

Pioneer Art

By Alice Baker

Among your grandmother's souvenirs you may find decorative calling cards, relics that reek of rapport, even of romance, and of a nostalgia for a fad of the long ago. These cards present an almost obsolescent art.

Up to the time of the introduction of the typewriter, penmanship received a good segment of time in common school programs, but due to that very indispensable invention the death knell to artistic penmanship and even legible script was sounded.

Artistic penmanship received much attention as far in the past as 1700. A text named "The Universal Penman; or Writing Made Useful for the Gentleman and Scholar" was published in London in 1741. The title of the book was embellished with scrolls, loops, and ovals in a manner enviable to the present day onlooker.

Later Platt Rogers Spencer (1800-1864) introduced the Spencerian system of writing which was universally popular and lasted out the century. His system was productive of a beautiful and legible calligraphy. Spencer formulated a few rules to make every writer a good one:

1. Good position, feet flat on floor, erect posture
2. Paper angling to body
3. Hand holding pen between thumb and first finger lightly
4. Wrist flat on desk
5. Second and third fingers pivot on which hand glided across paper. This position, made habitual by hours of practice on ovals and loops combined with shading, made any person an artistic penman.

Many persons qualified in this art as shown by the numerous calling cards in the dusty piles of old trunks. Among these artists was Squire Blomily, LaGrange, Wis. (Cards 1. and 2.)

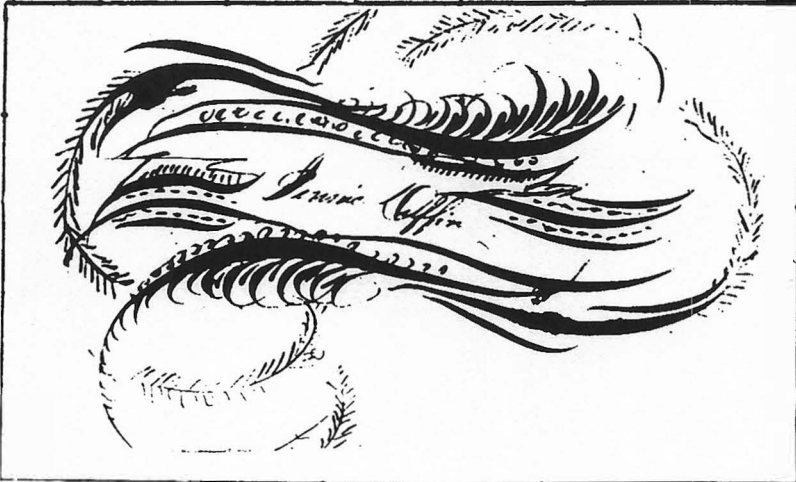
Another was Christie Carlin, for years President of the Bank of Palmyra. Carlin attended Milton College at the time Jonathon D. Bond was penmanship teacher there. Bond must have been a dynamic teacher and an outstanding person in his field as he taught penmanship four years before he graduated at that college. Carlin was an apt pupil as his penmanship became notable for the rest of his life. As a young man he made calling cards for himself and his friends; as a banker his signature was the essence of integrity; for years he signed the diplomas of graduating seniors; and even when he reached advanced years his script remained beautifully legible. (Card 3.)

Jennie Reeves of Eagle may have made her own card although her niece, Mrs. Fenton Engebretsen says that an uncle, Nicholas Faestl, an equally skilled writer, could have penned it.

The most prized card in the writer's possession is one too delicate to photograph well. As with most of the cards elements of design are scrolls, birds, feathers, wheat and other grasses. It is endorsed W. W. Austin, Johnstown Center. Whoever the penman was, he must have had lightness of touch, rhythm of motion, and a perfect sense of artistic form and balance.

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Calling
Cards



of

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Gracious
Age

