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Tributes To The Late WE Dennis

In the death of W. E. Dennis the profession has received a distinct loss. He was in a class by himself and his work was admired by all.

F. B. Courtney, Detroit, Mich.

I just returned from the funeral of W. E. Dennis. Mr. Dennis died last Friday about eleven o'clock. Was ill only about three days with pneumonia. In his death the profession lost one of the greatest, if not the greatest, in his line.

C. C. Lister,

June 8, 1924. Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have you heard of the sudden death of Mr. Dennis? It occurred last Friday, after an illness of only three days, from pneumonia. The sad news came to me with a shock. I can scarcely realize it. It seems but as yesterday since I met him at the Convention in New York and, in company with others, called to see him in his studio and looked over his wonderful collection of pen work.

He was a very genial, pleasant gentleman, and very unassuming. To my mind he had more skill in flourishing, birds, etc., than any man whose -work I have ever seen, not excepting that of the late John D. Williams, who, in his day, was considered the finest in the profession.

I greatly admired Mr. Dennis, and shall miss his frequent jolly letters, which were often written in very grotesque fashion.

Some others of us must soon follow. Ames, Hinman, Zaner, Risinger, Huntsinger, and now Dennis. They have led the way. The door is open. Are we ready to enter? To enter the heavenly home? I hope so.

H. W. Flickinger,

June 11, 1924. Glenolder, Pa.

Dear Friends:

I have your letter suggesting a tribute to my esteemed former business partner and friend, W. E. Dennis. I am more than pleased for this opportunity to commend Dennis, the man, as well as Dennis, the penman.

I first met Dennis in 1909, having gone from the Zanerian to work for him during the diploma season, and became associated with him in business in January, 1914, the partnership continuing until I left New York in August, 1918. During this time we were closely associated both in and out of the office, and I learned many of his peculiar traits of character which he permitted perhaps but few others to learn.

The longer I knew Dennis the more highly I valued his friendship. He was one of the kind that stick, and I could always count on his friendly letters whether I answered promptly or not. His letters were entirely different from the letters I receive from others-penmen or otherwise. He had a style all his own-a combination of shorthand, hieroglyphics and longhand.

Dennis had planned a trip for this summer to include Chicago, the Zanerian and other places along the route of a pleasant round trip, and I regret that death claimed him before he could make this visit. Many penmen would have had the pleasure of meeting a real prince of the profession-the most original by far that I have ever met. He loved the work and had seemingly unlimited skill. He was generous in his praise of the skill of others, and like most of the really great ones was extremely modest of his own ability. He helped many aspiring engrossers, and they were always welcome to examine his scrapbooks or samples of engrossing and learn as much as they could from them. He was glad to hear of the success of others, and envied none.

Dennis' work had included almost everything that a penman could be expected to do. His first inspiration was Gaskell's Compendium and later he attended Gaskell's school. At the age of 16 he was widely advertised as Gaskell's boy wonder. Later he had assisted A. R. Dunton with his diploma work and also his correspondence, which in those days before the advent of the typewriter, was in ornate penmanship. He told many amusing stories of both Gaskell and Dunton, and had great admiration for their skill.

After coming to New York he had written cards, taught penmanship and prepared pencil copy for copybook engravers, which was quite a field for penmen at that time. I showed some of this pencil copy to Mr. Zaner and he pronounced it -the equal of any he had seen and an entirely different style of work from the free, dashy pieces characteristic of the -Dennis of later years. He had specimens of carefully drawn and stippled figures, birds, etc., a style prevalent among penmen years ago. He had specimens of engrossing made from 20 to 40 years ago that employed a great variety of styles of lettering, and the color work which was in washes included ornament, portraits and other decorative adjuncts. Dennis had done comparatively little work in opaque color or what is generally termed illuminating at the present time, and strange as it may seem he had no success with the engraver's style of script, saying he "guessed he didn't have the right pull on the pen for script," but he could draw beautiful script in pencil, as witness the "Lord's Prayer" which appeared a few years ago in the Business Educator. The style of engrossing which was characteristically Dennis had display lines of German and Old English text and rustic lettering, and a Spencerian style of script which he wrote rather tall and compact. This style of engrossing permitted of considerable flourishing, which was real pleasure to him. Specimens of his lettering and flourishing remain which prove quite conclusively that he had no superior.

Dennis was of rather small stature about 5 ft. 6 inches in height, and weighed not over 135 pounds. His hobby in the line of exercise was walking and his vacations, which lasted as much of the summer as he could spare away from the office, were spent in tramping over the hills of New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

He was a hard worker and had produced perhaps as many pieces of penwork as any engrosser in the land. He had many sincere friends, and I hope to see some memorial to his memory placed where penmen of the present and future can see it and know of the esteem in which he was held by those who knew him best.

W. A. Baird,

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Mr. E. A. Lupfer,

Business Educator, Columbus, Ohio

My Dear Lupfer: The passing of William E. Dennis, Brooklyn, engrossing and illuminating artist, dean of his profession, was indeed a great shock to me, as it must have been to many thousands who were privileged to call him friend.

He was one of the very finest characters I have ever known, and the last time I saw him he jokingly told me, after complimenting him on how well he stood the years, that he was surely going to live out a full century.

His all around ability was generally recognized, and he leaves a void in the profession that will be very difficult to fill. Peace to his ashes.

Very sincerely,

P. W. Costello, Scranton, Pa. July 5, 1924.

W. E. DENNIS

The great master penman of the old school has passed on to a higher plane of existence. No man in the profession has done more to keep alive an interest in artistic penmanship as taught practiced by the "old timers." It was always a joy to visit Dennis, as he was a genuine and genial friend whose dry humor and big heart made him a favorite with all fortunate enough to come within the circle of his acquaintance. His studio in Brooklyn has long been the Mecca for lovers of fine penmanship, and hanging on its walls are some of the very finest specimens of pen drawing, flourishing and lettering, which in point of delicacy, accuracy and individuality are in a class alone masterpieces of line and color. No entertainment could quite take the place of an evening with Dennis, and in a letter written to me in April he sends the following characteristic invitation to visit him: "I wish U could come out this wa some da & C our big displa of pen-work, the old timers, etc."

Dennis, when quite a young man, lived for a time with the late A. R. Dunton, at Camden, Maine. Under the critical eye of "A. R." he acquired a wonderful degree of accuracy in penciled script for copper engraving, and he made several large exhibition pieces of pen drawing equal in detail and delicacy to the finest steel engraving, displaying wonderful skill and patience. He also acquired knowledge of disputed handwriting which he developed in later years.

I met "W. E." first in Boston in 1889 where he was employed by Mr. Dunton filling diplomas for the city. I was inspired by his unusual skill, and of course gathered many specimens of his off-hand flourishing, which have been carefully preserved all these years in my scrap book.

Dennis used to tell many interesting stories about his experiences while living with old "A. R." One day the old man said, "Dennis, I want you to write a letter for me in your best style in order that my reputation may not suffer, and sign my name." Dennis was pleased with the finished product and turned it over to the old gentleman, who, after stroking his patriarchal whiskers for a few minutes returned the letter suggesting the following postscript: "Please excuse poor penmanship. Been holding plow for a neighbor and my nerves are not as steady as usual." Dunton did a great deal of his work with a crow-quill pen and diluted India ink, producing the most delicate effects. Dunton lettered the Lord's Prayer within a border of very delicately tinted roses, and Dennis was making a copy of the design. After several days of painstaking work he completed the design and to all appearances his copy equaled Dunton's in fineness. Dunton said nothing but during Dennis' absence he removed his specimen from the frame, worked it up to a higher degree of fineness and replaced it in the frame. It was some time before young Dennis discovered the Professor's original method of getting results, a method that was quite successful in developing the skill and patience of this enthusiastic young man.

His going is a distinct loss to all, especially those that knew him and loved him as a man and honored him as a penman and engrosser of the first rank. He was ever a student, always striving for, greater skill, although his work 'seemed to combine all the important elements of beauty and perfection. I admired his every-day writing, charming it was in grace of line, distribution of color, and strikingly characteristic, all in all. The name Dennis will live in memory as a penman of the highest order; whose skill and genius as influenced thousands of young men to strive for greater heights in the line of e artistic penmanship.

All honor and respect to his memory.

EL Brown