

*J.J. Bailey's*



**Mile Stones on the  
Penmanship Highway**

*Compiled by James Ivey and Dr. Joseph M. Vitolo  
IAMPETH (2006)*

# Mile Stones on the Penmanship Highway

## Penman/Author Bio



**Joseph J. Bailey**  
(1879-1970)

*(\*Portrait and Bio used with permission from Michael Sull.)*

J. J. Bailey, Canada's most well known penman, was Edward C. Mills' foremost student, and except for Mills, Bailey was unsurpassed by anyone in plain, rapid, business penmanship. After graduating from the Zanerian College of Penmanship in 1910, he became associated with both elementary and high school systems in the teaching of penmanship. He was author of *The Bailey Method of Penmanship* that was used in the high schools throughout Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan for over 40 years. He also wrote 3 textbooks and a teachers' manual for use in elementary schools. One of the founding members of the International Association of Master Penmen, Engrossers and Teachers of Handwriting, J. J. Bailey was also an Honorary President of the Ontario Penmanship Association. A dedicated teacher, he significantly influenced the education of handwriting in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century. Among his many students were Frederick and Eileen Richardson.

(The following was transcribed by James Ivey from a ten page series of specimens penned by IAMPETH co-founding member Joseph J. Bailey (1879-1970). All images were scanned by Dr. Joseph M. Vitolo .The pages were penned by Bailey in the late 1920's and published in *The Business Educator* between 1929 and 1930.)

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### INDEX

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Page</i>
<b>Penman Bio</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Mile Stones on the Penmanship Highway</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Desire</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Technique</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Neatness</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Movement</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Form Study</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Criticism</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>System</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Style</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Scans of Specimens</b>	<b>10</b>

## **Mile Stones on the Penmanship Highway**

The road to good penmanship lies within a pleasant, though secluded, valley and is thronged with a myriad delights for those who have a keen eye and an appreciative mind. The beautiful vistas, the delightful scenery, the gurgling and refreshing waters, the green pastures, and the never-ending charm of the hills and dales make this road one of the loveliest highways in life, and one that brings peace and contentment to those who are fortunate enough to discover this enchanted land, and seek therein an escape from the hurry mad turmoil of this restless world. And they who have enjoyed its manifold allurements are only too eager to induce others to wander therein that they, too, may experience the joys of good penmanship and the splendid fellowship of the happy Brotherhood.

But we must come prepared. While the delights are undeniably there, an apprenticeship must be served so that we may be in a condition of mind and heart to enjoy them to the full, and to avoid any of the discomforts that camping by the roadside may entail. The sharp angles, intricate curves, hair-pin turns, and the long loops with their sudden turns demand close observation unremitting attention, and a well-developed coordination between mind and muscle if the driver would escape the inevitable disaster which must follow even a momentary lapse. That highly-developed skill that is so eminently necessary in propelling the vehicle over these dangerous places comes only through constant and intelligent practice and the utmost of concentration. Anyone not willing or capable of putting forth the requisite effort to attain this skill would never be able to appreciate to the fullest extent the joys of the Penmanship Highway.

## **Desire**

The first essential in preparing one's self for a career in writing is the possession of a desire for the work. This may be done in either of two ways: either a born liking for it or a cultivated one, both of which are almost of equal potential value as a basis of future success. The ambition to become a fine writer can never be realized unless you are an ardent admirer of good penmanship, either, as plain business, or the more attractive ornamental.

Doubtless there are many of the fine penmen of our day who can tract their success in no small measure to the inspiration received from a specimen of some old master. How many of them were not thrilled in days gone by, by the masterpieces of Madarasz, Taylor, Canan, Flickinger, Zaner, and Root who have passed to the great beyond, or to Courtney, Mills, Lister, Lupfer, Doner and Bartow, and a host of others who are carrying on the good work in our own times! If those who received inspiration from the pens of these masters were even to whisper, what a thunderous sound would roll over the land. Much of their finest work is still available, as reproductions, to the student, and almost every issue of the Business Educator contains one or more samples of their skill that will provide a month's study and practice. Make it your business to start a scrapbook, and paste in it all of them you can find, and when the world has gone wrong, from a writing standpoint, open it up and feast your eyes on the wonders therein, and if the clouds don't

roll away and the sun shine again, and if your enthusiasm is not renewed in the process then you have chosen your life-work unwisely.

## Technique

Every manual art has a definite technique which must be mastered or success in it can never be attained. Violin playing, golf, even baseball, have standard rules which all those who wish to excel must adhere to, or be relegated to the ranks of the incompetents. If you would achieve success with a pen you will have to learn the rules relating to penmanship, and observe them carefully in all your practice. The slightest deviation from the accepted technique will detract immeasurably from the skill you might attain. Faulty posture, faulty pen holding, and poor, uneven speed have made many a person into a mediocre writer who might have become a real artist with a pen.

Sit squarely in front of the desk with the feet flat on the floor, about a foot apart, bend the body slightly at the hips, so that the edge of the desk is about three inches from the body. Keep the right elbow a half-inch off the desk. The left elbow may be on the desk if you prefer it that way.

A good oblique penholder is essential. It should be carefully adjusted by a competent workman or a good writer, so that the pen points will be fairly on the paper, and so prevent scratching. Keep the metal part pointing about 45° from the horizontal.

Use a good grade of paper - not too smooth or too rough - one that the pen will adhere to, and enable you to feel, and develop a nice even touch.

Use only the best pen points. Take good care of them and they will last a long time. Throw them away when they commence to scratch.

The third milestone of the Penmanship Highway is Pen holding, the importance of which cannot be overestimated in learning to write. The free, easy movement required in the production of superior penmanship comes almost wholly from the manner in which the pen is held in the hand.

Cross the pen somewhere between the root of the nail and the first point of the second finger. Place the first finger on top about 3/4 inch from the end of the pen point. Drop the holder below the large knuckle joint. Place the thumb at the side - not underneath - of the holder, about 1/3 inch from the end of the first finger. Curve the fingers well, so that the first finger forms a right angle. The end of the second finger should be about opposite the root of the nail of the third finger, and the end of the third finger should be about opposite the root of the nail of the fourth. If the third and fourth fingers are curved as they ought to be, there should be a space of almost an inch between the ends of these two, forming a solid bridge for the hand to slide on. This will prevent any undue side sway of the hand, and add precision to the letter forms.

Do not grip the pen. Use just enough pressure to keep it steady in the hand. Expend a minimum amount of your nervous energy on holding the pen, and you will have a maximum amount to expend on the writing. This is one of the very important points that differentiates the good penman from the average or poor one.

Should you find this position hard to attain or maintain at first, spend a lot of time on easy, automatic movement exercises so that you can think of how you are doing the work, and not of "what" you are doing. Be patient, persevering and painstaking, and success will crown your efforts finally.

## **Neatness**

One of the worst retarding influences in the development of accurate, graceful penmanship is the tendency on the part of some writers towards carelessness in their practice, and in their execution. When a penman has succeeded in acquiring a free, easy movement, and has a good working knowledge of the letter-forms, there can be no reasonable excuse for untidiness, or carelessness in his writing. Yet the writing of many penmen appears untidy. This is due largely to the method or manner of practicing, and to carelessness in the matter of initial and ending strokes.

To overcome the former it is advisable to divide the writing page into four sections, leaving a margin of  $\frac{5}{8}$  -  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch on both sides. Select words or letter combinations that will just fill the sections, conforming to the lateral scope of the writer. Arrange each word in exact vertical alignment, at first in columns, afterwards writing them in lines, taking care to maintain the vertical alignment as before. Fill the page in this manner, completely and carefully, and the pleasing appearance of the page will have an unconscious influence on all future work.

The appearance of a written page may be greatly enhanced by paying close attention to the length of the initial and final strokes. If the initial strokes are made short, commencing on the line, and the final strokes made as though another letter were to be added, and ending at the height of the minimum letters, then much of the straggly rat-tailed writing would disappear. Try this, if you have not already done so, and I am sure you will be astonished with the result.

## **Movement**

The basis of all good writing lies in movement of the arm and hand in contra-distinction to what we usually designate as finger movement. In the latter the motion comes almost exclusively from the fingers, and in the former it comes from the muscles of the arm and shoulder.

Some penmen insist on absolute inaction on the part of fingers in every phase of writing, but many of our most skillful penmen, such as Madarasz, Canan, Zaner and H.W. Flickinger, advocated and used a certain amount of finger action, especially in ornate

work. The following is the method I use in both business and ornamental: muscular movement in capitals and in all minimum-spaced letters, and a combined finger and arm movement in letters higher or longer than these.

While it is both possible and practical to use pure arm movement in business writing for students, it seems to me to be much too inaccurate for professional penmanship for anything above the minimum letters, especially for the upper and lower loops. Most arm-movement writers make the up strokes in these forms too curved, and the down strokes too straight, instead of an evenly-balanced loop. However, F.B. Courtney could make them perfectly with pure arm movement, and, doubtless, some of my readers can too. Use your own judgment, and follow your own inclination in the matter.

One other point may be emphasized; one that the late C.P. Zaner considered of great value in his success, and which I learned from him. While the third finger slides on the paper and actually goes through all the motions made in each letter, the little finger hitches along, acting as a sort of pivot or guide-post, giving precision to the movement and accuracy to the form. Try this, if you have not already acquired it. Many of our best penmen have acquired it unconsciously.

## Form Study

As soon as you have developed a free easy movement and can apply it in the making of actual forms, it is then essential to devote considerable time in analytical study of the letters. The forms must be well made as well as freely and easily made. Writing to be good must be legible, and inaccurate forms can never be anything but illegible.

Divide the alphabet into groups, notice the points of difference between these groups; then the points of likeness within the groups, and the points of difference that distinguish one letter from another in the same group.

Every letter has some distinguishing characteristic - as the shoulder in r, the loop in e, the tick in c - and these distinguishing features must stand out prominently or the letters lack character.

It requires a long time to learn to make these features easily, rapidly and well even in groups of the same letter, and how much harder it is to combine them in words when we have to execute, automatically almost, the intricate turns and angles and retraces that go to make up cursive writing.

No wonder some get discouraged at the magnitude of the task ahead of them, and want to quit in despair when they find it almost an impossibility to make two r's look alike. But keep at it. Concentrated practice will win in the end, and some day when you are a real penman you will look back with a certain satisfaction on these moments of discouragement, and will feel in your heart that they were good for you, developing your stick-to-it-iveness, a highly necessary characteristic in these days when tenacity of

purpose may mean, and frequently does mean, the difference between ultimate success and failure.

## **Criticism**

To succeed in penmanship you must have an unlimited amount of ambition and an endless reserve force of energy and determination. There are so many things to create discouragement that it is only the stout of heart that eventually succeed.

If we would get anywhere we must have good instruction from sympathetic and energetic teachers. We must learn not only how to write, but how to write to the very best of which we are capable. To this end we must be shown our errors, and how to overcome them. Oftentimes the instructor is busy with some other person, or we are a correspondence student, and criticism is late in coming. No progress can be attained without some definite object in view. Careless, aimless practice will never produce a master in any line of endeavor. It is true in penmanship.

While you can attain a moderate degree of skill in the ordinary haphazard practice, no one ever reaches the top without self criticism. To find out your own errors with the aid of your eyes means that you are on the right road at last. No greater incentive to progress can be found than the desire to improve that comes with the assurance of our self-criticism; and do not spare your self in the process. Be far more exacting in your own case than in that of another. Keep at one form until you see much improvement, or until you reach perfection. Aim at the stars, even if your feet never leave the earth. Think good writing, dream good writing, and in the end good writing will be your most treasured possession. So work hard, and remember that hard work is akin to genius.

## **System**

Aimless, haphazard practice will never get you anywhere in penmanship. There must be a definite object in view whenever you sit down at your desk, otherwise the time so spent will be time almost wasted. If you have a purpose in view and concentrate your whole mind and energy in its accomplishment, there is no real reason for you to fail in your endeavor. Make up your mind to master some one part of your penmanship plan each week, and in an incredibly short time you will have accomplished more than you ever imagined possible in the time. There is nothing like system in any scheme of practice.

One of the best means of acquiring accuracy or precision in writing is to practice by the cumulative method. Possibly an illustration may explain what is meant much better than any number of words can do. Suppose you are desirous of improving a combination of a, n and m. Under the cumulative plan you begin with the word "ma", then "man", then "manna", "manner", "manners" etc. By the time you have made a page or two of each word you should have mastered the combination fairly well. The trouble with too many aspiring penmen is that they want to run before they have really learned to creep. Be patient, be thorough. Build a firm foundation, and your superstructure will weather the

gales, and the wear and tear of time. Do not be satisfied with anything but the best. There is nothing quite so deadening as mediocrity and nothing so chilling to one's friends or so heartening to one's enemies, as the knowledge that some person, who might make a name for himself in the penmanship world, is content to practice in an aimless way, and is quite satisfied with half-way measures.

## Style

There have been four main styles of penmanship during the last fifty years, all of which have imitators among present-day writers. Each style is distinct in itself, and on that account alone is deserving of imitation and admiration.

First there is the purely Spencerian style, of which Lyman P. Spencer and H.W. Flickinger were the most worthy exponents, and of which H.B. Lehman is the only living devotee. Next, we have the modified Spencerian. This style was made famous by the late C.P. Zaner. The next style, and one that has had more followers than any other, might be called the "dashy" style. Its originator (I may be wrong in this) was the late A.D. Taylor, a marvelous penman. However, he was not long enough with us, and it was left to Madarasz and our own F.B. Courtney to carry on the good work. There is no doubt that this style appealed to many on account of its brilliant shades, dash and beauty. The next style, which I shall designate as the "formal", was the one used by C.C. Canan, and of which E.C. Mills was and is the finest exponent in business writing. This style is marked by simplicity and accuracy as its dominating characteristics, together with wide lateral spacing between letters and well-rounded turns and curves.

From these any writer can make a satisfactory choice. But remember, choose carefully and wisely. No penman is capable, either mentally or physically, of mastering more than one of them. Each has its own special technique and requires special gifts of mind and muscle control. It would be wise, then, for every person who intends making penmanship his avocation to take stock of his mental and physical equipment before making a final selection, and it is quite possible that some who have already chosen might still do worse than to revise their original opinion.

The following are the scans of the original series of ten pages:

## Mile Stones on the Penmanship Highway

The road to good penmanship lies within a pleasant, though secluded, valley and is thronged with a myriad delights for those who have a keen eye and an appreciative mind. The beautiful vistas, the delightful scenery, the gurgling and refreshing waters, the green pastures, and the never-ending charm of the hills and dales make this road one of the loveliest highways in life, and one that brings peace and contentment to those who are fortunate enough to discover this enchanted land, and seek therein an escape from the hurry mad turmoil of this restless world. And they who have enjoyed its manifold allurements are only too eager to induce others to wander therein that they too may experience the joys of good penmanship, and the splendid fellowship of the happy Brotherhood.

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The first of a series of ten beautiful pages by J. J. Bailey

## Desire

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Use only the best penpoints. Take good care of them and they will last a long time. Throw them away when they commence to scratch.

The third milestone on the Penmanship Highway is Penholding, the importance of which cannot be overestimated in learning to write. The free, easy movement required in the production of superior penmanship comes almost wholly from the manner in which the pen is held in the hand.

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The fourth of a series of ten beautiful pages by J. J. Bailey, High School of Commerce, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.  
Be sure to read what Mr. Bailey has to say in these beautiful pages.

## Neatness

One of the worst retarding influences in the development of accurate, graceful penmanship is the tendency on the part of some writers towards carelessness in their practice, and in their execution. When a penman has succeeded in acquiring a free, easy movement, and has a good working knowledge of the letter forms, there can be no reasonable excuse for untidiness, or carelessness in his writing. Yet the writing of many penmen appears untidy. This is due largely to the method or manner of practicing, and to carelessness in the matter of initial and ending strokes.

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## Form Study

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## Criticism

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## System

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## Style

There have been four main styles of penmanship during the last fifty years, all of which have imitators among present day writers. Each style is distinct in itself, and on that account alone is deserving of imitation and admiration.

First there is the purely Spencerian style, of which Lyman F. Spencer and H. W. Flickinger were the most worthy exponents, and of which H. P. Lehman is the only living devotee. Next we have the modified Spencerian. This style was made famous by the late C. P. Janer. The next style, and one that has had more followers than any other, might be called the dashy style. Its originator (I maybe wrong in this) was the late A. D. Taylor, a marvellous penman. However, he was not long enough with us, and it was left to Madarasz and our own F. D. Courtney to carry on the good work. There is no doubt that this style appealed to many on account of its brilliant shades, dash and beauty. The next style, which I shall designate as the "formal," was the one used by C. Canan, and of which C. C. Mills was and is the finest exponent in business writing. This style is marked by simplicity and accuracy as its dominating characteristics, together with wide lateral spacing between letters and well-rounded turns and curves.

From these any writer can make a satisfactory choice. But remember, choose carefully and wisely. No penman is capable, either mentally or physically, of mastering more than one of them. Each has its own special technique and requires special gifts of mind and muscle control. It would be wise, then, for every person who intends making penmanship his avocation to take stock of his mental and physical equipment before making a final selection, and it is quite possible that some who have already chosen might still do worse than to revise their original opinion.