

David Parish Fairbanks  
(1913-2004)

Born in New York City in 1913, David Parish Fairbanks became an international traveler at the age of eight when his father accepted employment as an administrator of an arts academy in Rome. The Fairbanks family moved to the historic city, planning to live there for six months, and stayed for 19 years. In addition to working at the academy, the senior Fairbanks became a successful portrait painter in Rome.

While living in Europe, David received schooling in several disciplines. He attended schools in Italy, England and Switzerland, and, with the help of his father, learned to draw and illustrate. He also studied design and became fluent in French, Spanish and Italian. While in Rome, David became interested in calligraphy when a friend who was studying medieval manuscripts stayed with the Fairbanks family. She would bring home pictures of the manuscripts, and he was fascinated with the intricate detail and beauty of the art.

In the early 1930's, David returned to America for a brief period and lived in New York. Having always enjoyed dancing, he obtained a job as a ballroom dancing instructor. During this time, he also attended the famed Julliard School in New York, taking various courses in piano instruction. In his spare time, he played the ukulele for fun and still does!

In the early 1940's David enrolled in a drafting school, and this line of work became his profession. He worked as a draftsman for a number of companies, eventually accepting a position in one of the design departments of the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Norfolk, Virginia. Some years later he took a position as a draftsman for the Southeastern District Planning Commission in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and remained in their employ until his retirement in 1979.

In addition to Fairbanks' career, throughout the years he maintained a calligraphic studio known as The Scriptorium. Although he was proficient at a number of broad pen alphabet styles, he enjoyed the discipline of engrossing most of all. Studying from the Zanerian Manual of Alphabets and Engrossing and the works of famed engrossers Alberto Sangorski and Arthur Szyk, David developed a style characterized by traditional composition, extreme detail in decoration, and dramatic use of color. His work exhibited a masterful sprinkling of filigree throughout border treatments, and the liberal use of gold to accent prominent features in the design.

David was one of Michael Sull's mentors and had a tremendous impact on his development as an engrosser. He was honored at the 2001 IAMPETH convention in Kansas City with a Master Penmen award presented by Michael Sull. A charter member of the Tidewater Calligraphy Guild (Virginia Beach, Virginia) David continued to freely share his knowledge and techniques with his fellow guild members.

David Fairbanks passed from our keeping on November 26, 2004. He will be greatly missed by his friends and family.

\*Modified from the original text published in Sull's SS&OP Volume I.