

The Life & Works of
Francis B. Courtney
(1867-1952)



Compiled by Dr. Joseph M. Vitolo, 2014
Penman and IAMPETH Historian

Thank you to Michael Sull and Tom Costello for making the above portrait image from the Zaner-Bloser Collection available to us.

The following biography is used with permission from Michael Sull's Spencerian Script and Ornamental Penmanship, Volume I.

Francis B. Courtney
(1867-1952)

Known as "The Pen Wizard" by his peers, Francis B. Courtney was truly unique among penmen. As a student at age 17 of AH Hinman, the grand old master and student of PR Spencer, Courtney developed his passion for penmanship early in life. Shortly thereafter, he received further training in penmanship at the Spencerian Business College, Cleveland, Ohio.

His first position after graduation was as an accountant in a manufacturing company, which he held for two years. However, preferring to work in a business college environment rather than in a general office, Courtney wrote 200 single page specimens, each line being in a different style, and sent them out to business colleges throughout the country. This brought him many job offers, and his reputation as a penman grew rapidly. Over the years, he taught at many such colleges: Hinman's College, Worcester, Massachusetts; Portland, Maine Business College; Lincoln, Nebraska Business College; Spaulding's Commercial College, Kansas City, Missouri; McDonald Business College, Des Moines, Iowa;

Caton's Commercial College, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Wood's School of Business, New York; Cedar Rapids Business College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and Toland's Business University. He was one of the most consistent contributors to the Penman's Art Journal, the American Penman and the Business Educator, and was very prolific in his personal correspondence with his friends and colleagues.

No other penman was so versatile in various writing styles as Francis B. Courtney. He was most flamboyant in the penmanship demonstrations he gave, and he exhibited his prowess with the pen often. He seemed to revel in dashing out exotic and novel forms of decorative writing, a number of which were of his own creation. His Needlestitch script, Courtney's Backslanted script, Figure Writing, and Letterheads became trademarks for this great penman. Throughout his long life, he was an avid teacher, and influenced many young writers with his flawless work. He died at 85 years of age in 1952.

The following biography was taken from 'The Blue Book Containing Photographs And Sketches Of A Few Commercial Teachers' compiled by L.E. Stacy (1907)

Francis B. Courtney

Mr. Francis B. Courtney was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1867. At the age of seventeen, he entered Hinman's Business College, Worcester, Mass., to take the commercial course. Under the instruction of Mr. Hinman, he soon became interested in penmanship, and after he had graduated from the commercial course, he continued the study of ornamental penmanship.

After completing his commercial and special penmanship training, Mr. Courtney became an accountant in a manufacturing establishment, and held this position for two years. In preparing to solicit his first position in a business school, Mr. Courtney wrote two hundred sheets of foolscap, writing each line in a different style of penmanship. As a result, he received immediate offers for his services, coming from various directions. He has taught in the following schools; Hinman's College, Worcester, Mass.; Gray's College, Portland, Maine; Lincoln, Nebraska, Business College; Spaulding's Commercial College, Kansas City, Missouri; Mc Donald's Business Institute, Milwaukee, Wis.; Iowa Business College, Des Moines, Ia.; Wood's New York School; Toland's Business University, and is at present with McDonald's Business Institute.

As an all-round penman, Mr. Courtney has never had an equal, and he deserves his title "wizard of the pen." As an expert of forged handwriting, Mr. Courtney has had large experience, and has testified in some noted cases. In addition to being a penman, he is an all-round teacher of commercial subjects.

Courtney on Movement

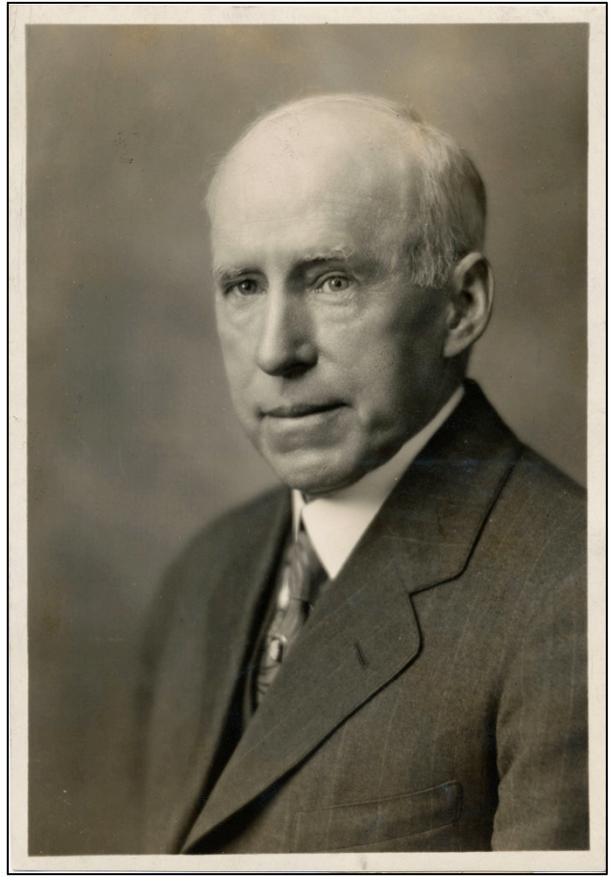
There is but one movement to which I have chained my life's work in the field of dashy and rapid writing. It is the muscular movement, the movement that has done more for penmanship than any other ever tried or even suggested. It is the foundation of all penmanship skill. You must acquire it or any amount of time and effort you may devote to this work will be lost. You must develop and store away a generous quantity. You must practice exercises until the action of the arm is light, absolutely free, and under perfect control. Such action can be acquired only through a complete relaxation of all the muscles of the hand, arm and shoulders. Gripping the penholder severely produces a rigid tension of the muscles, prevents freedom lightness of touch, and grace of movement. Do not attempt any of the shaded strokes until you can make the light strokes with perfect ease.

A Courtney-Madarasz Legend as told by Delbert Tysdal

Legend tells of a meeting of pen masters that included the likes of Louis Madarasz, CP Zaner, FB Courtney, EW Bloser as well as others. The story describes a scene where some of them are gathered at a table sharing their knowledge and penned specimens to out 'do' each other. At the table were Francis B. Courtney, a pen master possessing an most freakish pen skill and the great Louis Madarasz consider even at that time to be perhaps the greatest ornamental penman to ever pick up a pen

In one exchange Courtney quickly penned an absolutely incredible specimen of both script and flourishing. Courtney then shoved the specimen across the table to Louis Madarasz and said, "Beat that in a day!" Madarasz took Courtney's sheet of paper and penned a single capital letter and passed the paper back to Courtney saying, "Beat that in a lifetime!"

Francis B. Courtney
in Pictures



FB and his wife Mildred

Standing l-r: Courtney, Madarasz
Seated l-r: Hinman, Flickinger



Courtney at work as an Examiner
of questioned documents.

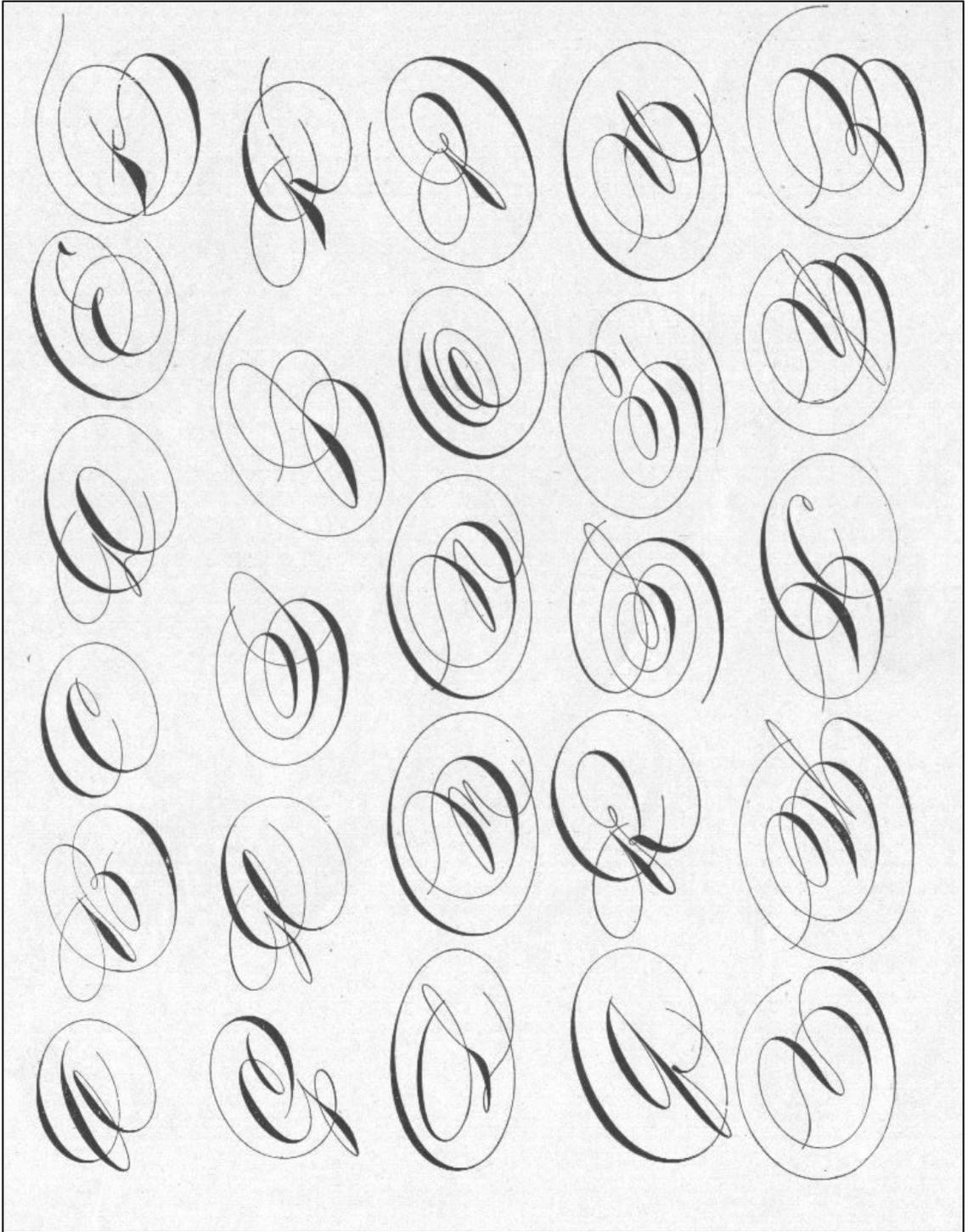


Courtney seen here with Edwin
L. Brown (1869-1958)



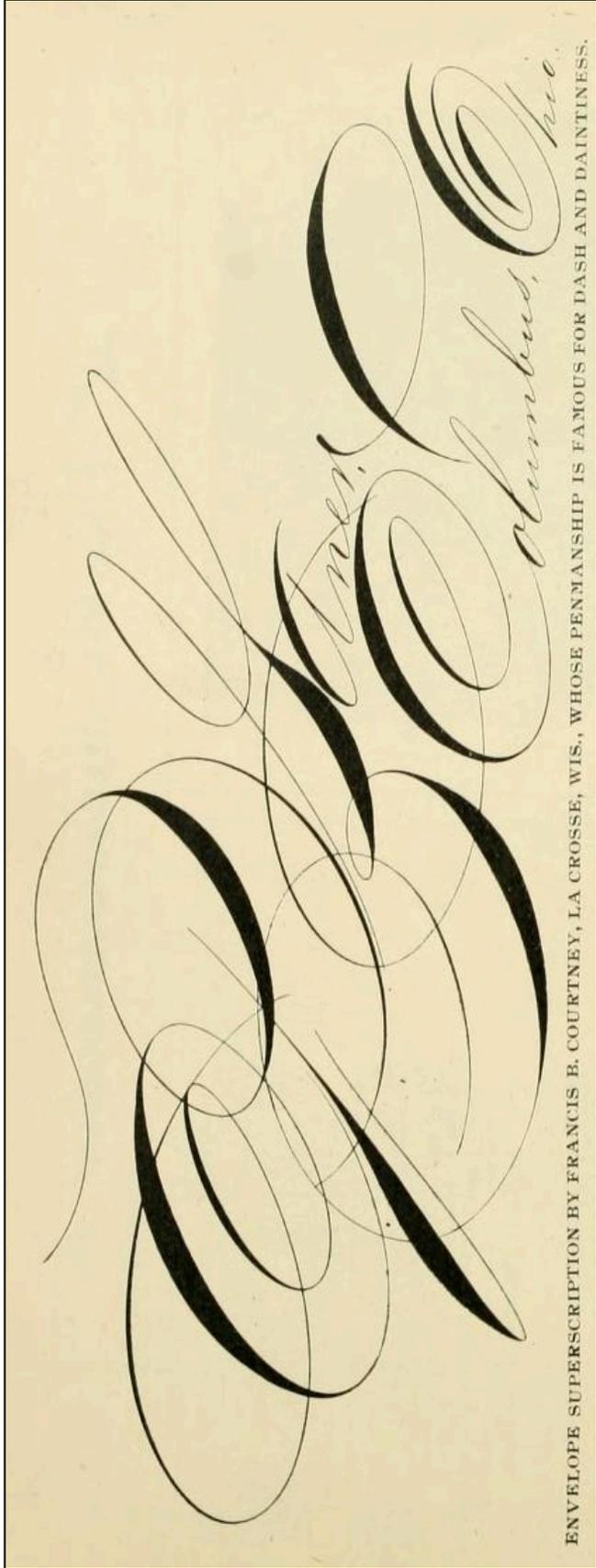
The Pen Work of Francis B. Courtney

*A special thank you to Nick D'Aquanno, Bob Hurford,
Schin Loong and Michael Sull for contributing to the
images shown.*



New York, Nov. 5-03.
Received of James & Joseph
Nine Hundred Dollars.
Freeman & Ware.

BOLD, GRACEFUL, EFFECTIVE SCRIPT BY FRANCIS B. COURTNEY, 222 WEST 123d ST.



ENVELOPE SUPERScription BY FRANCIS B. COURTNEY, LA CROSSE, WIS., WHOSE PENMANSHIP IS FAMOUS FOR DASH AND DAININESS.

New York, April 14, -04

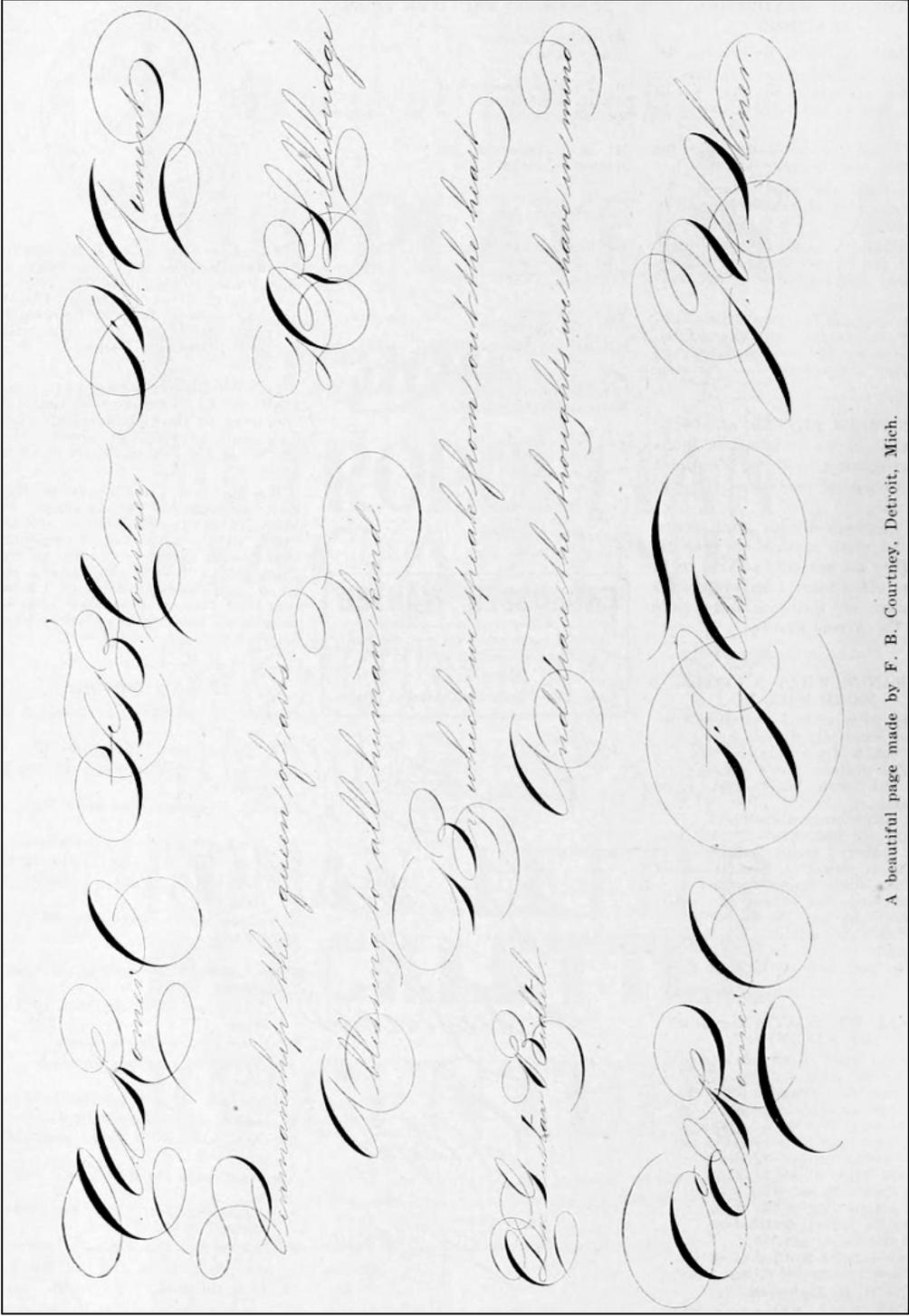
James & Blosser,
Columbus, O.

Dear Friends. I have just closed an engagement with G. J. Gotland of the Wisconsin Business University, La Crosse, Wis., at a fine salary with the privilege of reengagement.

I think it is Mr. Gotland's intention to have me act as supervisor of the penmanship division of his chain of schools.

Very truly yours,

Francis B. Courtney.



A beautiful page made by F. B. Courtney, Detroit, Mich.

F. B. Barnett

Jacksonville,

P.O. Box 109

Fla.

F. B. Compton

Kanoka,

P.O. Box 190

Ill.

F. B. Fawcett

Richmond,

P.O. Box 91

Va.

F. B. Frost

Detroit,

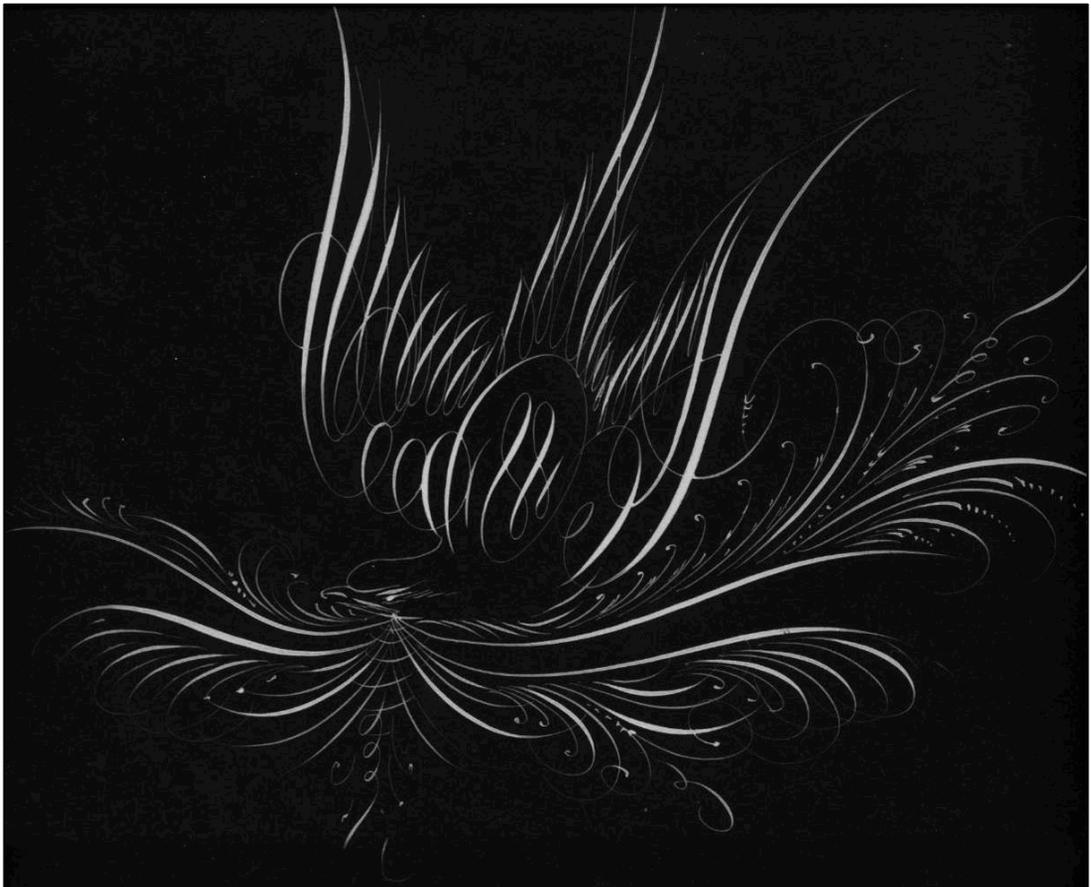
P.O. Box 53

Mich.

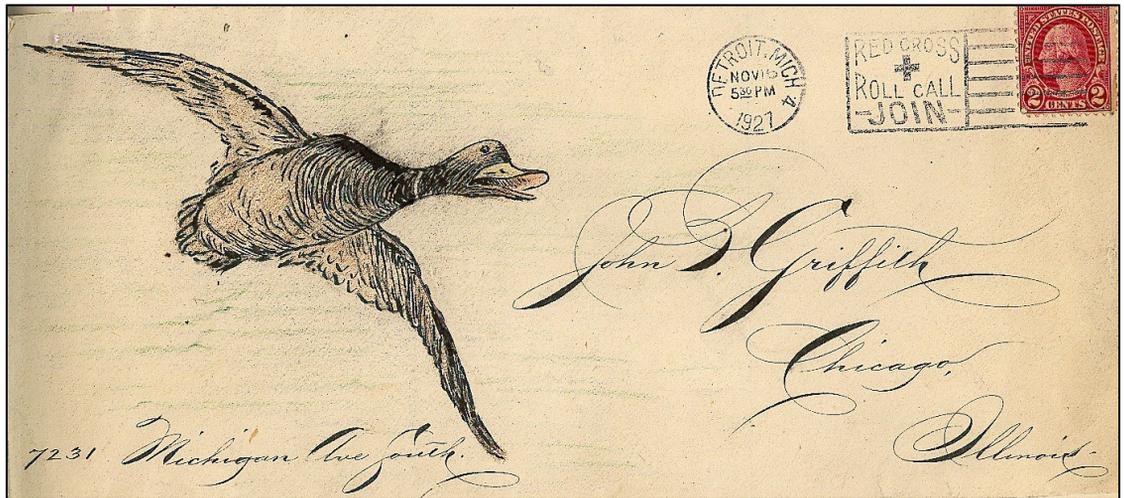
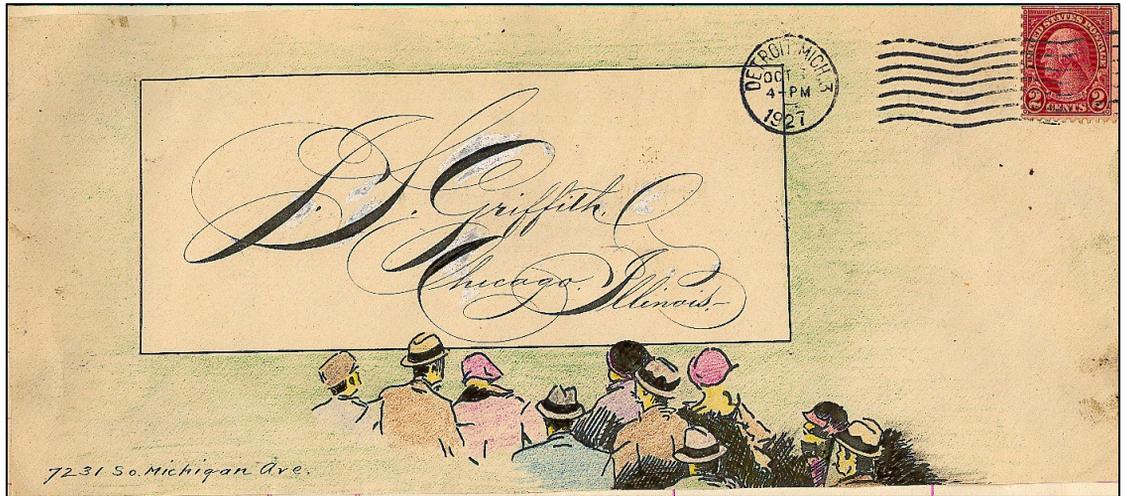
Attend The

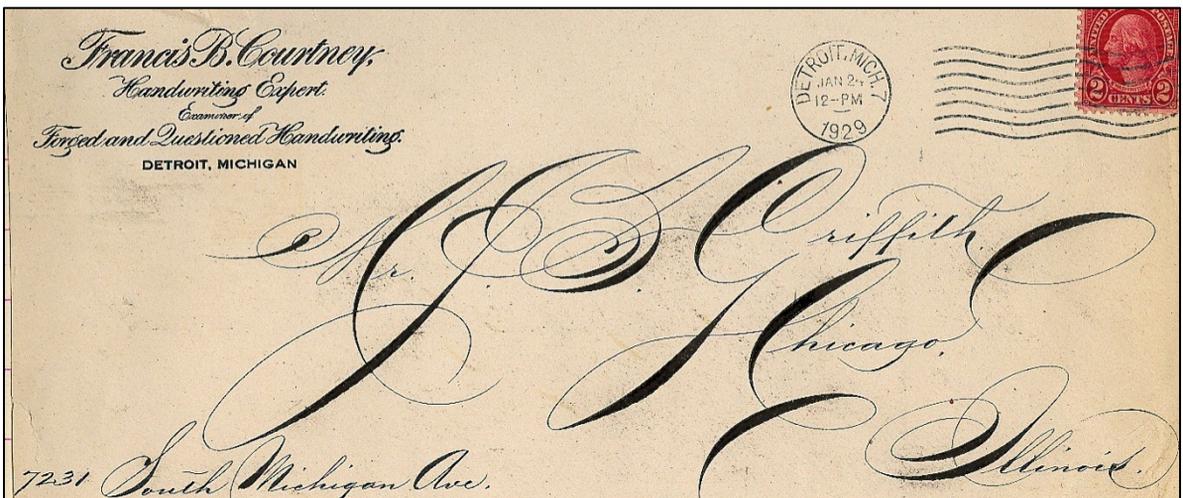
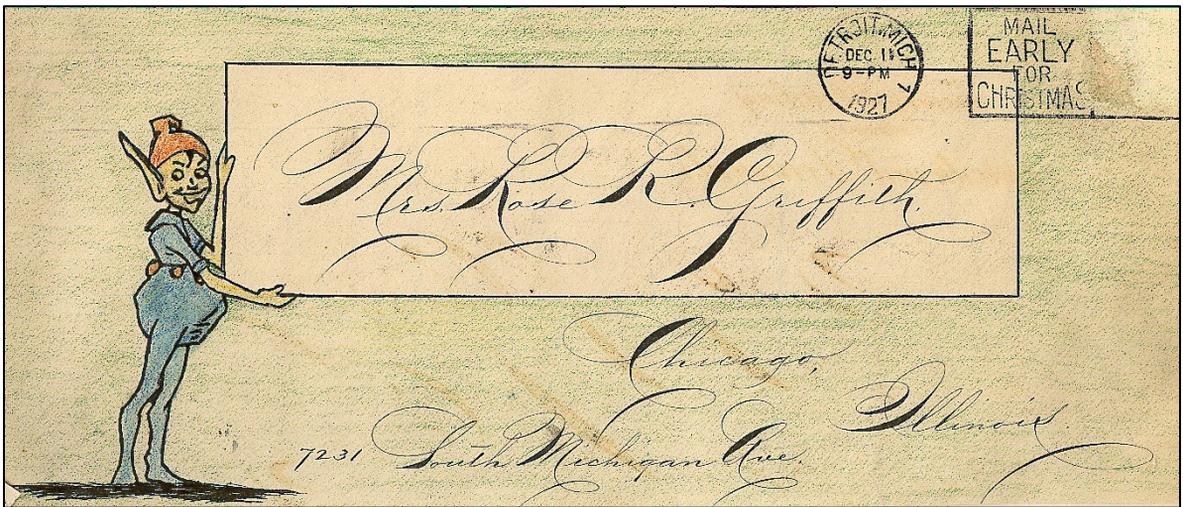
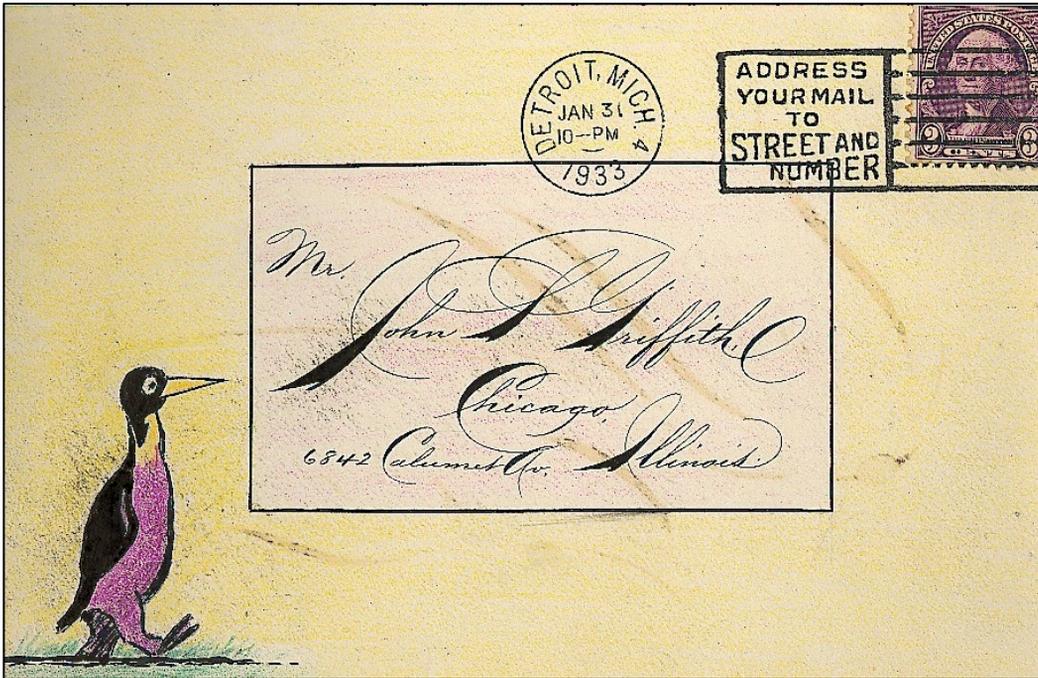
Englewood Business College

Chicago, Ill.



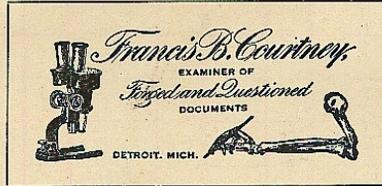
Kind Hearts
Kind hearts are gardens
Kind thoughts are roots
Kind words are flowers
Kind deeds are fruits.





12365 CHERRYLAWN AVENUE

TELEPHONE HOGARTH 7404



Friend Griffith,

Thanks for the
Booklet,

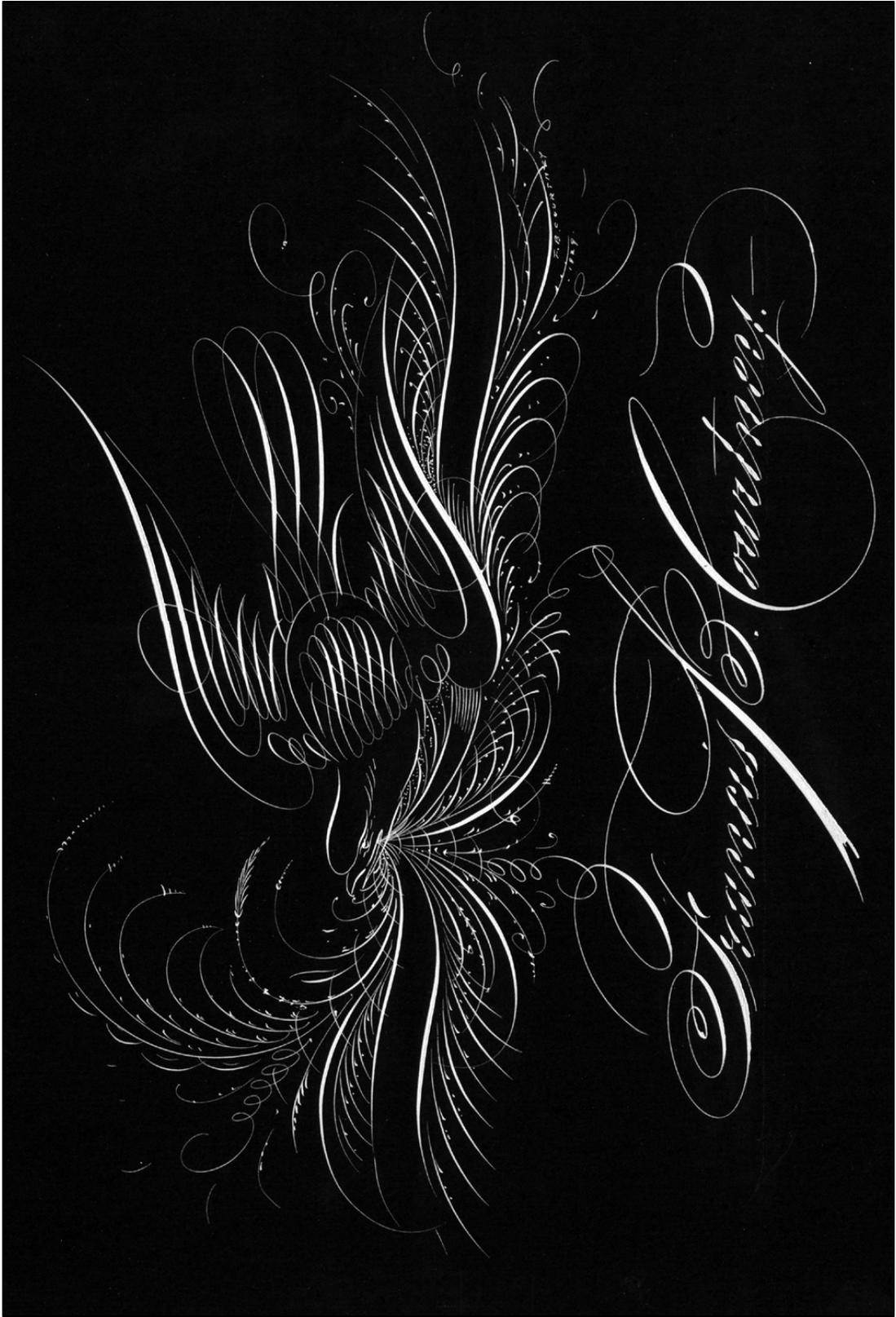
Yours truly,

F. B. Courtney



Image provided by Schin Loong



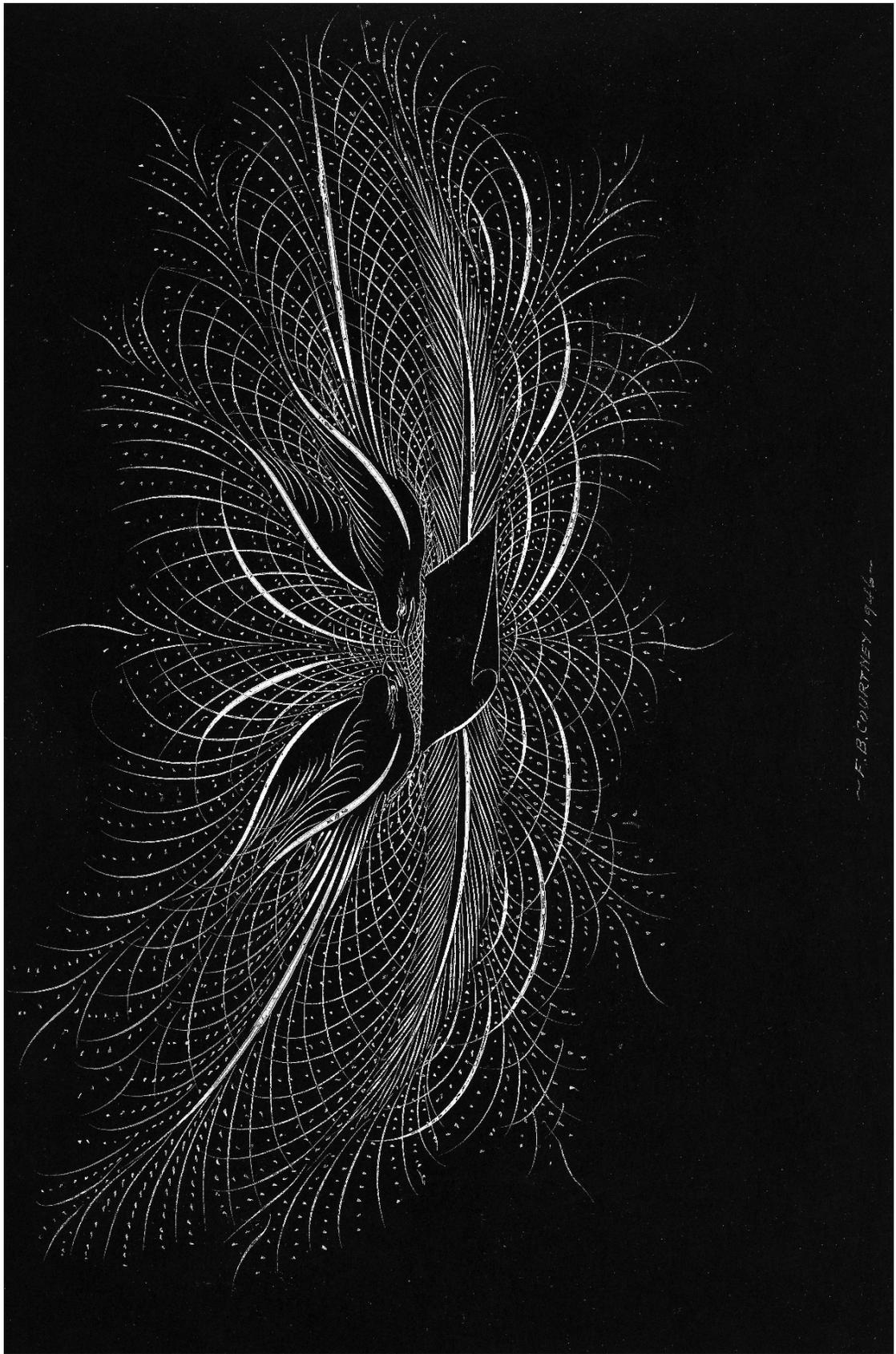












F. B. COURTNEY 1946



F. B. CURNEX



