize that this hand that wrought so many beautiful and artistic works of great variety has been stilled forever. We wonder if he will, in his new sphere, continue to do those -things which he so loved, in an even more perfect and beautiful form. We like to think so.

His passing was swift and with but little warning. Stricken with an acute attack of pneumonia, his none too robust body, weakened by long hours of work during a busy season, offered but little resistance.

Born among the New Hampshire hills he never lost his love for them and every vacation period he would instinctively turn his steps to the north. He frequently talked of going elsewhere but never did. He loved to walk and frequently hiked much of the distance to New Hampshire. He planned this year to walk from New Haven to Boston and invited me to accompany him.

His early love for penmanship led him to Manchester and the great Gaskell about whom at that period was clustered a small group of aspiring young penmen who were destined to make penmanship history-among them Palmer and Madarasz. He was proud of his Alma Mater and frequently spoke with glowing enthusiasm of the success of the little group.

For more than thirty years he was engaged in the engraving business in the city of Brooklyn. In that time he built up a lucrative business and the work turned out by his studio was skillfully executed and always in good taste. Dennis the man is no more but his work and the influence his work had on others will live for years to come.

Dennis was to the penmanship profession what such painters as Whistler, Sargent and Da Vinci were to the art world. I doubt if he has ever had an equal in offhand flourishing. Until recent years very little of his work was published. About seven years ago he began work on a collection of elaborate flourished designs and a variety of alphabets done in his inimitable style and when completed it made one of the most amazing collections to come from the hand of one man. -This collection was on exhibition in the office of The American Penman for several months and excited universal admiration. It was then given to his old schoolmate, Palmer, for publication. This book known as "Studies in Pen Art" forms one of the most enduring monuments to that Greatest of Great all around penmen, W. E. Dennis.

From THE BUSINESS EDUCATOR, a Zaner-Bloser publication, September 1924 edition: "The great master penman of the old school has passed on to a higher plane of existence. No man in the profession has done more to keep alive an interest in artistic penmanship as taught and practiced by 'the old timers.' It was always a joy to visit Dennis, as he was a genuine and genial friend whose dry humor and big heart made him a favorite with all (persons) fortunate enough to come within the circle of his acquaintance. His studio in Brooklyn (357 Fulton St.) has long been a Mecca for lovers of fine penmanship, and hanging on the walls are some of the finest specimens of pen drawing, flourishing and lettering, which in point of delicacy, accuracy and individuality are in a class all alone--masterpieces of line and color. No entertainment could quite take the place of an evening with Dennis, and in a letter written to me in April (1924) he sends the following characteristic invitation to visit him: 'I wish U could come out this wa (sp) some da (sp) and C our big displa(sp) of pen-work, the old timers, etc.' Dennis, when quite a young man, lived for a time with A. R. Dunton, at Camden, Maine. Under the critical eye of 'A. R.' he acquired a wonderful degree of accuracy in penciled script for copper engraving, and he made several large exhibition pieces of pen drawing equal in detail and delicacy to the finest steel engraving, displaying wonderful skill and patience. He also acquired a knowledge of disputed handwriting which he developed in later years. "