

## Chapter 7

### SIGNATURE WRITING

Signature Writing, or "Superscription" as it was frequently called, represented the epitome of a person's skill in Ornamental Penmanship. It should be pointed out that while the allied field of "Off-Hand Flourishing" displays a far greater artistic skill in terms of illustrative, or pictorial penmanship than Signature Writing does, there is a very distinct difference between these two arts. Off-hand flourishing does not employ letters as elements of design; rather, it is through the artistic rendering and arrangement of lines, curves and shades that the beautiful swans, birds and cartouches were created. In Signature Writing, however, letters are indeed the principle elements of design. Described quite simply, Signature Writing is the artistic combination of letters (normally the capitals) in a person's signature arranged in such a manner that the finished work exhibits a graceful sense of overall balance and design. In other words, it is not merely the joining of an order of letters. The letters themselves, capitals and lowercase, should be of the best form possible, for no ornate system of joining will ever disguise poorly made letter forms. Rather, the goal here is to let one letter flow gracefully into the next letter. At times this may be quite difficult to do depending on the letter form itself. When this is true, it is much more preferable to overlap letters so that optically, the finished piece gives the appearance of letters joining in combination.

The benchmark of a well made signature is that it is appealing to the eye, has a pleasant balance in the placement of the heavy-shaded strokes, and in general, possesses a natural look about it in the manner in which one letter joins to another letter. All too often aspiring penmen seem to forget the importance of good letter form and concentrate primarily on the joining aspect, invariably producing an awkward hodge-podge of jumbled lines and letters. Gracefulness and legibility are lost, and the "magic" of Signature Writing tends to elude them. Remember-in Signature Writing you are designing a signature-monogram; a planned work of art. It rarely happens without careful thought. Capitals should not be bunched together, and some form of a flourished ending stroke should be employed to balance the large looping areas taken up by the capitals. Sometimes the simplest combination of loops is best. It will become too easy to "over do it" in terms of joining letters, and you must always be conscious of that point when your results look good and any further enhancement will make the combinations look unnatural, or "forced."

There are many flourished strokes which are best studied by observing the examples shown at the end of this chapter, and in Volume 2.

It is wise to remember that all joins should be thin hairlines without any shading. The joins should not appear to dominate the signature in such fashion that the eye would tend to see the joins before it sees or reads the letters. The goal should still be legibility, but enhanced in beauty and appearance by the design and placement of joining lines.

Before a person tries their hand at Signature Writing, it is absolutely mandatory that they have achieved a degree of confidence and skill in penning the letters themselves. This is vital. Once you have accomplished this aspect-once you are able to make the letters and produce good ornamental penmanship, only then will you truly be able to understand the natural "laws" mentioned above; i.e., what efforts will produce beautiful signature/letter combinations, and what efforts will result in awkward or "forced" letter arrangements. From this point, the path to attractive Signature Writing is a fairly easy route. The aspect of joining letters is based on the direction that your pen is moving as it goes into a letter, and the direction of your pen immediately after it finishes making a letter. With the great variety of entry and ending (exit) strokes shown in the previous chapter, it can be seen that the pen can enter a letter from various directions:

The same is true of ending a letter for both capitals and lowercase.

As you look at the following examples, caution yourself from being overly impressed. Study them in detail. See how the letters are joined and note the parallel effect of curves and perpendicular crossing of lines. When you start practicing, begin with pencil first until you feel comfortable with joining and have gained a sense of confidence in your efforts. A trick to keep in mind is that sometimes you can create an interesting

look by making one of the capitals extra large (usually the first one) and begin the next capital within the "empty", or negative space of that large letter. You may wish to place a sheet of tracing paper over the

examples shown and try to retrace them with a pencil. Don't worry at first about placing shades where appropriate-just try to follow the direction of the letters and the joins. Keep practicing in this manner until you can write the signature combinations yourself on a separate sheet of paper. Then try your own name. You may eventually come up with several versions of a signature combination for a particular name. When that happens, pick the combination that looks the best and master that one first. There really aren't any other secrets to this art.