

Walter J. Filling passed away a few years ago. I believe the date was 1997; however, if anyone knows different please let me know. Mr. Filling was a Penman/Engrosser of profound skill. His work appears in the Zanerian Manual. Below is a reprint written in his own words about his life.

Joe Vitolo

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Member Spotlight: Walter J. Filling

When Aline Malone asked me to write a "Member Spotlight" piece for the Newsletter, I was pleased for the opportunity to address my friends in IAMPETH, and especially pleased to find there remains interest in my work and career despite my inactivity these past few years due to health problems.

My life as a penman began in a one-room school in Cameron County, Pennsylvania - I was one of the few children who greatly enjoyed practicing the circles and loops in Penmanship class.

The business side of my career began around the age of 12 when I would go to my neighbors offering to letter names on their mailboxes for a fee ranging from 25 cents to a dollar, depending on the style. This was during the Depression, and I had very few takers. I once did a mailbox in Old English for a whole dollar, and that was a big day for me.

Like many of the boys at that time, I went to work at a factory (Sylvania) at the age of 15, but I continued practicing my lettering. I eventually opened a little shop in Emporium where I did lettering and engraving after my day job at the factory. The local newspaper editor would often stop by on his way home, watch me work, and conclude, "Filling, you've got to get the hell out of Emporium," meaning only a city could provide enough business to support me in this line of work.

Because of my love of engrossing and engraving, I practiced and studied intensely. I took correspondence courses from the Zanerian College under E.A. Lupfer and benefited enormously from his guidance. And I kept in mind my father's philosophy: "Be sure your work is done right, even if it takes you longer and you don't get paid extra for it."

I finally got to a big city in 1946, when Sylvania moved the unit I was in to New York City. On fifth Avenue I had located master engraver and engrosser, Arnold P. Hemersbach, who took me on as a student. We became good friends, and after a couple of years, he persuaded me to move on to take a job teaching engraving at the Jeweler's School in New Castle, Pennsylvania.

This experience led to another teaching job at the Washing Technical School in Washington, DC. In Washington I saw the opportunity to go into business for myself as an engrosser and engraver. and in 1952 I did \$0.

One of the first that gave my fledgling business a boost was for the American Pharmaceutical Association. The Association was celebrating its centennial, and I got a contract for 1,500 certificates. Over the years I did work for a number- of such organizations as well as government agencies, including The White House. Eventually I produced documents for the signature of seven presidents, from Harry Truman to Jimmy Carter. I was able to attend the signing or awarding of some of these documents. All were exciting, memorable moments for me. I had a good relationship with Adrian Barclay Tolley, the expert engrosser at The White House for many years. In 1953 he asked me to join his staff, but by then, I was enjoying my independence, and I declined.

What was the nature of my work? With the growing use of mechanized methods of engraving, there was less and less work in hand engraving. I recall Mrs. Lyndon Johnson was one of the who still had items brought to me to engrave. Many of the lettering jobs were certificates or diplomas to be filled in using Engraver's Script, Old English, or whatever style appropriate. At the other extreme there were elaborate

pieces with much illuminating and gold embellishment involving many hours of work. I have shown slides of many of these at IAMPETH Conventions.

I was in business in Washington for 27 years. As many of you know, the work is exacting and calls for many long hours hunched over a drawing table. The physical demands take their toll, and recurrent back problems were a major reason for my retirement in July 1977. I was very fortunate to find a very able person, Virginia Hannah, to buy my business. I could recommend her to my loyal customers without hesitation.

I look back on my career with satisfaction and with deep gratitude to the many people, beginning with my parents, who encouraged and guided me and provided many opportunities.

I found some of my best friends and most valued colleagues in IAMPETH. I have been a member since 1960 and have wonderful recollections of happy and stimulating times at our annual conventions. I am now an Honorary President, and the 1996 Convention in Washington, DC was dedicated to me - an honor for which my wife, Emily, and I will be ever grateful. For a while we felt like celebrities!

Since 1977, I have been able to relax and putter about at the old family farm in Emporium. Some of our IAMPETH friends have been able to visit us, and we hope others will do the same.

Best wishes to all!

Ed. Note: Walter Filling successfully lobbied to have "Engrossers" Included in IAMPETH to reflect their contributions to this organization. In August 1973, it was added by constitutional amendment. Walter also lettered and designed our official letterhead and logo.