

When devotees of the history and art of Ornamental Penmanship discuss masters of the past one name stands out above all others, Louis Madarasz. Madarasz was a rare talent with the pointed pen who could pen script of uncommon accuracy and beauty. If you have never heard of him before please be sure to view the image posted in the next message. I would like to post a little about how he wrote. The great Madarasz passed away on December 23, 1910. The information posted below was text converted from 'The Madarasz Book'. This Madarasz tribute publication from Zaner-Bloser is one of the most sought after rare books in all of penmanship. A few years ago, I scanned the book cover to cover. The result is CDROM of the compiled images in jpeg format. The disc is available through Daniel North's web site at:

<http://www.theelegantpen.com>

Regards,

Joe Vitolo

HOW MADARASZ WROTE.

While this work was being prepared a gentleman wrote for information regarding the word offhand " as applied to the penmanship executed by Madarasz. He also asked what movement or movements Madarasz used in making the capitals and small letters. He desired to know whether he used the muscular movement exclusively. We replied as follows:

" Yes, Madarasz has been referred to as an offhand writer. In fact, in his advertising he frequently used the word 'offhand' in referring to his penmanship. The word was used to convey the idea that the work was readily produced. In other words, he seemed ready at all times to produce his best work, and did not have to go into training for some time in order to reach his high standard of excellence. The word was used in a similar sense to that used in reference to an offhand speech.

There are some who can produce very fine work if they have plenty of time to prepare for executing it. His work was known as offhand work for the reason that it was done on the spur of the moment, so to speak, quickly and readily. Work that is slowly and laboriously executed is not referred to as offhand work. We think Madarasz himself is the one who popularized the word referred to in connection with his work, and we also think it is very appropriate.

While he could use the whole arm movement very skillfully, he usually executed the capitals with the arm resting on the table, which is known as arm or muscular movement.

His small letters were executed with what is usually known as combined movement, which includes a slight expansion and contraction of the fingers in connection with the arm or muscular movement. We have never known him to claim that he executed all of his work with what is known as pure arm or muscular movement."

Mr. W. C. Brownfield, of Bowling Green, Ky., was one of the last pupils to take Instructions under Madarasz, and, on request, contributed the following on this subject:

In making reply to your inquiry concerning the movement Madarasz used, I will say at the outset that it is rather difficult to say just how much muscular or how much finger movement he did use; however, I will state as nearly as I can from observation of his hand, from what he told me, and from conclusions I have drawn since having studied his work.

"I saw him execute many ornate capitals, some quite large, with the arm touching desk at all times. Speed and muscular movement coupled with a conscious tenseness in his grip and full confidence in his pen seemed to make it possible for him to turn out letters which were marvels of beauty and form.

"I said to him, 'You have a very hard name to write,' but almost before I had finished speaking it was all on the paper. Thinking, perhaps, he had just thrown it off without any particular care, I arose to see, and to my surprise it was about as good as he usually wrote it.

"My first impression was that he was using almost all finger movement, his method being so much different from any I had ever seen used; but after watching him for several days, I discovered there was much more muscular in it than I had supposed. The hand did not seem to stop gliding anywhere except when a shaded down-stroke was used. On cards he often wrote all the small letters of a name without lifting his pen. A small running hand style seemed to be his favorite and this he could execute with almost pure muscular movement.

"He never allowed himself to turn out careless work, no matter what the recompense was going to be. He had a method for every stroke and always made it a point to know what and how he was going to execute any combination and how any piece of work should be done. In other words, he always used his head before he did the pen. He was truly a genius, and I don't believe anyone could duplicate his style successfully without having seen him write it. Madarasz did not say much about movement, but he would tell me when I was not using enough. He referred to 'Professional Movement' when asked how he did his fine work."

Mr. C. E. Doner, of Beverly, Mass., was closely associated with Madarasz in New York City some years ago, and has contributed the following:

"It was in New York City that I became a personal friend of the great penman. It was there that we worked side by side in an office. As I am writing this little sketch, I picture

ourselves clearly, Mr. Madarasz in one small room and I in an adjoining one-he a past master of the art and I a mere student. As I sat at my desk I could see him writing at his desk, and I assure the reader of this article that I took every opportunity to study his position, movement, and in fact every act that he performed with the pen. Occasionally I would go to his desk, lean over close to his paper and watch him execute. Mr. Madarasz was not a rapid writer, but his every movement was sure and firm and strong and graceful. He had a wonderful command of the pen. It seemed that whenever his pen would touch the paper that it was so guided as to make a graceful form. By observing him closely I noticed that his arm would be raised slightly from the table in executing large free capitals and gently lowered to the table when writing the small letters. He used more or less finger action in writing small letters, but his movement was so fine and accurate that the form would be almost perfect. As I remembered him, he would, as a rule, remove his coat and have nothing on his arm but the shirt sleeve. These are a few personal glimpses of Mr. Madarasz as I observed him at work.

Now just a few more words about the skillful penman as I saw him at play. He was a man of few words and it took some time to become acquainted with him, yet once a friend a true friend. Underneath this reserved nature there was always a streak of fun and good humor. He always enjoyed a good meal and frequently we dined together. One of his favorite dishes was green turtle soup. During our friendship in New York we were members together of a small pen club and about once a week we would all gather at some French or Italian restaurant to partake of a table d'hote dinner. On these occasions we would frequently talk shop and often times would discuss current events. It was during occasions like these that I had an opportunity to know him as a man.

" During my friendship with Mr. Madarasz I found him a true gentleman in, every sense of the word. After leaving New York I continued to keep in touch with him, and I have in my scrapbook a few personal letters and a fine collection of his exquisite penmanship. As time goes on we shall miss him and more, but his beautiful style of penmanship will continue to be an inspiration to the coming penmen.

Mr. T. Courtney, a student and friend of Madarasz, contributed the following: Madarasz seemed always to be able to execute high-grade ornamental writing at a moment's notice, without any preliminary 'tuning up,' He used the muscular or forearm movement on large flourished capitals without ever raising his arm off the desk. Usually he wrote on his bare forearm when doing his best ornamental writing. He laid great stress on the starting and ending ovals, insisting on these being horizontal, and about equal when they occur in the same capital so that the letter would balance. For all his best work he used Korean stick ink which he ground as needed. This ink is capable of producing the finest hairline of any ink that I have ever used.

" During the holidays of 1902 I was asked to prepare a paper on Ornamental Writing to be read before the National Penmanship Association, and in preparing it I wrote to several leading penmen asking several questions in regard to accurate writing. The following from Madarasz gives very clearly his opinions on that subject, and I am quoting it in full:

New York Nov. 21, 1902.
My DEAR COURTNEY:

1. Accurate writing is writing so closely near to an accepted standard that the well-trained eye cannot detect the difference.

2. The muscular movement for capitals, crossings on t's, overthrow, underthrow and ending strokes requiring firm free curves. For small letters, minimum, the finger movement for upward throw on i's and d's, the muscular ; for downward shades on these two, the finger ; for loops, a fast finger movement.

Accurate writing is acquired only by the absolute knowledge of perfect form and so much practice that the hand will trace, unconsciously and easily, the ideal of letters in the executer's mind.

Flickinger in his prime used whole arm movement for capitals, and so did AD Taylor. Touch is a matter of temperament, and relies greatly upon the pulsations in the writer's hand and the quality of materials used.

My wife and I are in good health and happy-nothing more is desired. Yours truly,

L. Madarasz

After expressing our views, as given at the beginning of this article, and after the contributions from Messrs. Brownfield, Doner and Courtney had been received, fortunately we came into possession of a letter written by Madarasz in Knoxville, Tenn., on May 15, 1909, in which he clearly explains the movements he used in executing ornamental penmanship, as follows:

I use a purely forearm or muscular movement in the execution of all capitals, and a combined movement on all small letters, thus: to the height of a small u, a muscular movement, and from the upper portion of an), letter higher than a small u, I check the movement and shoot my finger up reaching above the height of small u and down again. Where an f occurs I use the muscular movement for the lower half. On small y, g, j p and q, I use a muscular movement. I omit using the bottom loops on y, g. z and j because the strain of crossing exactly on the base line is too great."