



Besides guerrilla warfare and a written constitution, the post-Revolutionary United States also contributed to the development of a new method of teaching handwriting in the English-speaking world.

Without a Borrowed Hand

THE BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN PENMANSHIP

Eight years after the Peace of Versailles, when Great Britain recognized the independence of the United States, John Jenkins published *The Art of Writing Reduced to a Plain and Easy System* (Boston, 1791), and while not the first writing book printed on this side of the Atlantic, his was the first systematic handwriting manual.

The history of printed handwriting books can be divided into two genres—the copybook and the writing manual. In the former, models of penmanship were presented for the learner to copy, usually under the guidance of a tutor who provided instructions on such basic skills as how to cut a quill, hold the pen, pen angle and/or pen pressure, letter slope, joining letters, letter, word and line spacing, and a myriad of other details essential for handwriting. Writing manuals, on the other hand, spelled out many, if not most of these instructions in a printed text, as well as providing models to copy, and although used by tutors, they were also meant for the solitary learner. Throughout this article I use the term “copybook” for books primarily containing printed models and “writing manual” for those which contain extensive instructions on how to write, and which may also have exemplars to be copied. By *handwriting* I

mean writing made with a minimal number of pen lifts within a letter and word, joined letters that conform to certain rules or conventions, and whose principal aim is to produce a legible text. Before presenting Jenkins’ writing manual a brief overview of copybooks and writing manuals seems in order to place his contribution in a historical context.

Ludovico Vicentino Arrighi’s *La operina* (Rome, 1522/24) is generally considered the first printed and illustrated European writing manual. In it he gives instructions on writing chancery script, that is to say, the writing style then in use at the Vatican chancery. He begins his “lessons” with two rules (*norme*), namely that all minuscule letters start with either a broad horizontal or a thin diagonal stroke. His instructions continue by grouping letters of the alphabet according to whether they begin with one or the other of these strokes. He writes of the proportion of minuscules (an oblong parallelogram) and describes the ductus (stroke order and direction) of a few letters, and a list of letters to be joined with following ones and those that didn’t join is given. Letter and word spacing are covered and capitals are shown but no detailed instructions for these



1. Portrait of a pupil from Jenkins’ *The Art of Writing* (1813). Author’s collection.

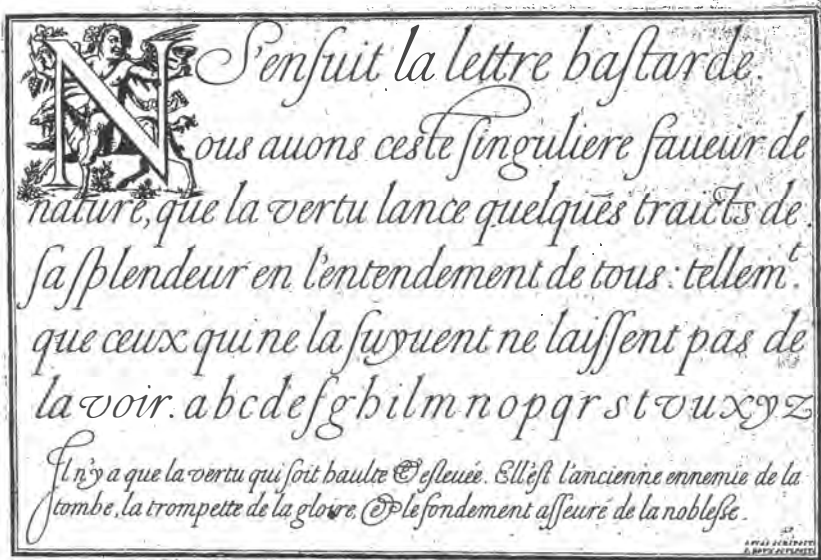
The first American printed book containing handwriting models was published by that great polymath Benjamin Franklin.

are given beyond that they too begin with the same basic strokes, do not slope as the minuscules do, and should be made firmly without trembling. The rest of his manual is given over to models of chancery alphabets, exercises to “steady the hand,” and a page of conventional honorific abbreviations used in correspondence and formal documents. The following year Arrighi published another booklet on how to cut a quill, which also included a variety of models of writing and lettering, mostly without instructions.

I have dwelt on Arrighi’s manual (perhaps far too much for the sophisticated reader) because it is the prototype of many of the printed writing manuals that were to follow in the next 400 years. In it is set the order for teaching handwriting (minuscules before capitals), the grouping of minuscule letters by shared similarities rather than alphabetic order, the relative proportion of the height-width ratio of small letters, some pen strokes basic to making any letter, joining letters, letter and word spacing, and models to be copied. About the only additions made by his successors to this course of instruction would be a detailed description of pen and letter angle and line spacing.

The history of printed writing manuals and

2. *Lettre bastarde* from Lucas Materot, *Les oeuvres* (1608). With a stronger slope, beaked serifs on the ascenders of *b, d, h, and l*, flat descenders on *p* and *q*, and a more gradual transition from thin to thick to thin in the letters, this is a clear departure from the Italian chancery of the previous century. Other significant changes are the hairpin arched join preceding *m, n, and r*, and the circular turns at the feet of *a, d, i*, etc. Engraving. x-height = 6 mm. Photo courtesy of the John M. Wing Foundation, The Newberry Library, Chicago.



copybooks follows, quite naturally, the history of commerce and government since the chief use of handwriting was, after the advent of printing from moveable type, in these two fields. Sixteenth century Italian manuals and copybooks were printed in Milan and Brescia, among other places, but

most of them appeared in Venice, the principal center of commerce linking Italy and the rest of Europe with trade from the Mid and Far East; and Rome, the ecclesiastical and political capital of the Italian peninsula. By the end of the sixteenth century the world of trade and politics had shifted north to France and the Low Countries and the printing of books on handwriting began to appear with increasing frequency in these countries.

The eighteen-year-old Clement Perret published, in 1569, the first copybook printed from engraved metal plates (*Exercitatio alphabetica*, Antwerp) which reproduced the subtleties of pen better than the relatively crude woodcut books of the early sixteenth century. In 1608 Lucas Materot published his *Les oeuvres . . . ou l'on comprendra facilement la maniere de bien et proprement escrire toute sort de lettre italienne* (Avignon) and introduced a style of handwriting which, although based on the Italian chancery script of the previous century, was to have a lasting effect on western penmanship for the next three hundred years. [Figure 2] Materot’s *Italienne bastarde* acknowledged its somewhat dubious ancestry in its name but had a stronger slope and rounder arches than chancery, hairpin joins between letters, and became one of the principal sources of round hand script of the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Others in Italy and the Netherlands had shown examples similar to those in Materot’s copybook, but none had the grace and clarity of his script. *Les oeuvres* was, however, primarily a copybook without instructions on forming letters, although it did contain quill-cutting and ink-making instructions. It would take almost half a century before detailed instructions and a systematic approach to writing *Italienne bastarde* were first published.

Toward the middle of the seventeenth century the French writing master and secretary to Louis XIV, Louis Barbedor, was given the task of revising the official government scripts, and in 1647 he published his *Les écritures financière, et italienne bastarde*. However, this copybook of gargantuan proportions (the oblong plates were some twelve by fifteen inches!) contains no instructions. Jacques Raveneau published *L’art d’écriture de finance et italienne bastarde à la françoise* (Paris, 1649) which did give some instructions for writing the *bastarde* hand, but it was only when Barbedor renewed his copyright in 1657, reprinting the same plates under the new title of *Traité de l’art d’écrire*, did he include encyclopedic letterpress instructions on how to write the letters shown in his examples. *Bastarde* was written with a flexible square cut quill (as round hand was until some time after the introduction of steel pens in the 1830s), and Barbedor not only gave the x-height in terms of pen width

(six nib widths), but the slope of the letters (20 degrees from the perpendicular), and the pen angle (22.5 degrees). Barbedor also standardized a vocabulary describing basic pen strokes and a system for writing minuscules. His terms, *trait panché*, *plien imparfait*, *demy plein*, and *delié*, (diagonal thin stroke, broad diagonal down stroke, medium diagonal stroke, and a fine upstroke made with the corner of the pen) became the usual terminology for subsequent French writing manuals and, in translation, some English manuals as well. The fundamental letters for the *bastarde* minuscules were the *i* and *o*, and by combining these two letters or parts or multiples of them, all twenty-three letters of the alphabet could be made. (French has no *k* or *w*, and seventeenth century French used *i* as both a vowel and the consonant *j*.) For example, combining *o* with an undotted *i* gave an *a*. Capitals, never the most orderly part of any alphabet, were not given the same detailed presentation and, curiously, were to be made with a separate, very flexible, tiny-edged quill.

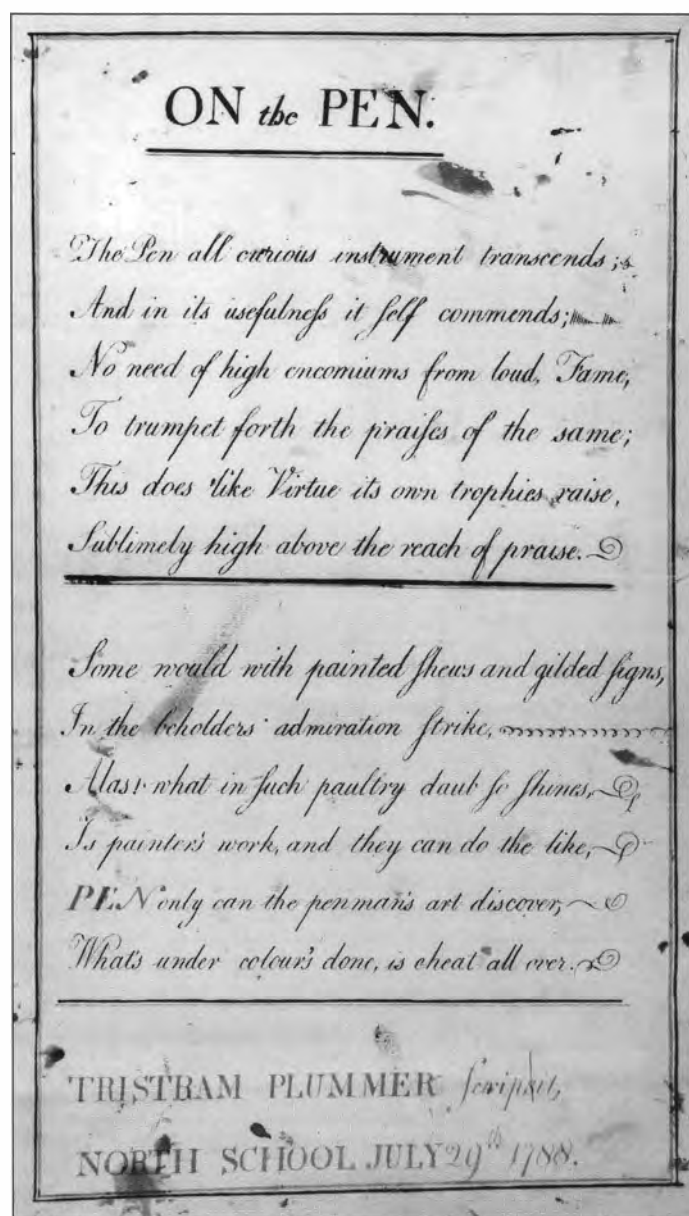
Today, many of us associate seventeenth and early eighteenth century round hand with elaborate flourishes and ornate capitals and these certainly abounded in both writing manuals and copybooks. One of the principal sources of this florid writing style, called by English writing masters "command of hand," can be traced back to the Dutch copybook/writing manual, *Spiegel der schrijfkonste* (Rotterdam, 1605) of Jan van den Velde. Van den Velde's plates were published in separate editions with letterpress text not only in Dutch, but also Latin, German and French. The instructions on writing are limited to the simpler letterforms and do not include the incredible flourishes that appear on nearly every engraved page. Yet despite his lack of printed instructions, those that followed Van den Velde seemed to strive to outdo his maze of letter ornamentation. By the end of the seventeenth century a minor backlash against overelaborate writing, especially as applied to capitals, occurred among some penmen who argued that a simpler and legible handwriting was more practical and useful in commerce.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century may be considered the golden age of the English copybook. Writing masters such as Edward Cocker, John Seddon, George Shelley, John Ayres, Charles Snell, John Clark, Joseph Champion, and above all, works published by the engraver George Bickham, senior, dominated the international field of handwriting. Therefore it is not surprising that English round hand was the preferred style of writing in America both before and after the revolutionary war. (I ignore the few Pennsylvania "Dutch" copybooks which do not show much round hand and whose tradition can be traced to the German and Swiss copybooks from the ancestral countries of Amish and

Mennonite settlers, as these had a very limited influence on American handwriting.)

The first copybook printed in America, or rather the first American printed book containing handwriting models, was published by that great polymath Benjamin Franklin. George Fisher's *The American Instructor: or, Young Man's Best Companion* (Philadelphia, 1748), published in London in 1725 as *The Instructor*, was brazenly pirated by Franklin who included his own writing models, quite unlike those in the British edition. The multiplicity of Fisher's book by different American publishers (seventeen editions by 1833) probably had more to do with the other subjects included (reading, grammar, arithmetic, accounting, letter writing, applied arts, science, geography, etc.) than the few

3. Manuscript leaf by Tristram Plummer. This 18th century writing specimen by a thirteen-year-old boy studying at Boston's North School shows a typical round hand of the period, along with built-up roman capitals. Notice the slightly enlarged backstrokes on the *a*'s, *o*'s, *f*'s, *l*'s, and long *s* produced by an edged pen. The two forms of *r* used show a transition from the italic letterform to the shape that became standard in 19th and 20th century writing. Some of the *l*'s are looped, as is one *b*, possibly for the sake of variety. Letters appearing as gray, and the inside rule, are in red. The source of the text has not been traced, but it is likely to be from a period copybook. x-height = 3 mm. Photo courtesy of the John M. Wing Foundation, The Newberry Library, Chicago.



pages devoted to handwriting. In fact some editions used script typography instead of engraved plates for their exemplars, a trick occasionally used in some sixteenth century copybooks. Fisher's section on writing contained more about the mechanics of writing—how to hold the pen, cutting quills, making black and colored inks—and texts to be copied, than writing instructions.

Very few copybooks were published in America either before or immediately after the Revolution, possibly because of a paucity of letter engravers, but more likely because of an abundance of English books already in the United States. Abiah Holbrook, the great eighteenth century New England writing master and teacher, had some twenty-two English copybooks in his personal library, and his pupils at Boston's North School copied many of their texts from Bickham's *The Universal Penman* (London, 1743). [Figure 3] All this changed in 1791 when John Jenkins published his *Art of Writing*.

There is little known about Jenkins' life beyond a brief autobiographical statement in the second edition of *The Art of Writing* (Cambridge, 1813) and a plea by a group of ministers to the State of Massachusetts for the support of his system and for financial assistance to its author, separately published in 1809 and reprinted in the 1813 edition. From these sources we learn that Jenkins was born around 1755 or '56, became a country school teacher "at an early period of life," taught both publicly and privately in ten of the States, was the sole support of his family, and had suffered from ill health and poverty between the first and second editions of his writing manual. The frontispiece portrait in the 1813 edition shows a slender, handsome, clean-shaven youthful character who hardly looks to be in his fifties. According to a mid-nineteenth century report, he died in Wilmington, Delaware, in October, 1822, although no record of his death has been found in that State's archives.

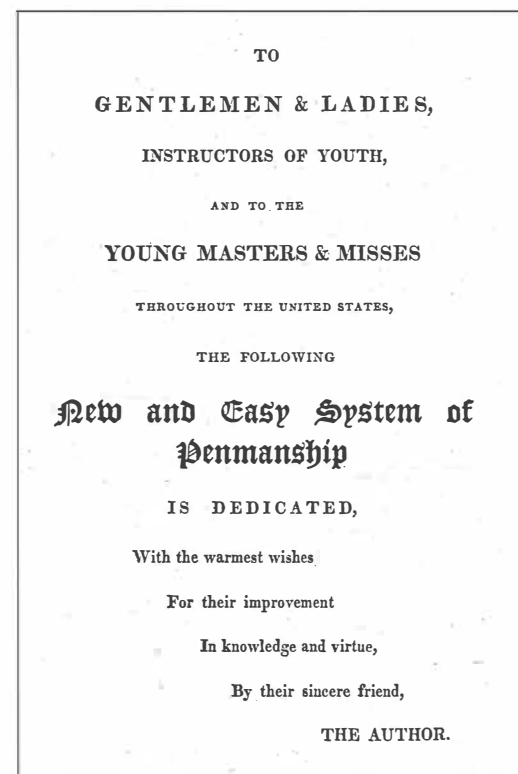
His own instruction in writing had been poor and "he was mortified at the thought of furnishing his pupils with the very defective models of his own pen, for their improvement in so elegant an art." (Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from the 1813 edition. The 1791 edition of 32 pages and four engraved plates contains less detailed material than the 1813 edition of 92 pages and eleven plates, although the instructions on writing are identical in both editions.) Like many writing masters, he had used copies from other masters (probably printed English examples) for his pupils to imitate, but some of his employers felt he should be able to teach his students "without a borrowed hand." He discovered his system by critiquing his pupils' letters and analyzing each distinct part of each letter and showing them "how

each part, or parts, of one letter, was the part, or parts, of several other letters." This approach proved successful and Jenkins realized that writing was not only an imitative skill but a rational one as well. He also felt that "as writing is in some measure a mechanical art, it should be mechanically taught." This rational-mechanical approach led Jenkins to focus on two aims for the pupil: to learn the principal letter parts or strokes, and to acquire the right motion of the fingers and pressure of the pen. This approach also had the ultimate aim of standardizing writing in order to achieve universal legibility. He compared writing to the establishment of pronunciation as put forth by Noah Webster:

For when all are taught to pronounce alike, we may, without any difficulty, understand one another; so when all are at first instructed to imitate, in writing, one and the same standard, we shall soon perceive the agreeable effect of that harmony and similarity which will be the natural consequence.

An additional advantage to this approach was that even when students had a change of instructors (which they sometimes did), they would not lose the skills they already had learned.

The Art of Writing offers some rather curious innovations in a handwriting manual. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, it was often customary to dedicate one's writing book to some prince of the state or church by way of asking for protection from a higher authority. Occasionally a



4. Dedication from Jenkins' *The Art of Writing* (1813). Author's collection.

Thirdly. Of the six principal strokes, with little addition or variation, and being differently combined, are formed twenty-five small letters, and several capitals.

EXPLANATIONS.

I. The first stroke is the *l*; and of this are formed the *b*, *t*, little *i*, and *u*, and part of the *a* and *d*; the *b* is made of the *l*, by carrying the hair stroke up to the line, and adding a small swell. Observe, that although the *t* and the little *i* are neither of them drawn so long as the *l*, yet the same shape and idea of the character is to be retained, and the same motion of the fingers and pressure of the pen is required, as each of these letters is but the lower part of the *l*.



It is easy to discern that two *i*'s form the *u*.



The *i* being drawn on the right side of the *o*, forms the *a*.

The *l* being drawn on the right side of the *o*, forms the *d*.



6. Explanations from John Jenkins, *The Art of Writing* (1813). This is the beginning of Jenkins' descriptions of how letters of the alphabet are made from the principal strokes. Wood engraving and letterpress. Actual size. Author's collection.

combinations are displayed to the learner, no actual writing is practiced. Instead, the alphabet, grouped according to the principal strokes, is followed by a "dialogue" or quiz which the pupil was expected to memorize before proceeding to the next step. Each stroke and its related letters were reviewed in forty-two questions and answers in the first dialogue. Jenkins then turned to instructions meant more for the teacher than the student.

The following sections deal with dividing the class according to skill levels, the correct position for sitting to write, directions for holding the pen and exercises with a dry pen. Reading these sections one is impressed by Jenkins' practical experi-

ence. The teacher offered praise as well as criticism, and encouraged the students to become self-critical. Picking up the pen, holding it and tracing the strokes are repeated until they become habit, readying the scholar to concentrate on the act of writing rather than the mechanics of the pen.

Returning to the student, further dialogues are presented for the pupil to memorize, teaching the proportion, slope, joins and spacing of minuscules. In this Jenkins used a closed system based on the letter *n*. Writing masters from Arrighi on found *n* the ideal letter to describe the height-width proportion of small letters as well as their slope, and the inside width of an *n* was universally judged to be the optical ideal for letter spacing. A full *n* described the distance between words, and twice the height of the *n* gave the length of unlooped ascenders and descenders, with looped ones being slightly longer. The only new contributions Jenkins made to these standard approaches was to offer a novel geometric method to determine letter slope (53 degrees from the horizontal) and a somewhat overly fussy set of categories of letter spacing based on three-fourths to two and one-half times the width of the inside space of an *n*. For example, John Clark, in *Writing Improv'd* (London, 1714) gave more or less the same directions about joining minuscules but a much more succinct instruction about letter spacing, namely that it should appear equal to the inside space of an *n*.

Writing was not to be taught by words, or in Jenkins' case, dialogues alone. Besides the wood engraved models in the text, visual aids in the form of five engraved plates were interspersed among the question and answers about minuscules. One plate, however, was shown more to encourage the scholar than to demonstrate Jenkins' principles. [Figure 7] It contains the following text written out by Jenkins:

*To write with ease & Elegance,
is a most Useful, Polite and
Necessary Accomplishment
For All Young
Gentlemen & Ladies.*

By diligence & care Your Writing will be fair.

Much of the writing of this text does not correspond to Jenkins' instructions: *hs* and *ls* have looped tops, simple but abundant flourishes spring from several letters, and the writing included in a vignette above this text is a completely different alphabet, closer to a sloped, unjoined print script than a cursive. The vignette is interesting as it is a profile of a young girl in the act of writing and represents the only pupil portrait in the book. [Figure 1] The flourishes and mixture of hands probably alluded to the fact that Jenkins was a master of more than one script and could, should the occasion arise, show a modest "command of hand."

George Shelley, in *The Second Part of Natural Writing* (London, [1714]), followed the French approach to learning the round hand based on using *i*, *c* and *l* as the fundamental letters. These were “the most simple Letters, as consisting of the least Parts . . . yet are they but *Parts* of some other Letters” (emphasis in the original). He also based capitals on a single S-shaped stroke “being contained in more than one half of the [capital] Alphabet.” Jenkins, who may or may not have been familiar with this book, based his capital alphabet on another six basic strokes and taught them in the same dialogue form as he had done for minuscules. [Figure 8] Several letters—*L*, *I*, *J*, *H*, *K*, *F*, *V*, *W* and *Z*—called for a “waved stroke” which although not included in the basic strokes was amply illustrated in four engraved plates showing the construction of capitals. Parts of capitals were made using some of the minuscule strokes and the dialogue explaining the formation of these letters had only thirty-two questions and answers, relying, no doubt, on the student’s understanding of how minuscules were made.

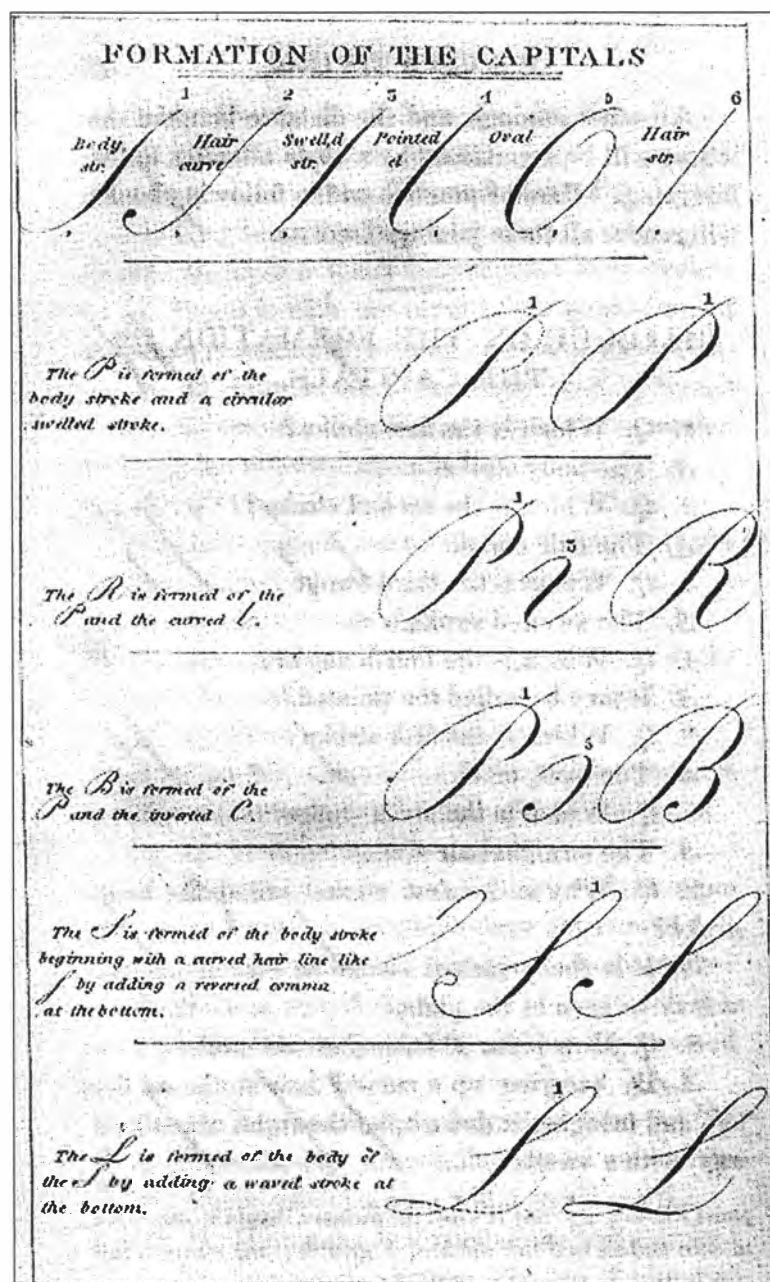
A digression is in order to explain the next part of the book. The full title of Jenkins’ work is *The Art of Writing, Reduced to a Plain and Easy System of a Plan Entirely New in Seven Books*. Only two other of the books have survived, and these in unique copies. Given his financial difficulties, it is quite likely these two were the only ones ever published. Both books contain engraved models (wood engravings for Book II, metal for Book III) for the pupil to trace with a dry and inked pen. Book II has letterpress instructions above each lesson while Book III has none. Both books contain a variety of writing guides—outlined letters, circles to guide the pen around curved strokes, marks indicating where to begin and end letters, and so forth. Three more books were planned with additional exercises, while the seventh was to contain “various specimens of penmanship for imitation.” Perhaps fearing the complete set would not be published, Jenkins included instructions for these lessons in *The Art of Writing* and it is in the section following capitals that he describes exactly how letters were to be made.

Five of the basic minuscule strokes are again illustrated, only this time the dialogue describes the pen pressures used to make each part of the stroke next to wood engraved illustrations. [Figure 9] The first and last of each illustration show a solid stroke while the intermediate ones are partially “hollow,” describing the path the pen took in making the letter. All basic strokes were made with the edge of the pen parallel to the base line and were composed of three parts: a hard then gradual release of pressure to a hair stroke which was made by lifting the pen to its right corner. Strokes starting with a hairline reversed this process,



7. Portion of a plate from *The Art of Writing* (1813) meant to encourage the scholar rather than demonstrate Jenkins’ principles. Author’s collection.

8. The principal capital strokes from John Jenkins, *The Art of Writing* (1813). Not only is a waved stroke used to make part of many letters, but a circular swelled stroke forms the bowl of the *P*, *B* and *R*. Neither of these strokes was considered “principal” by Jenkins. Engraving. Actual size. Author’s collection.



MOVEMENT OF THE PEN ILLUSTRATED.

The first principal stroke is the direct *l*: drawn thus—

1. Q. What is the first motion of the pen in drawing the direct *l*?

A. The pen being held right, the first motion is to set the pen firm and square on the line,* pressing hard to fill and square the top of the *l*: thus—

2. Q. What is the second motion?

A. It is to continue the same hard and equal pressure in a straight line from the top quite down to the upper edge of the period: thus—

☞ The learner is here to notice, that the body part of *l* is the stem of the *h*, *p*, *k*, and *q*.

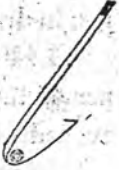
3. Q. What is the third motion?

A. It is a gradual rise of the pen, from a full to a fine hair stroke, while forming the oval turn at the period: thus—

☞ The learner will notice, that the hair line is drawn up to the hyphen, with the right corner of the pen, and in a curved direction.

These three movements of the pen, properly performed, leave the direct *l* thus—

* The lines here referred to and used in the following books are hereafter explained.



come as a surprise to some that the last two cuts of the flexible quill were a sloping cut to the tip, and a perpendicular cut of the point, leaving a square nib.

Imagine Jenkins was a rather kindly school master from the title of the final instruction for the teacher: "To Make Writing an Amusement." Well aware of their short attention span, he recommends children copy no more than three or four lines rather than the customary ten or twelve, and that lessons should last no longer than forty minutes at a time. He also pleaded for the comfort of students, each one being given a roomy, well-lit place to write at a well-made desk (of his design), using the best writing materials. The final pages are devoted to a printed set of alphabetically ordered aphoristic sentences, and three poems lifted from Bickham's *The Universal Penman*, to be used as copies for the pupils.

Direct and paraphrased quotes by Jenkins not only from *The Universal Penman*, but also *The American Instructor* and other sources point out his familiarity with pre-Revolutionary copybooks and writing manuals, but given his impoverished circumstances it seems unlikely he owned such books. He gave no direct references to other writing books and his instructions are unique for the time. His style of round hand was common on both sides of the Atlantic and no new letterforms were introduced by him, but as Jenkins himself pointed out, "From his early youth he had been highly gratified by examining beautiful specimens of penmanship, and felt a strong desire to imitate them." His goal was not to create a new script but to make the learning of the current one easier. By analyzing letters into their components and showing how learning these elements first and then combining them into letters and words, Jenkins believed children could be taught writing more economically in all senses of the word. His discoveries did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries.

Before Jenkins could publish his revised version of *The Art of Writing*, a spate of American writing books appeared based on his system. The first was *Dean's Recently Improved Analytical Guide to the Art of Penmanship* (Salem, [1805]) by the prolific Henry Dean, who liberally cribbed from English authors as well as Jenkins. Dean did not limit his book to only the round hand but most of the engraved plates are of this script and show Jenkins' basic strokes plus a few of Dean's own invention. There is no mention of Jenkins, but anyone familiar with both books could not fail to notice a similarity. Unlike Jenkins, Dean was a successful author of writing manuals and copybooks. His first book went through six editions by 1808/09 and he published six other works on writing between 1806 and 1808.

Figure 9. The movement of the pen illustrated from John Jenkins, *The Art of Writing* (1813). Similar diagrams were repeated in Book II of *The Art of Writing*. The text begins with instructions to press the pen hard and ends with the making of hair strokes with the right corner of the pen, showing the effects of a flexible, edged pen. Wood engraving and letterpress. Actual size. Author's collection.

beginning on the right or left corner of the pen and gradually increasing the pressure to a full stroke with both sides of the pen touching the paper. Further instructions meant for the teacher included faults to watch for in the application and release of pen pressure. While this use of a nibbed, flexible pen was not original with Jenkins, his detailed instructions were the first and most clear we have in English for writing round hand.

A lesson on using the dry pen was followed by instructions on cutting a quill for the round hand. Jenkins' quill cutting steps are virtually interchangeable with scores of such directions found in English and continental writing manuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it may

The next manual cannot be said to be “based” on Jenkins since James Carver’s *A New and Easy Introduction to the Art of Penmanship* (Philadelphia, 1809) is quite simply a plagiarism, right down to the layout of the dedication page. Carver did acknowledge Jenkins by reprinting two pages of recommendations from the 1791 edition but made no mention that the basic strokes, their illustrations and his text were from that book as well. This magpie author, not content to steal from Jenkins, also borrowed from Dean’s *Analytical Guide*. Two other titles by Carver appeared in 1810 and, anonymously, in 1819.

Allison Wrifford’s *A New Plan of Writing Copies* (Boston, 1810) acknowledged Jenkins as its source but dropped any mention of him in the 1812 and 1813 editions. Like Dean, Wrifford was a successful author of writing books and published four more by 1833.

Other American authors continued to copy Jenkins’ system even after his 1813 publication. It was as if his discovery struck a vein of gold that others mined. It is hard to say why Jenkins seemed to fail while his imitators prospered. Perhaps there was a greater demand for writing manuals in New York (where Dean published many of his books) and Philadelphia than in New England. In any case, the success of early nineteenth century American writing manuals probably had as much to do with the rise of the U.S. as a mobile and mercantile society in the early nineteenth century as it did with a systematic approach to teaching handwriting.

England continued to produce writing manuals, and one by Joseph Carstairs was imitated by the American writing teacher Benjamin Franklin Foster who published *Practical Penmanship* in 1830. Soon his system replaced Jenkins’ and became known in France as the *systeme americaine*. A page had turned in the history of handwriting. The rise of the steel pen was imminent and Platt Rogers Spencer, a follower of Foster, would replace Foster’s method with a system more suitable for the new technology. The country was moving west; there were letters to write, diaries to be kept, businesses to run. Handwriting had never been more necessary.

I thank the helpful and cheerful staff of Special Collections at The Newberry Library, Chicago and am, even after a score of years, still awed at the depth of the resources of its John M. Wing Collection. There are few libraries in the world where you can call up half a dozen editions of Arrighi or nearly every printed writing manual from 1509 on. However, New York has two excellent resources for checking most of the early books mentioned in this article: The New York

Public Library and Columbia University Library. Below is a list of works consulted for this article. Wherever I am aware of a facsimile edition I have indicated that with an asterisk (*). Sadly, no facsimile of Jenkins’ *The Art of Writing* has ever been published. Are you listening Dover Books?

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Robert Williams is assistant design manager at The University of Chicago Press. He studied calligraphy in London with Ann Camp, Donald Jackson, and Dorothy Mahoney, and has taught classes and workshops in various parts of the U.S. His articles and reviews have appeared in several American and English journals.