



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Penmanship was once highly valued

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Bethinking of Olde Orleans

Writing was once one of the three Rs in elementary education — reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. Every teacher in a district school-house years ago taught penmanship and there were many volumes devoted to the correct method.

George Shattuck (1830-1907) of Medina, an expert in penmanship, developed the Medial System and during his career sold more than 80 million copybooks. There were also the Spencerian copybooks and the Palmer Method, etc.

By the time you got to the third grade, the teacher would allow you to use ink from one of those wells in your desktop. It was indeed a momentous sense of satisfaction for students when they were considered old and big enough to use ink.

Writing correctly was also traumatic to students who were left-handed, because the teacher of penmanship forced all "lefties" to use their right hand. The main reason was that by moving a left hand from left to right across a page, an ink smear would then appear.

Penmanship was considered an important part of every student's education because reading depends

on legibility.

Shattuck and others with a perfect style made use of their talents, too. In the 19th century, it was considered proper etiquette to leave a calling card upon visiting your friends. These were beautifully hand-lettered cards with simply your name on them. The size of the card was slightly smaller than a contemporary business card. Many households even had a special dish near the front door called a "tazza," which was a depository for such calling cards.

The accompanying picture is a pen-and-ink drawing by H. Clure White of Gaines in the 1880s. White, for a while, taught penmanship in a Chicago school.

In this drawing, he is simply "showing off" the things he can do with a variety of steel pen nibs. These nibs, which spread with pressure, could form various widths of lines as the ink flowed. Note that the little banner in the drawing carries the name of this delineator, H.C. White.