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A History of Penmen, Early Business Education, and Educators in America

By AH Hinman

WE Dennis.

As every city has a leading engrosser, Brooklyn, New York, has in WE Dennis one of the ablest pen-artists in the country. Mr. Dennis began life in Chester, NH, forty-five years ago. At the age of fifteen in his country home, he secured Gaskell's compendium, and considerable progress in writing by home practice. He admired the dashy, graceful writing and flourished designs, which, with old English and German text lettering, we copies from which he practiced for two years without a teacher. At seventeen, he entered Gaskell's Business College, Manchester, N. H. There he saw masterpieces of Gaskell's work which gave him the penmanship fever during which he was lost in practice.

Mr. C. T. Cragin, then Gaskell's commercial teacher, writes of Mr. Dennis as follows:

"He was an earnest untiring worker, and we had hard work to get him away from the big sheet of Whatman's hot-pressed paper, long enough to feed him, when he did his first copy of John D. Williams' bounding stag jumping over the Atlantic ocean. He didn't sleep over three hours out of the twenty-four, while engaged upon the American Eagle, dropping the boa 'constrictor on the Western continent; and when he did the pen-drawing of the sweet little dickybird feeding the fat grub to his mate on the nest, from William's and Packard's Gems, he lost flesh at the rate of a pound a day. His tastes in those days ran largely to offhand flourishing, and he thought Michael Angelo, Raphael, and Murillo mighty small potatoes beside John D. Williams, Fielding, Schofield, Hinman and Gaskell.

After preparing a number of pieces of pen work, and teaching a few writing classes as an itinerant teacher, he met in Boston that eccentric genius, AR Dunton, author The Duntonian copybooks. After helping Mr. Dunton on some Diploma work for the Boston Schools, Mr. Dunton took him to his home in Maine, and there trained him in preparing copies in pencil for the engraver, at which Mr. Dennis became very skillful. Dunton took great pleasure in giving his pupil his best points. He was a man of great artistic talent, and critical as a teacher. Mr. Dennis next went to Brooklyn, New York, and taught for several years in Wright's College, and later at Pierce College, Philadelphia, one year.

For the past fifteen years Mr. Dennis has been the leading engrosser and pen artist of Brooklyn. There he attended the art courses and lectures of the Pratt Institute, which brought his skill into line with the scientific artists in engraving, lettering, and designing. Beside his own work, he has kept two assistants busy. His best, (apprentice) pupil was C Skillman, who has become one of the finest artists in lettering and all round penmanship. In Mr. Dennis' office, 357 Fulton St., Brooklyn, he has displayed about fifty pieces of pen art and engrossing of all styles, among which is the Declaration of Independence, over five feet in length. His first large piece of engrossing was made for the employees of R. Dunlap Hat Co., for which he received \$150.00. Since then he has made other pieces for the same company, at prices ranging from \$150 to \$200.

His highest priced piece of engrossing was an album presented to Helen W. Gould, by the Firemen's Mutual Benevolent Association, for which they paid \$250.00. This was done entirely in water colors, with no penmanship about it.

Among Mr. Dennis' many patrons who have paid him from \$100 to \$200 for pieces of engrossing are:

The New York and Brooklyn Brewing Co.

Knights of Labor, Brooklyn.

Brooklyn Philosophical Society.

American Institute, New York.

Most of Mr. Dennis' work is upon pieces ranging from \$10 to \$50. This work he finds the most profitable, as cheap, dashy, skilful work is rapidly and easily executed.

In his cheapest work on pieces from \$5 to \$20, he employs the offhand style-German text, old English, quick rustic, and other rapid styles of lettering - with Spencerian Script, and free-hand flourishing.

Excepting in the mid-summer months, Mr. Dennis has from six to twelve sets of resolutions ahead which keeps him busy. As this work is apt to be confining and wearing, he changes from work to recreation that he may not break down. The work is very fascinating, as styles and designs are changing and new ideas must be worked out. Mr. Dennis is a great master in the use of Watercolors and his color effects are marvels of art and beauty. The art of illuminating is coming more and more in to fashion on each year, and is bringing more trade and profit to the rare artists like Mr. Dennis, in that branch of the Engrosser's work.

Mr. EL Brown

Brown was born in Camden, Maine, in 1869. In his early youth he manifested great interest in writing. The upfilled pages of his grandfather's old account books he filled with crude spread eagles, and screaming Whip-poor-wills. He seemed to have a mania to draw or flourish on every smooth surface, from a sheet of paper to a board fence. His first real inspiration came to him in Gaskell's Compendium of Penmanship which he purchased with his first dollar. After completing a common school education, he entered the Rockland Commercial College, and after graduating he re-entered the college in 1888, as a teacher of penmanship.

There under the training of Mr. HA Howard, he made rapid advancement in all styles of plain and ornate penmanship. In 1888 he met Prof. AR Dunton, who was so much pleased with Mr. Brown's work, that he took him under instruction. Mr. Dunton was a merciless and impartial critic, and though his criticisms at times seemed unjust, they usually proved correct. Mr. Brown was employed by Mr. Dunton as one of his assistants, in engrossing the diplomas of the Boston Public Schools, and since Mr. Dunton's death, they are still engrossed each year by Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown has executed many large exhibition pieces, embracing all styles of plain and ornamental penmanship. The most elaborate of these is a large pen drawing entitled "Fight for the Standard," executed in imitation steel engraving. He designed and executed an elaborate chart for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, which was photo-engraved, copyrighted and had a large scale. He is a constant, earnest student of all things artistic, and his drawing from casts has helped him greatly in decorative designing. During several years past he has made a study of watercolor painting from nature, and his summer vacations are spent on the seashore, sketching rocks and surf.

He was employed for a time in the office of Ames & Rollinson, N.Y., and the artistic atmosphere of the office of artists has had a great influence on his work. In 1900, he went abroad, visiting many of the old countries where, including the Paris Exposition, he feasted his eyes on the work of some of the world's greatest masters in painting and sculpture.

Mr. Brown's time is almost wholly devoted -to designing and engrossing, and his business covers the United States and Canada. His work is largely the making of high-grade diplomas. He has engrossed for colleges and schools during the past seventeen years, 60,000 diplomas.