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# An Elegant Hand: The Golden Age of American Penmanship and Calligraphy

*By William E. Henning*



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This work chronicles the history of the Golden Age of American penmanship and calligraphy. The author guides the reader through the lives and careers of some of the most important American penmen, including Platt Rogers Spencer, the Father of American Handwriting, and Spencer's gifted student, George A. Gaskell, whose books and periodicals reached hundreds of thousands of students throughout the second half of the 1800s. Paul Melzer, the editor of this work, added more than 400 examples taken from original specimens to handsomely illustrate Henning's manuscript.



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### **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

The period from 1850 to 1925 saw a flowering of American penmanship. In addition to itinerant writing masters, there were hundreds of private business schools, all of which taught penmanship (before the typewriter was invented). Periodicals such as *The Western Penman* were devoted to the subject, and expert calligraphers produced textbooks and copybooks for students. Even today, books on Spencerian calligraphy and on the Palmer method are being published (e.g., Michael Sull's *Spencerian Script and Ornamental Penmanship*). The present work details this period in history, devoting a chapter to each of seven experts (including Spencer and Palmer) and mentioning the work of 40 others. The text conveys the author's enthusiasm for the subject; Henning's father was himself once an editor of *The American Penman* and is one of the book's main subjects. Published posthumously (Henning died in 1996), this book was edited by rare book dealer and autograph collector Paul Melzer. The text is very readable, and the more than 450 illustrations are well chosen. Complementing Tamara Plakins Thornton's *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History*, this work is excellent for collections on the letter arts or on the history of education in America. Margarete Gross, Chicago P.L.  
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