Scripsit

The Journal of the
Washington Calligraphers Guild
Vol. 47, No. 2 Fall 2025



Pens & Protocol Vol. 3

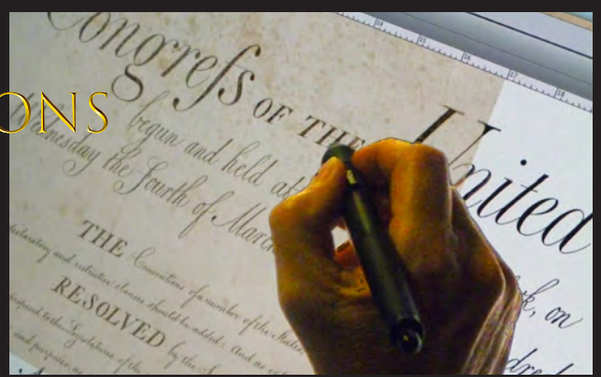
The Calligraphy of Official Washington





& Unique Commissions





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Scripsit Vol 47, No 2 Fall 2025

The 3rd edition of Pens & Protocol:
The Calligraphy of Official Washington

Scripsit

The Washington Calligraphers Guild

Scripsit is the biannual journal of the Washington (DC) Calligraphers Guild and is among the many benefits available through membership: **calligraphersguild.org**

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From the editor

Lorraine Swerdloff

As the editor of two previous Scripsit editions of *Pens & Protocol: The Calligraphy of Official Washington*, published in 2008 and 2016, it was my pleasure to share the invitations, menus, resolutions and other calligraphic art produced by Washington Calligraphers Guild members at the highest levels of the United States government.

But as we prepared for a third *Pens & Protocol*, the Guild did not receive permission to print White House and State Department artwork created more recently by our members. Moreover, federal award certificates and USPS postage stamps our members previously designed and were featured in past Scripsits are now handled by each agency's graphics departments.

So this issue instead takes a bird's-eye view of the evolution of White House calligraphy and design through the experiences of WCG members Rick Paulus and Patricia Blair, retired chief calligraphers who were responsible for the modernization.

After detailing the old way of preparing art for print production, they recount how digital technology revolutionized both the appearance and the production of their artwork used for official and social entertaining at the White House.

Interviewing Pat and Rick was a walk down memory lane for me. My publications career began in 1972 at a printing firm where one man set display type from upper and lower cases while another produced columns of body text on the linotype machine (only men in those days), through the giant leap into desktop publishing and sophisticated graphics programs.

Younger generations may dismiss us as contemporaries of Johannes Gutenberg, but please give us credit for embracing modern technology in our work.

We hope you appreciate this issue's evolutionary timeline, the origin stories and developments that were necessary to have taken place to bring us to where we are today. And we commend you for spreading the lettering arts worldwide with videos and posts on social media.

Together, we are keeping calligraphy alive and relevant. ❖



Pat Blair lettered this menu for a 2016 State Dinner honoring Canada.

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Ink and Innovation:

How Calligraphy & Design Evolved at the White House

It takes more than elegant lettering to faithfully execute the office of White House calligrapher.

The position also requires expertise in graphic design, typography, watercolor painting and illustration, as well as mastery of White House forms of address, social etiquette and protocol. And while the desks of White House calligraphers contain tools remarkably similar to those their predecessors used over a century earlier, what has changed are the computers with sophisticated programs at each desk, the volume of work and the deadlines (from weeks for one project to sometimes just hours).



America in the 1990s was in the midst of a digital revolution, with widespread adoption of personal computers and growing internet access driving fundamental changes at home and work.

It was a fascinating transitional period that bridged traditional print methods and the digital world—and the White House calligraphers were learning to change the way they approached their printing and design needs to produce invitations, menus, programs and so much more.

In the following pages we'll hear from the chief calligraphers who brought White House printing equipment and design into the 21st century—Rick Paulus and Patricia Blair *(pictured at right)*—but first a brief look back at how this work was done in the pre-digital age.

In the mid-20th century, the calligraphers followed strict formats that limited their hands to broad-pen Italic and Roman and pointed-pen engrosser's script—so that every menu, for example, looked the same.

There was no ability to print in-house, so even small quantities were sent to local printers. Almost nothing was printed in color due to the cost (each color required a different pass through the print rollers and the equipment wiped clean between colors). Calligraphers handled projects such as seating charts *(page 5)* that are now done on computer.

Around 1980 advances in printing technology permitted the economical use of one or two spot colors plus screens of that color, thus adding visual variety without the added cost of a full-color (CMYK) job. Designers chose colors from a Pantone Matching System binder, and marked the PMS number on the artwork in "non-repro blue" pencil (the camera shooting the art for offset printing ignores that pale blue).

continued on p.7







1981: White House calligrapher and artist Bill Gemmell (p.4) took advantage of two-color printing to have his cowboy line drawing printed in 100% brown and the background in a screen of brown, giving the appearance of more than two colors.

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Saluting Past Official Scribes

Octavius L. Pruden was the first White House calligrapher. His path to the position he held for 30 years began during the Civil War, when his regiment camped outside Washington, DC in Alexandria, VA. His elegantly penned reports attracted the attention of headquarters, so when his regiment moved out, Pruden was assigned to the War Department. He was transferred to the White House in time to create an illuminated marriage certificate for President Grover Cleveland *(right)*. When Gen. Ulysses S. Grant became president in 1869, Pruden was appointed to the official staff and remained through seven administrations, penning all nominations and communications down to minor messages until his death in 1902.

Adrian B. Tolley was called to the White House in 1915 for a special job: to letter the names of guests onto wedding invitations for President Woodrow Wilson's marriage to Edith Bolling Galt. (A *Washington Post* article explained that the people who do this are called "calligra-fists.") A.B. Tolley stayed on at the White House as the chief of the Social Office and official White House calligrapher for a remarkable 45 years, until the end of Eisenhower's presidency in 1960.

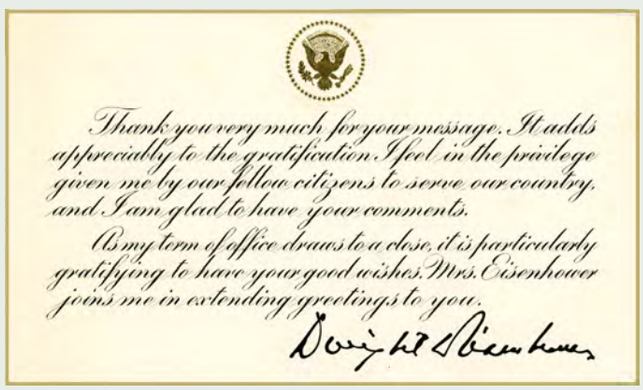
Adrian B. Tolley passed on his engrossing skills to his son William E. Tolley, who opened a studio in downtown Washington in 1946 to handle the demand from burgeoning government agencies. A relative of Bill Tolley, David Hobbs joined the studio in the 1970s and later owned the David A. Hobbs Inc. & Tolley Studios. For many decades the studio served as a training ground for Washington's professional calligraphers, including Rick Paulus.

Assisting Tolley was engrosser **C. Earl Leslie,** who came to Washington in 1933 after placing first in a national handwriting exam to serve as secretary to Interior Secretary Harold Ickes. Moved to the White House, Leslie penned during the presidencies of Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower. One notable project he created was the proclamation of Germany's surrender in World War II.

After Tolley and Leslie retired, **Sanford Fox** assumed the role as chief of the Social Office from 1961 until 1975. Fox first found his penmanship in demand back in 1943 when he was flying as a Navy purser on the airplane carrying President Franklin D. Roosevelt. One stop required place cards for a dinner for heads of state including Winston Churchill, for which he elegantly complied. Two decades later Fox lettered a proclamation awarding Churchill honorary U.S. citizenship—then designed the prayer card for President Kennedy's funeral.



1886: Octavius Pruden penned, illustrated and illluminated a marriage certificate for President Grover Cleveland, 49, and Frances Folsom, 21.


Thank you very much for your message. It adds appreciably to the gratification I feel in the privilege given me by our fellow citizens to serve our country, and I am glad to have your comments.

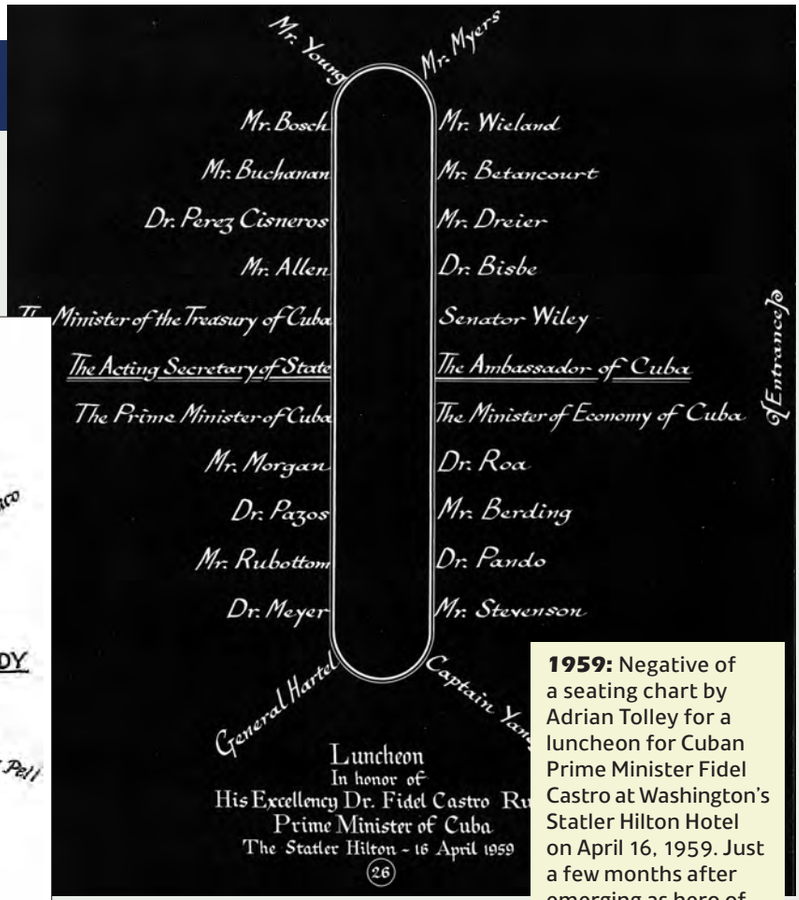
As my term of office draws to a close, it is particularly gratifying to have your good wishes. Mrs. Eisenhower joins me in extending greetings to you.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

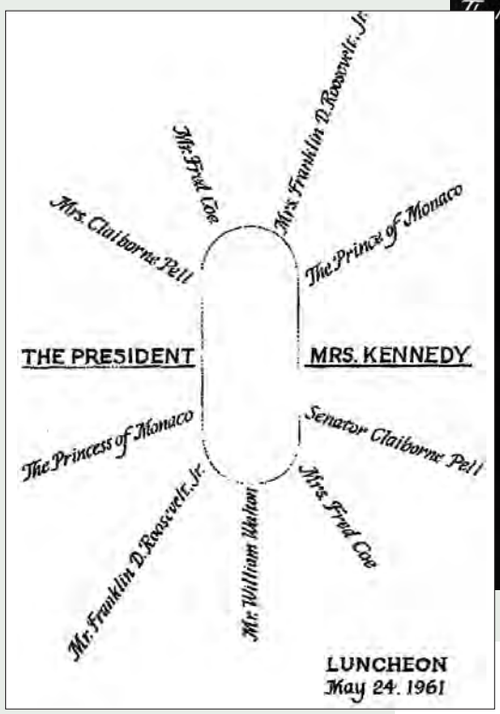
1960: Adrian Tolley lettered a thank you card from President Eisenhower in classic engrosser's script that typified the era. It was made into a plate from which the cards were engraved.

When Fox needed help, he turned to the CIA. There he found **Russell Armentrout**, who apprenticed under Fox and succeeded him as chief of the Social Office, then served as President Ford's calligrapher, 1974-1979. He brought in **William T. Gemmell,** who directed the renamed White House Office of Graphics and Calligraphy from 1977 until 1993. Although Bill limited calligraphic styles to a formatted Roman, Italic and engrosser's script, his illustrations brightened many projects requested by the Carter, Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations.

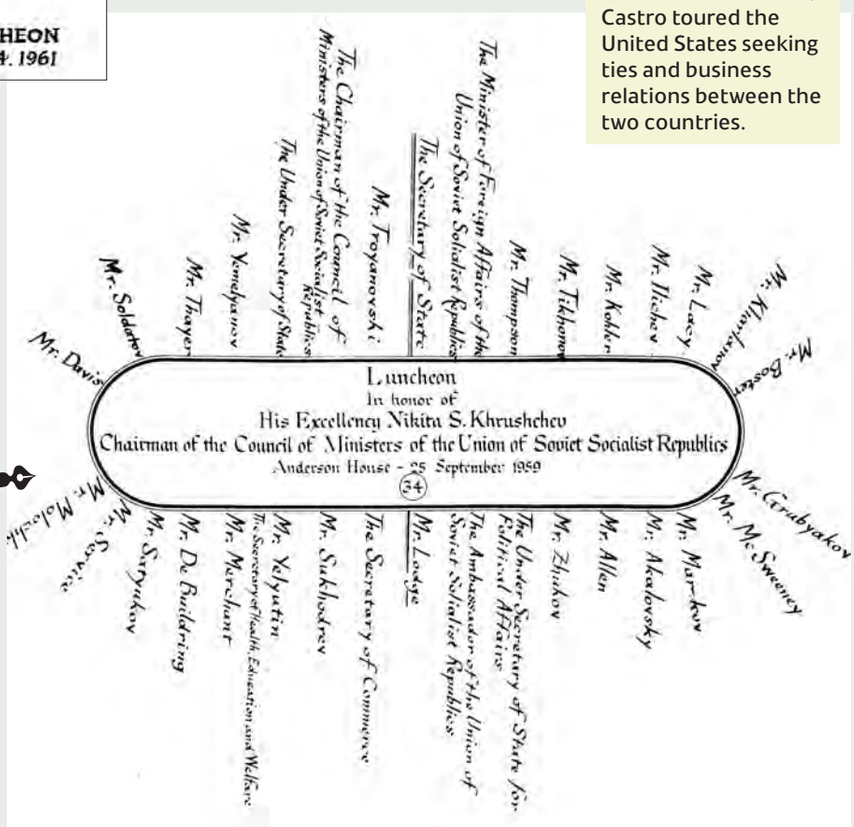
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1959: Negative of a seating chart by Adrian Tolley for a luncheon for Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro at Washington's Statler Hilton Hotel on April 16, 1959. Just a few months after emerging as hero of the revolution he led, Castro toured the United States seeking ties and business relations between the two countries.



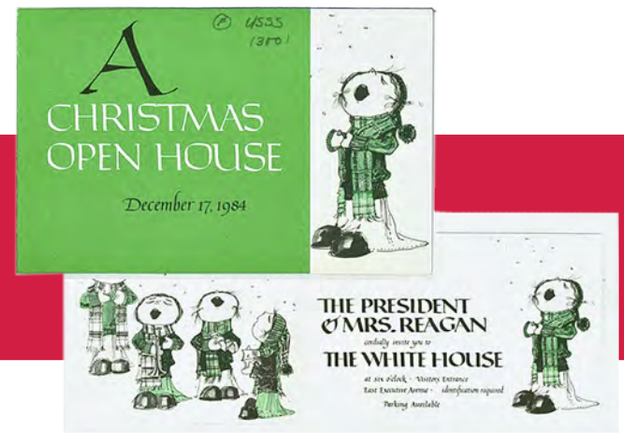
1961: As head of the White House Social Office, Sanford Fox created this seating chart for an official luncheon in honor of Monaco's Prince Rainier III and Princess Grace. Hosted by President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, the highly publicized event was a significant moment for Princess Grace, the former American film star Grace Kelly, in her role as an international royal figure.



1959: Shortly before his retirement after 45 years as White House Chief Calligrapher, Adrian Tolley created this seating chart. The landmark luncheon for Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was held at Anderson House, a stately mansion often used by the State Department for official diplomatic functions. Khrushchev's visit in September 1959, the first by a Soviet leader to the United States, took place during Cold War tensions to help foster communication between the two superpowers.

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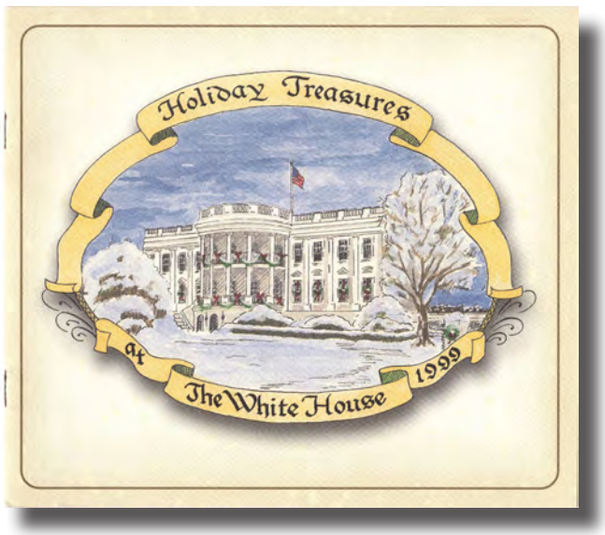
The Evolution of White House Design and Color



1984: Two-color printing.
This Reagan Open House invitation featured carolers by Bill Gemmell, "a talented illustrator who contributed a lot to the designs during his time," said Pat Blair. Designing in two colors was common in the 1980s because full-color printing was expensive. Pat explained: "Artwork had to be manually separated into individual color plates (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) through a photographic stripping process. This added significantly to the cost and turnaround time of professional color printing, especially for smaller runs," she said. Screening a color produced lighter tints for interest, "offering more design choices without incurring more expense."



1998: The 1998 Holiday Tour Book was the first big project the Calligraphy Office designed entirely on the computer. The artist was a White House Secret Service uniformed officer whose drawings the Social Secretary admired.



1999: The White House Holiday Tour Book was the second that the Calligraphy Office managed entirely in-house using digital-age methods and tools introduced by Chief Calligrapher Rick Paulus. Framed by Rick Muffler's calligraphy is a painting of the North Portico by Martha's Vineyard artist Ray Ellis.



2012: Pat Blair wrote "Joy to All" in dancing caps on the cover of the White House Holiday Tour Book that featured artwork by Washington students.

4-color printing:
Beginning around 2010, technological improvements and cost reductions in digital printing equipment allowed commercial printers to offer relatively economical, high-quality four-color printing. When the White House required large runs, the calligraphers took advantage of it to design lively Holiday Tour Books with colorful graphics.

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DINNER
Honoring
The Governors of the
States and Territories

Smoked Salmon with Pasta
Dill Sauce

Supreme of Chicken White House
Sautéed Leeks & Baby Carrots
Brown Rice

Mushroom & Fennel Salad
Cheddar Cheese

Apricot Soufflé
Liqueur Sauce

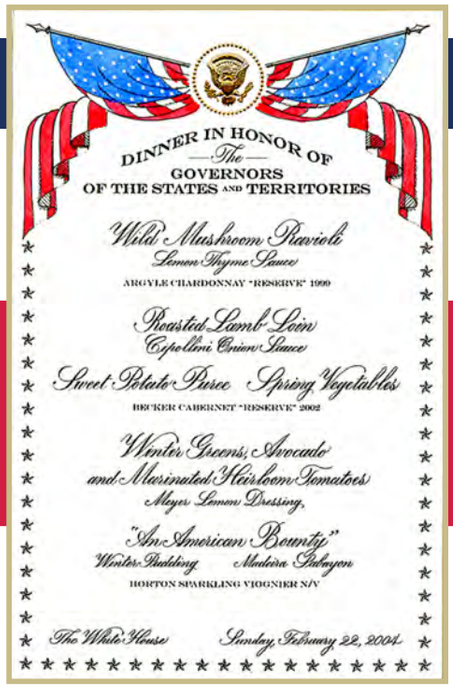
Stoney Hill Chardonnay 1982
Adelsheim Pinot Noir 1983
Charles Fournier Blanc de Blancs

THE WHITE HOUSE
Sunday, February 23, 1986

Annual Governors Dinner Menu

1986: The menu on the left was done by hand in traditional White House style. Because of the set format, for many years every menu looked identical, regardless of event.

2004: The traditional format was replaced by the creative freedom made possible by Adobe graphics programs and in-house color laser printing. Rick Paulus set the top line in a curve and paired his engrosser's script with the Trajan typeface.



DINNER IN HONOR OF
The
GOVERNORS
OF THE STATES AND TERRITORIES

Wild Mushroom Ravioli
Lemon Thyme Sauce
ARGYLE CHARDONNAY "RESERVE" 1999

Roasted Lamb Loin
Cipolini Onion Sauce

Sweet Potato Puree Spring Vegetables
BECKER CABERNET "RESERVE" 2002

Winter Greens, Avocado
and Marinated Heirloom Tomatoes
Meyer Lemon Dressing

"An American Bounty"
Winter Pudding Madeira Sabayon
HORTON SPARKLING VIOGNIER N/V

The White House Sunday, February 22, 2004

from page 3

Preparing the art for printing was tedious, requiring "mechanical paste-ups" assembled by hand *(p.9)*. The calligrapher designed the page by cutting out lines or words of lettering and any other art, assembling them on a paper or board, and pasting them down with rubber cement or heated wax. The "seams" of the pasted lines were "whited out" with white paint and a small brush to prevent their shadow from printing; the paint also corrected imperfections in the lettering.

From paste-up to desktop publishing

Hired as Chief Calligrapher in February 1998, Rick Paulus realized that the White House Office of Graphics and Calligraphy needed to adopt new methods of production. Aside from envelope writing, half of the work the office produced, including engraved invitations and dinner programs with menus, needed to be farmed out to engravers, the Government Printing Office and other suppliers.

"For this the office had only a black-and-white Xerox, a fax machine and lots of couriers," Rick said. "This method, in addition to being very time-consuming, limited creative options. It was always easier to go with a standard layout than to come up with something more ambitious."



The President and Mrs. Clinton
request the pleasure of your company
at
A Summer Picnic
for
Members of Congress
to be held at
The White House
on Thursday, June 11, 1998
at six o'clock
Casual attire

1998: To complement the 19th century engraving selected for the front of the 1998 Congressional Picnic invitation, Rick Muffler printed several copies of a vintage alphabet. With an X-acto knife he cut out each letter, applied rubber cement and carefully pasted them by hand to create the invitation.

Rick requested a computer be installed in the office, and that very day a PC appeared.

"I didn't know much, but I did know that the graphics world is very much Mac-based," he said. Three months later a Macintosh G-3 arrived, "with more processing power than we Luddites could ever handle."

In 1998 the page layout software of choice was Quark Xpress, which had just superseded PageMaker. So Rick took a two-day class to learn the basics of using Quark Xpress.

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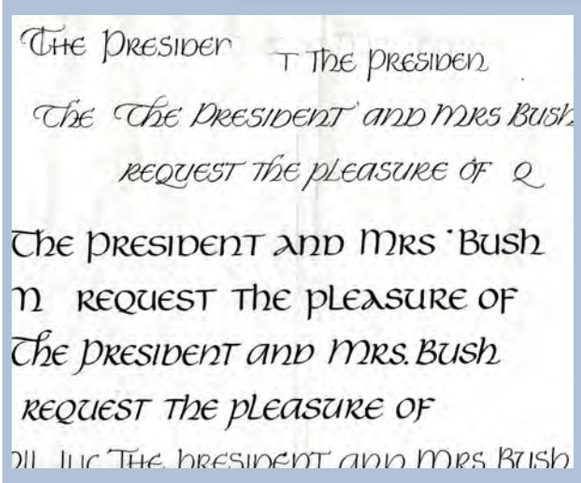
Reference Hands by Rick Paulus



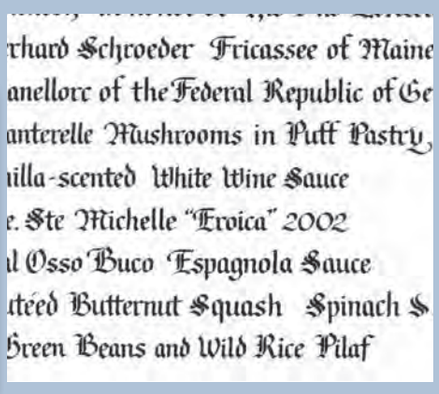
1998: Shortly after moving into his East Wing office, Rick Paulus received a PC to communicate securely, a Mac for graphic work and a color laser printer. Soon Rick Muffler and Debra Brown received Macs too. As they worked on projects, the trio learned to use Adobe's Creative Suite.

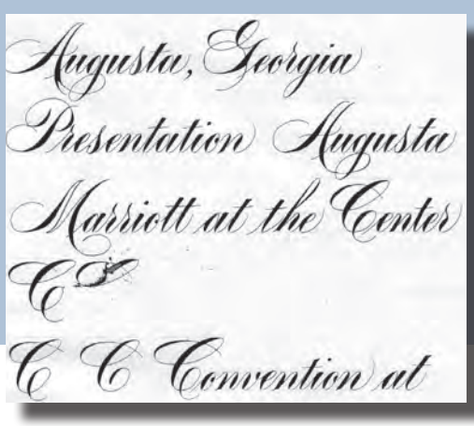


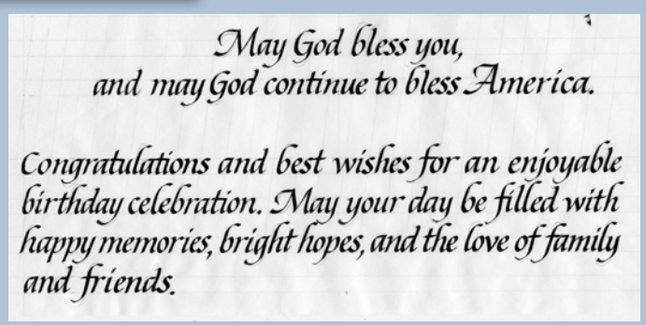
2000: Rick Paulus lettered this menu using the four nibs pictured. To correct a problem with the word "honoring," he pasted on a new one.



Rick Paulus posted calligraphy samples above his desk to experiment with variants, such as the Uncials at left, and also to produce the consistent, polished look expected at the White House. Bottom right shows the wording to be lettered in Italic on birthday cards.







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Evolution of Design: In the Beginning There Was Pasteup

Before going digital, this is how designers prepared art for reproduction

The calligrapher lettered on a sheet of Canson Pro-Marker, much larger than the final product for precision and sharpness when reduced. After lettering each line as well as corrections and alternate letters, the calligrapher cut out each piece, normally with an X-acto knife on a self-healing mat, then arranged them on a base sheet or board.

To affix the pieces, calligraphers used rubber cement, although heated wax was a popular option. Any excess rubber cement was removed by rubbing with a pickup (shown to the right of the knife). The blue pencil could be used for guidelines or notations, since pale blue does not reproduce when copied.

This original, called a mechanical, was then given to the printer with the exact degree of reduction needed. The scale-o-graph at top left was helpful to determine the correct proportion, although many designers used a circular proportional scale to calculate dimensions and percentage reduction. Alternatively, the designer could make a photocopy to the correct size for the printer.



The next year Adobe introduced InDesign, which quickly became the industry standard for desktop publishing.

"And I had just begun with Quark," Rick exclaimed. But there was no choice: using the software preferred by printing firms is essential.

Additional computers were ordered for his two colleagues, Rick Muffler and Debra Brown, along with Adobe's Creative Suite that provided InDesign for page layout, Photoshop for digitizing and cleaning up lettering, and Illustrator for creating vector graphics.

In short order all three calligraphers had to add computer graphics to their job description.

The Calligraphy Office was still manually pasting up some work, then scanning at a very high resolution. On the computer they could fix minor problems and make layout changes before sending it to the printer, an appreciated advance.

When it was time to produce the Holiday Tour Book given to visitors to the White House, "we had acquired the right equipment and had learned just enough to lay the book out and prepare it for press entirely in-house," Rick said.

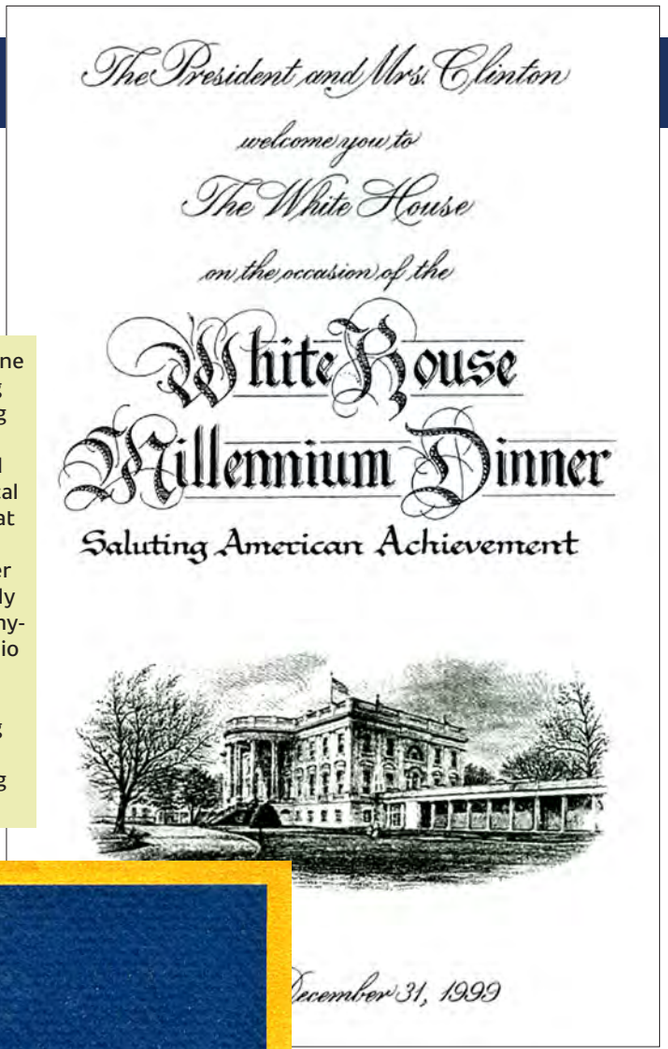
Although the operating costs of the Calligraphy Office skyrocketed during the transition—expenses in previous years consisted of ink and nibs for the most part—it soon became apparent that producing the work in-house was a significant cost saver.

"Besides," said Rick, "to not have digital capabilities today would be laughable."

"As we became more comfortable with the new technology, we began to realize we could contribute work to the White House website and other purposes," he added.

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Into the New Millennium



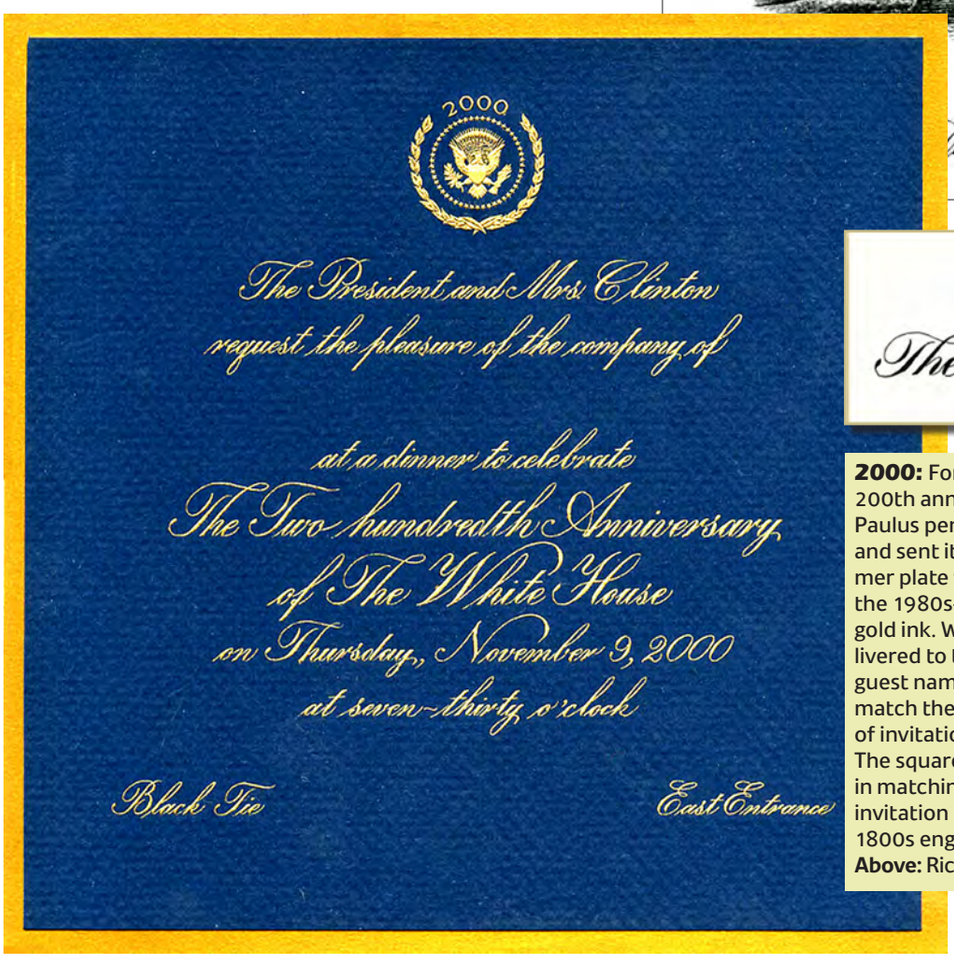
FYI

The **Y2K** scare was a widespread concern that computer systems worldwide would fail at the turn of the millennium because many older programs used a two-digit year format (99 instead of 1999) to save memory, which could cause them to misinterpret the year 2000 as 1900. Extensive investments in IT systems successfully updated software and hardware, preventing the feared widespread chaos (for example, some refused to fly, believing planes would fall from the sky at midnight). Happily, there was a relatively smooth transition into the year 2000.

1999/2000: Only one week after wrapping up the overwhelming Christmas events of 1999, Rick Paulus had to pull off the historical Millennium evening at the White House.

"I wanted the dinner program to look really special, so I locked myself in my home studio until it was finished," Rick said.

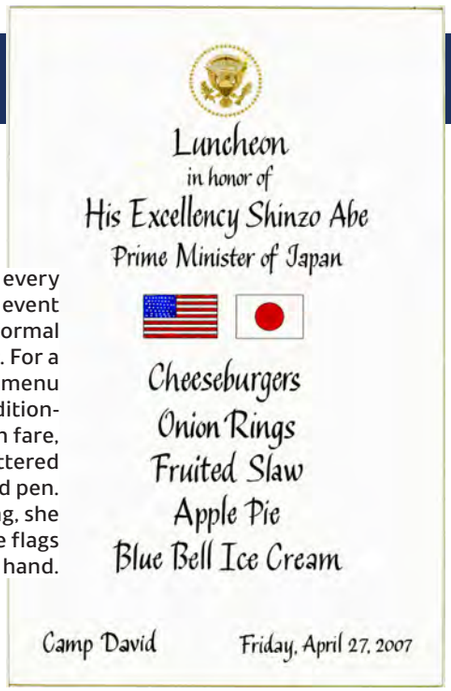
"It was indeed a big party, with the final guests not departing until 5 a.m."



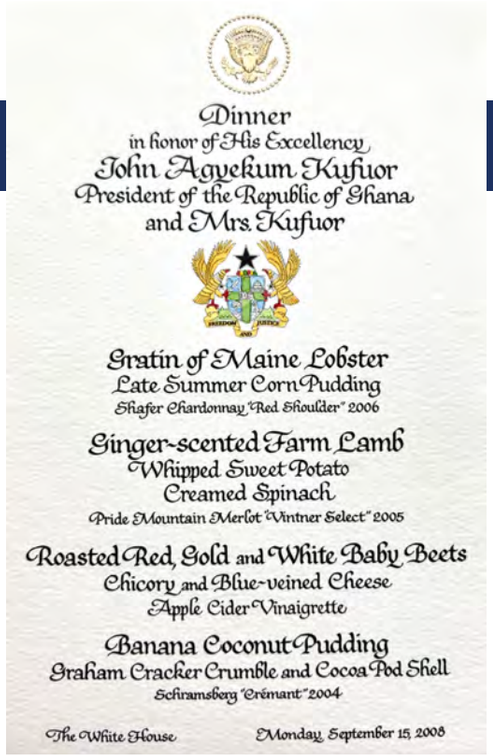


2000: For a formal dinner to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the White House, Rick Paulus penned the invitation, then scanned and sent it to an engraver who made a polymer plate from the art—a process begun in the 1980s—and engraved the lettering with gold ink. When the finished product was delivered to the White House, Rick inscribed the guest name on each invitation in gold ink to match the engraving, lending the appearance of invitations hand lettered for each guest. The square blue envelopes were addressed in matching gold ink before inserting the invitation and a translucent slip sheet with an 1800s engraved image of the White House. **Above:** Rick wrote place cards in copperplate.

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2007: Not every Presidential event required formal treatment. For a Camp David menu featuring traditional American fare, Pat Blair lettered with broad pen. After printing, she painted the flags on each by hand.



2008: State Dinner menus have a traditional format but need not be lettered in script. Here Debra Brown used a broad pen for a unique look. Because full-color printing was costly for heavier weight menu stock, the calligraphers hand-colored all the illustrations.

By 2005 they were incorporating their art into holiday decorations, garden tours, the Easter Egg Roll, "and so many more opportunities," Rick reported, "thanks to having computers in the office."

> *"To not have digital today would be laughable."*
>
> Rick Paulus

Not just pretty writing

When Pat Blair was hired as Chief Calligrapher in 2006, "no one asked about graphic design skills," she said. The job requirement was "good lettering skills"—no problem for an expert calligrapher who earned the IAMPETH title of Master Penman the year before.

But Pat knew she needed to acquire the digital skills of a modern-day graphic artist.

So she took an InDesign instruction book on vacation in anticipation of her first big project: designing the Holiday Tour Book, with color pages of art and text detailing the decorations in the White House public rooms.

The process in place during Pat's first year had an invited artist providing illustrations. That expanded in subsequent years to include artists and students from the Corcoran Gallery and the Duke Ellington School of Art invited as well to contribute holiday illustrations.

With text provided by the Social Office, the project took several months, and the computer was a welcome tool.

"Tens of thousands of books would be printed for the guests who visited and toured the White House during the holidays," said Pat, "and it was my responsibility to ensure that everything was correct before printing."

Just as Rick Paulus had done, she attended the press inspection, checking sheets as they rolled off the huge presses that all colors were accurate. If not, "the color could still be tweaked on the press by changing the amount of cyan, yellow, magenta or black in order to achieve the best representation of the artwork in the book."

The computer played a prominent role even in hand-lettered pieces. After calligraphers lettered with black ink on layout paper, they scanned it at very high resolution (1200 dpi). In Photoshop they converted the bitmap art to grayscale, centered each line correctly and touched up the calligraphy, Pat explained.

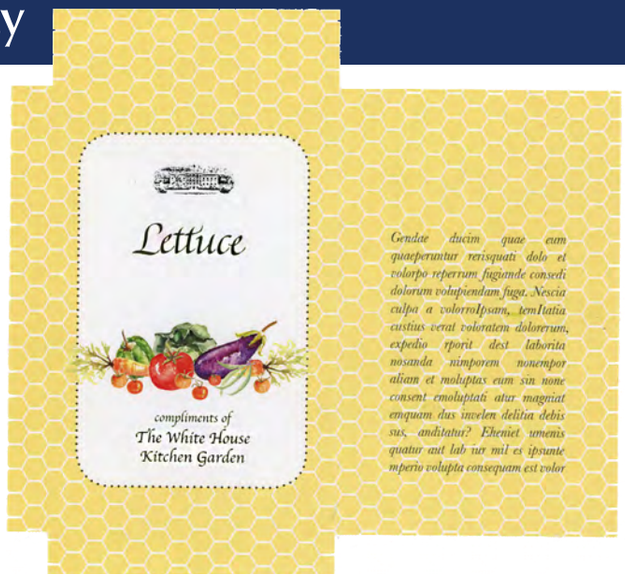
The final step was to convert the calligraphy back to bitmap for the best print result, before placing it into InDesign to adjust to final print size and add crop marks. This could then

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Design Explodes with Creativity



Pat Blair created wrappers for small bars of soap hand-crafted in the White House Kitchen to coordinate with the pale blue programs her team also designed.



Seed packet template for printing in-house. Once the design for each type of seed was finalized, the calligraphers printed, trimmed, folded and glued the edges, leaving the top open to receive seeds from the White House garden.

be saved as a PDF file for safe electronic transmission to the printer or engraver.

Digital printing in color

Just a few years into the new millennium, advances in digital color printing opened up many opportunities for creative design that a decade ago would have been out of reach.

A digital laser printer in the Graphics and Calligraphy Office allowed the artists to print many small projects that before had to be sent out, if done at all.

"Handling everything in-house allowed our creativity to explode," Pat said, "and it was easy to accommodate requests. Just about everything they could imagine, we were able to deliver."

One year the Social Office wanted to present a small bar of soap made in the White House Kitchen to each of the guests.

"We designed wrappers to coordinate with the tablescape, wrapped and banded the soap, added ribbon and placed them atop coordinated programs we had designed," Pat said.

Similarly, the calligraphy office was able to produce a variety of seed packets for Mrs. Obama, who was proud of her White House vegetable garden, to share with guests.

> *"Just about everything they could imagine, we were able to deliver.*
>
> Pat Blair

Recounted Pat, "I designed them using InDesign, included a cutting template, then printed, trimmed, scored, folded and glued the edges of each packet to hold seeds." The packets went into a large envelope that Pat illustrated in watercolors.

She even printed an extra-large version used for media events. "I painted illustrations of vegetables, wrote a heading in calligraphy, scanned all of it, and used InDesign to create the larger version, cut, trimmed and glued it right in the office," Pat said.

One project that was never printed in-house were invitations to a State Dinner because they required archival inks.

An engraved invitation from the White House is a treasured keepsake, and now options for color allowed for more variety. The text, done in calligraphy or a font, is set up in Photoshop

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2008: Design possibilities exploded after 2000, including the use of die cutting and color engraving. The invitation at left employed both techniques.



2011: The program for "The Motown Sound: In Performance at the White House" was produced to look like a 45 rpm record inside a die-cut sleeve.

or InDesign, and sent to the engraver in black. The artist specifies the Pantone color to be used.

In 2000 Rick Paulus designed a stunning invitation to the 200th anniversary of the White House *(p.10)* by selecting gold engraving on rich blue stock.



More design options

The Annual Congressional Picnic invitation showcased how far design options had come. "No longer needing to limit colors, we could now use our own artwork for the cover," said Pat *(2005 invitation directly above is an example)*.

Die-cutting printed material into shapes became an option for design as well, as software programs like InDesign and Illustrator made the job of creating the template easy.

In 2008 the calligraphers created a fun die-cut of Uncle Sam's hat for the invitation *(above)*. Pat first painted the hat in watercolor and lettered the heading in gouache. A separate outline created in Illustrator was used to create the shape of the die cut. After printing, the die-cutting machine trimmed the hats.

But they didn't stop there. A separate invitation card was engraved in red and inserted into a die-cut slit in the band of each hat.

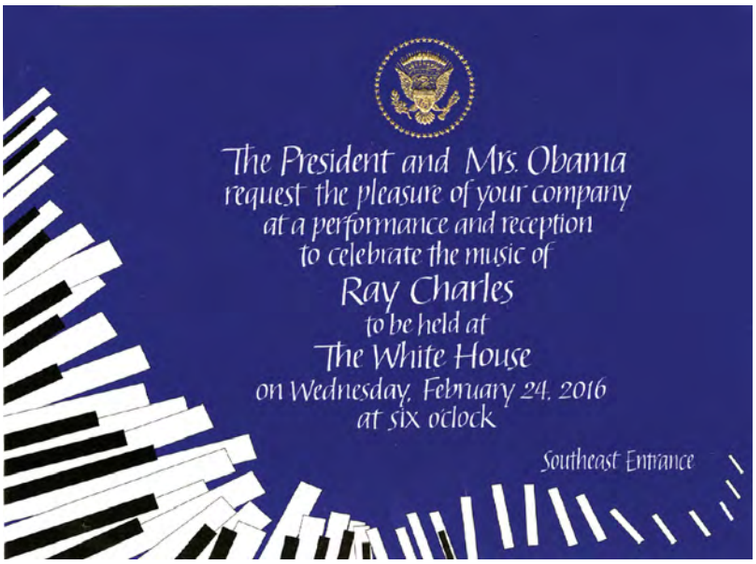
Programs score a hit

Even White House program designs were refashioned. Earlier designs consisted of an off-white textured cover with gold engraved POTUS seal. The gold seal would always be included, but many more options for design were implemented, including printing in color, using a printed flyleaf and die cutting.

In 2011 staff calligrapher Rick Muffler designed the souvenir program for "The Motown Sound:

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Evolution of Design: Lively Letters



2016: Ray Charles invitation combined piano keys delightfully designed in Illustrator by Becky Larimer with italic hand lettering by Debra Brown, who chose a fixed slant to play against the piano keys' various angles.

2016: Luncheon menu below was also lettered by Debra Brown.





2016: Menu for the State Dinner in honor of the Nordic nations was lettered by Pat Blair.

In Performance at the White House" to look like a 45 rpm record inside a die-cut sleeve *(page 13)*. Rick produced the design in Illustrator, indicating the size of the paper and placement of the cut-out center circle and notch in the top.

A graphic image of the "record" was digitally printed on the first page so it showed through the cut circle, just as a record in its sleeve would be seen. As always, the gold seal was engraved.

"Being able to use color in so many ways made planning for a large event like a State Dinner all the more exciting," Pat said *(see pages 16-19)*.

Digital combined with calligraphy

The digital revolution has found a permanent place in the Calligraphy Office, and these innovations have continued to allow for many creative projects today and in the future. Hand lettering is still at the forefront, but now the

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Chief Calligrapher Pat Blair (standing right) with staff calligraphers Debra Brown (seated) and Becky Larimer.

2017: At the end of the Obama presidency, the administration planned a breakfast and requested chalk board lettering, which was "all the rage," Pat recalled. "We were excited to try our hand with lettering using white markers so the chalk wouldn't rub off on clothing." The calligraphers first laid out the designs on paper, then enlarged them onto chalk boards using a grid system.

ability to streamline the process of preparing for print has been a boon to a busy office.

While invitations to important events such as State Dinners continue to be mailed in hand-addressed envelopes, beginning around 2018 most invitations are being sent electronically. But event guests receive the prized hand-lettered, custom-designed invitations as they depart.

"Our hope is that adding creative touches to the many events at the White House has brought pleasure to all who visit," Pat said, "making their experience at this special place even more meaningful."

Added Rick Paulus, "I think just the fact that our work is set in front of heads of state all over the world is amazing. And we're proud to showcase the talent and the art that's so much a part of the United States."

Since 1998 every calligrapher working at the White House, for the Vice President and at the U.S. Department of State have been members of the Washington Calligraphers Guild:

Rick Paulus was serving as the State Department Office of Protocol engrosser when he was hired as White House Chief Calligrapher in 1998. He served the Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush administrations before leaving in 2006.

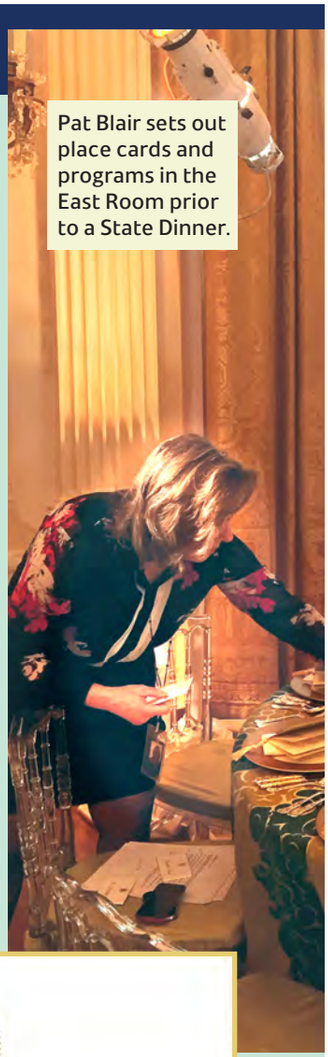
(After Rick left State, ***Jennifer Nicholson*** was hired in July 1998 and served until February 2021 as the Calligrapher and Senior Protocol Officer for the Office of the Chief of Protocol serving the Secretary of State. ***Samantha Singson*** was hired at State in June 2021.)

Named IAMPETH Master Penman in 2005, ***Patricia A. Blair*** was hired in February 2006 as White House Chief Calligrapher after lettering on a contract basis for the Vice President for five years and serving as WCG President for two. Helping Pat with the endless demands for social and official entertaining during the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama were ***Debra Brown*** and ***Rick Muffler,*** who retired after 30 years and was replaced by ***Becky Larimer*** in 2014. Pat Blair retired in August 2018.

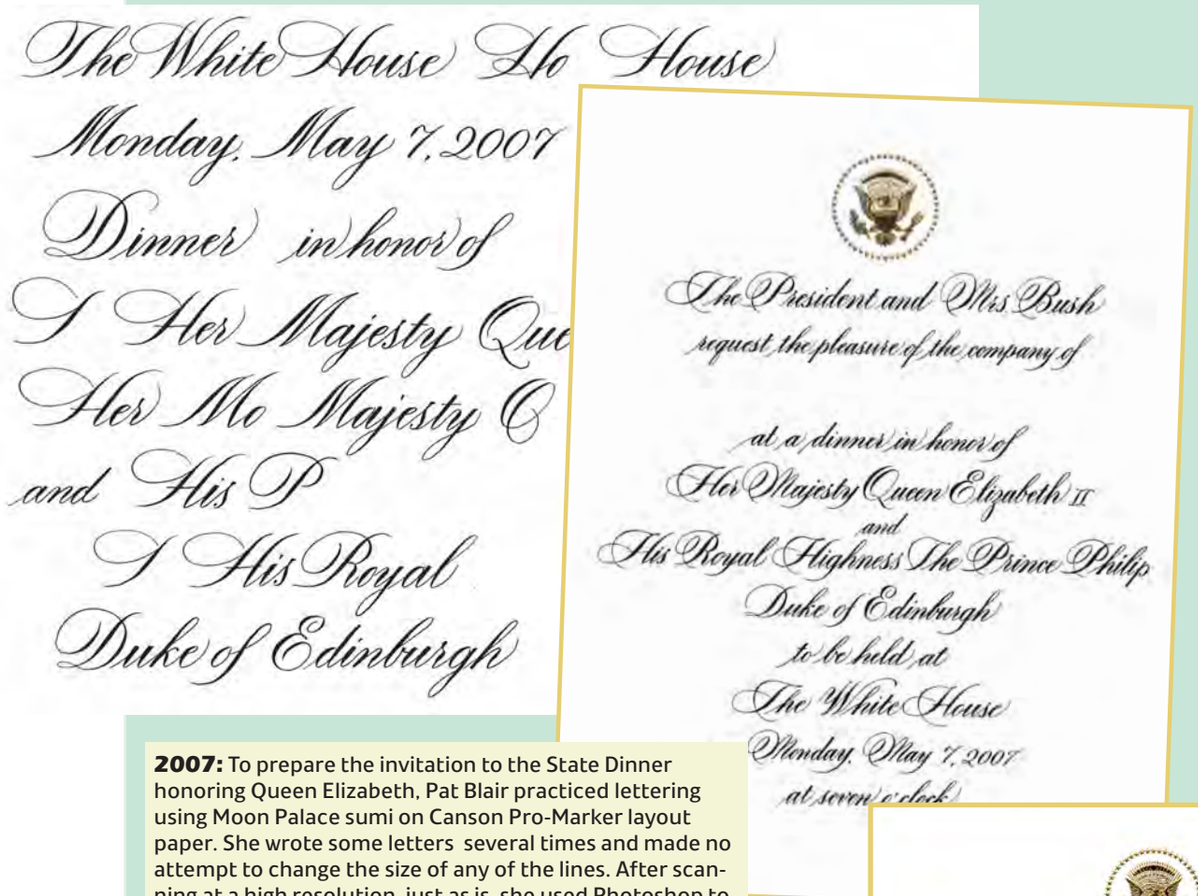
Lee Ann Clark followed Pat from the Vice President to the White House as Chief Calligrapher, serving the Trump and Biden administrations. But 2025 construction of a ballroom in the East Wing meant packing up the Graphics and Calligraphy Office until a new studio is constructed, all while fulfilling calligraphic and production demands of the second Trump presidency.

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State Dinners: All Hands on Deck



Pat Blair sets out place cards and programs in the East Room prior to a State Dinner.



2007: To prepare the invitation to the State Dinner honoring Queen Elizabeth, Pat Blair practiced lettering using Moon Palace sumi on Canson Pro-Marker layout paper. She wrote some letters several times and made no attempt to change the size of any of the lines. After scanning at a high resolution, just as is, she used Photoshop to adjust sizes, make corrections and swap letters for better ones. She then opened InDesign to create the layout for transmission to the engraving firm.

When the invitations, engraved in black on heavy 6-ply stock finished with a gold beveled edge, were delivered to the White House, Pat lettered the name of each recipient in a generous copperplate hand to match the original lettering—reflecting a past custom of writing out each invitation by hand. The invitation envelopes for all White House dinners and receptions are addressed by hand.

White House menu stock is 100% cotton three-ply, pre-printed with a gold beveled edge and pre-engraved with the Coat of Arms of the President of the United States.

Before Pat Blair's menu layout—lettered in a compressed round-hand—went to the printer, she added a faint outline of the rose motif based on the planned centerpieces. When the menus were delivered, Pat painted each rose with McCaffrey's Ivory watercolor with a bit of Van Dyke brown gouache. To the leaves she used moss green watercolor followed by touches of gold gouache.

At the end of formal dinners at the White House, guests would often write their name on their menu card and pass it around for their tablemates to sign—a memento of a very special night.



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Pat Blair had been White House Chief Calligrapher for just a year when the Social Secretary shared the news that Queen Elizabeth was being honored with a State Dinner in May 2007.

"Many 'pinch me' moments were experienced as we discussed the decor and planned for the calligraphy," Pat recounted. She presented several calligraphic hands to the First Lady, who selected Pat's elegant copperplate script for both the invitation and the menu.

Customs and traditions are taken into account when a State Dinner is being planned, and for the Queen, a white Tudor Rose was chosen as each table's floral centerpiece.

"It was fitting to include this rose on the menu," said Pat, "and we wanted to hand paint each one."

Because the menu stock was a hefty 350gsm weight, it could not be printed on the office laser printer. Before sending it to an offset printer, Pat added a pale outline of the rose design.

"When we received it back, we painted each rose a creamy white, each leaf an earthy green, and touches of gold added for some sparkle," she said. "It made for a beautiful place setting!"

Staff calligrapher Debra Brown lettered the luncheon menu at left, hand painting flags from both the United States and Great Britain on each. But her work was not done.

"Two days before the event, we were told there would be a secondary dinner for staff," said Pat, so Debra took on more lettering and flag painting.

"For the Queen or any other event, it's the same process. We can't make mistakes—everything must be perfect."

Luncheon
in honor of
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
and
His Royal Highness The Prince Philip
Duke of Edinburgh

Wild Asparagus Veloute
Chive Oil
Heirloom Tomato Fondue

Seared Baby Sea Bass
Ramp Vermouth Sauce
Lemony Risotto

Ruby Red Grapefruit Fillets
Jicama and Florida Avocados
Citrus Dressing

"Spring Garden"
Raspberry Meringue · Dark Chocolate
Mint Granita

DuMOL CHARDONNAY "ISOBEL" 2004

THE WHITE HOUSE MONDAY, MAY 7, 2007



Pat Blair penned place cards for the State Dinner honoring Queen Elizabeth in a hand to match the invitation, just as she personalized each invitation with the guest's name in the same hand.

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State Dinners: Continuing the Tradition



2018: Pat Blair lettered the invitation to President Trump's first State Dinner shortly before she retired.



2018: For the annual Governors' Dinner hosted for the first time by the Trumps, Pat Blair designed the program's inside flyleaf with all 50 State Flowers. The flowers were full-color images that she transformed to grayscale in Photoshop and colored in sage green. Pat lettered the menu in a compressed copperplate.

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2015: For the State Dinner honoring Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Pat Blair designed a program folder with a fuchsia cover and a flyleaf bursting with peonies. Inside was the menu featuring Japanese-American fusion cuisine that Pat lettered in a variation of copperplate, and information about the after-dinner entertainment.



Every State Dinner requires months of meticulous planning to honor a visiting head of state, and the White House calligraphers are involved in many aspects of the event. From the program they produce for the Arrival Ceremony, attended by up to 5,000 the morning of the State Dinner, to the program for the after-dinner entertainment, calligraphers contribute their talent to assure the event's success.

Once the First Lady and Social Secretary select a theme for the décor and choose the tablecloths, flowers, china and room ornamentation, Pat and her staff design pieces that complement them. These include: the hand-lettered invitation with each guest's name added by hand; a hand-addressed envelope; the items positioned at each place setting, such as a place card and either a menu or a larger program containing the menu and a description of the entertainment.

They also letter an escort envelope for each guest that will contain the assigned table number. (For smaller events, the calligraphers letter a seating board rather than individual place cards.)

The day of the State Dinner is both long and busy. The calligraphers finish up last-minute lettering (often having received a final guest list just the day before), organize the place cards in the proper order and insert the correct table number into each escort envelope.

"When we get the okay that the tables are ready for us, we go into the State Dining Room and set out each place card and the program or menu," said Pat, adding, "When the guests begin arriving, we staff a table to hand out escort envelopes.

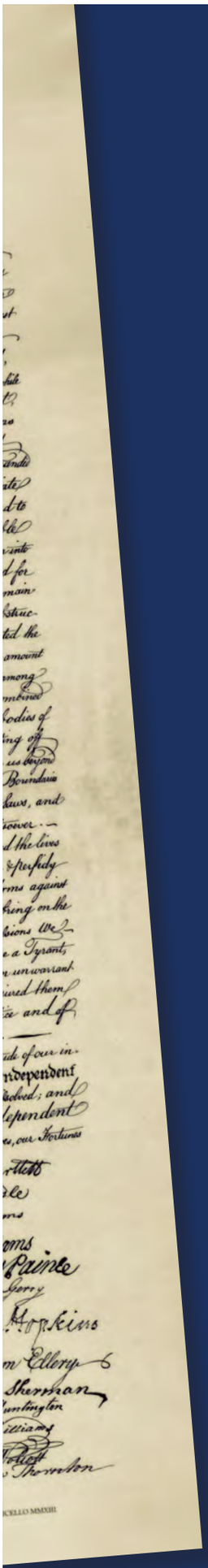
"If there is a case where a name is misspelled, or maybe we have a gentleman as a 'Mr.' and he's a 'Dr.', we will find out when the guest comes to the White House gate," Pat explained. "We quickly redo the place card and escort envelope with the goal that, by the time the guest arrives at our escort table, everything is correct.

"White House calligraphers work hard," Pat added. "Forty-hour weeks are practically nonexistent."

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Third-generation calligrapher Holly Monroe, commissioned to re-create the lettering and signatures on the three Founding Documents of the United States, displays her penwork on the Declaration of Independence, shown here reproduced onto vellum parchment.



Rewriting History:

Calligrapher Reproduces Our Founding Documents

A unique inquiry came to calligrapher

Holly V. Monroe:

Could she letter this nation's Founding Documents in the same sizes and hands as the originals, with signatures?

"I'm always up for a challenge," said Holly, who accepted what would become a multiyear project of precisely imitating the lettering of three 18th century engrossers:

Timothy Matlack *The Declaration of Independence, 1776;*
Jacob Shallus *The Constitution of the United States, 1787;*
and **William Lambert** *The Bill of Rights, 1791.*

The commission came from Ryan Thelen, a Cincinnati high school history teacher who wanted his students and others to experience the three documents, known collectively as the Charters of Freedom, in their original sizes on genuine calfskin.

Rewriting History

RYAN THELEN is passionate about the foundational documents of American democracy.

"They introduced the idea of the rule of law, guiding principles crucial for maintaining a just and free society," he tells his 10th grade Advanced Placement history students at Cincinnati's Walnut Hills High School.

"I wanted to purchase a full-size parchment reproduction of the Declaration of Independence for use in my classroom," said Ryan. But he was frustrated by the "crinkly paper made to look like parchment; or rather, how people think it should look."

Calling it "one of the strangest overlooked gaps in American archival history," Ryan began what turned out to be a 10-year project "to make full-size calfskin reproductions of the Founding Documents that would look like the originals did when they were new.

"What I didn't know is that the journey to reach my goal would be so difficult."

One exception: finding a scribe to channel the 18th century engrossers of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. That turned out to be easy.

Google 'Calligrapher'

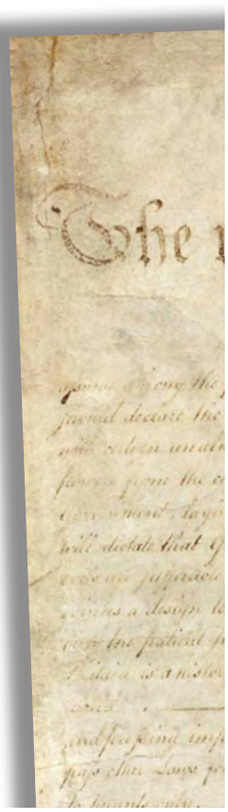
"I just searched online for calligraphers," Ryan said. When he saw Holly Monroe's website, "I was so impressed by the breadth of her work" that he wanted to meet immediately in her studio, at that time also in Cincinnati.

"Not only is Holly serious about her craft, she has done it for a living since 1980 and wasn't intimidated by the large sizes of the Founding Documents," recalled Ryan, adding, "It's in her blood." Holly's grandfather took correspondence courses with Earl Lupfer at the Zanerian College of Penmanship and her father studied there. Both were accomplished members of IAMPETH—as is Holly, who also belongs to the Washington Calligraphers Guild.

"I felt honored to do this project, even though it was tedious at times," acknowledged Holly. "But it was especially meaningful because we are approaching the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation" on July 4, 2026.

Filling in the blanks

Ryan understood that reproducing the faded Declaration of Independence would be especially difficult for the lettering artist due to the poor condition of the original.



"Iron gall ink faded so much that many words are illegible today," he said. Used for centuries to create dark, indelible ink, it was made from the chemical reaction between iron scraps and tannins from oak galls (growths on oak trees caused by gall wasps depositing eggs). But the tannic acid contributes to the deterioration of animal skins over time.

"The Declaration suffered damage during the many years it was moved by horseback or displayed in full sun," added Ryan, "subjecting the parchment

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Working on a table lit from below, Holly Monroe placed tracing vellum atop a high-contrast image of the Declaration of Independence in order to replicate the 1776 lettering of engrosser Timothy Matlack.

The Declaration as it appears at the National Archives, the ink faded to such a degree that its words are barely legible—words that revolutionized the way Americans view the role of government and the rights of individuals.

Rewriting History

> The original Founding Documents are on permanent display for public viewing under low light in the **Charters of Freedom Rotunda** of the National Archives Building. Housed in special encasements filled with inert gas to prevent deterioration, the cases are lowered into a vault each night for safekeeping.

to extremes of heat and humidity."

To help Holly reconstruct missing text, Ryan obtained 35mm transparencies of the original documents from the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. He had these images printed in full size with increased contrast.

Engrossers' hands

Now the lettering could begin. Holly Monroe covered each section of the improved image with Clearprint Drafting Vellum. Using oblique pen holders with Hunt 22 or 56 and Gillott 101 or 303 nibs dipped in Moon Palace sumi ink, she set about tracing Thomas Jefferson's compelling words as rendered by their original engrosser, Timothy Matlack *(p.26)*.

"I'm very patriotic, so when I lettered the stirring words I've known since childhood, I felt truly inspired," Holly acknowledged.

The veteran calligrapher enjoyed the creative challenge posed by each Founding Document.

"The three engrossers had different letterforms so I had to learn to adapt to their hands," said Holly, who reported that she could see how their English roundhands were moving toward copperplate. "But replicating dozens of signatures was the most difficult part."

By learning the different hands, "I developed a sincere appreciation for the countless clerks called upon over the centuries to copy legislative and legal documents."

For more than a century Congress employed engrossers to write out bills prior to submission. Typewriters and typesetters gradually replaced scribes beginning in the 1890s. Congress still uses the word *engross* to mean "prepare in official form."

Digital for details

Once Holly had lettered all three Founding Documents, Ryan located a Cincinnati firm to have her oversized work digitized. The documents were scanned at 600 dpi and the files sent back to the calligrapher.

Viewing her letters enlarged with the aid of a Wacom Cintiq 24HD monitor, Holly used its pressure-sensitive pen and "adjusted any letter that didn't match the original," she said.

"I put in more than 200 hours of calligraphy and digital adjustments to bring the historical scripts 'up to snuff,'" Holly noted. "Now these precious documents look like new."

"It was a dance of traditional craftsmanship with digital technology," agreed Ryan.

But even before Holly set pen to paper,

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In a Revolutionary War soldier's uniform, Ryan Thelen unfurls Holly Monroe's replica of the Declaration of Independence that he has reproduced on calfskin. The history teacher sells them exclusively through Thomas Jefferson's Monticello: monticelloshop.org/collections/wall-decor/products/parchment-declaration

On his website Patrigraphica.com, Ryan offers the four-page U.S. Constitution and the one-page Bill of Rights, reproduced in original sizes on calfskin.

Also on Patrigraphica.com, Ryan holds periodic drawings for high school social studies teachers to receive a Declaration of Independence on calfskin.

Holly Monroe sells letterpress versions on fine art paper of the Declaration and the Bill of Rights: shop.hollymonroe.com/collections/prints/patriotic



Ryan had invested thousands of dollars and much vacation time to research the history and writing behind the documents, as well as to locate large, unblemished calfskins and a method to print on them.

As calligraphers know, parchment is very expensive. And while it's great for calligraphy, "it's terrible for printing," the veteran educator learned. "And the larger the parchment, the more difficult it becomes."

Hunting for calfskins

The project took him to London twice to meet with printers to the monarchy and to research sources of calfskin and methods to print on them. In addition to printing presses, he tried intaglio printing, silk screening, even inkjet.

"The experimentation mounted up," Ryan recalled. "These large skins are costly, so every skin that was messed up in printing or in shipping … well, you can imagine how much it set me back. When I began this project in 2009, if I had known then the degree of difficulty and expense involved, I'm not certain I would have started."

Then Holly directed Ryan to Jesse Meyer, who continues his family's tannery trade that dates back to 1550 in Germany. Pergamena Parchment in New York state was able to supplement Ryan's supply of large, unblemished skins from William Cowley Parchment of Great Britain.

Finally the educator found a way for Holly's lettering to be transferred onto calfskin. Now his company, Patrigraphica, is the only source for full-size Founding Documents on genuine parchment like the originals.

Noted Ryan, "I'm gratified the United States Charters of Freedom can now be displayed in classrooms, legal and Congressional offices, and wherever the significance of these founding principles can be appreciated."

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Writing History: Declaration of Independence

Timothy Matlack:
Engrosser of the Declaration of Independence, 1776

Arguably the most famous document in U.S. history, the Declaration of Independence expresses the ideals on which the new nation was founded. Although drafted for the most part by Thomas Jefferson in June 1776, the scribe who put quill to parchment to produce the historic document was a man named Timothy Matlack.



Portion of 1790 portrait of Timothy Matlack by Charles Willson Peale.

A former shop owner and brewer who had spent time in debtors' prison, he was by then a 40-year-old clerk at the Pennsylvania State House where the Continental Congress was meeting.

On July 4, 1776, Congress approved the Declaration and ordered that it be "fairly engrossed on parchment … and be signed by every member of Congress." That day its text also had its first public reading outside the State House (now Independence Hall).

According to one eyewitness, the speaker was none other than clerk Timothy Matlack. Therefore, he may have voiced the Declaration before even starting to engross it.

After receiving final instructions on July 19, Matlack selected the best available skin large enough to accommodate the document's wording, signatures, margins and interlinear spacing.

He penned a visually distinctive title with large letters and flourishes: "The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America."

Under this title, the lines of text that Matlack wrote in English roundhand script take up almost the entire width of the parchment (now reduced to 29.5 inches wide x 24 inches high).

The scribe finished his work by August 2, when presiding officer John Hancock was the first to sign the Declaration—his large signature a deliberate choice, possibly to highlight his position and the significance of his action. (If caught by the British,



Parchment is a raw animal skin that has had the hair and flesh removed, then stretched and dried under tension. At right, a William Cowley parchment maker demonstrates how skins are mounted and stretched for days before being cut to size. Scribes must further prepare vellum to receive ink and illumination.

View the J. Paul Getty Museum's video about the centuries-old process of turning animal skins into a bound manuscript: www.tinyurl.com/skin2parchment

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Hancock and other signers could have been hanged for treason.)

Matlack was also the penman for George Washington's commission as commanding general of the Continental Army. Despite the scribe's Quaker background, he then joined Washington in going to war.

Like the future president, Timothy Matlack crossed the icy Delaware River in December 1776—serving as colonel of a rifle battalion at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton. His wartime activities got him disowned by the Society of Friends.

After the war, Matlack pursued a long and colorful political career. He was a delegate to the Second Continental Congress in 1780 and also to the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

By the time he died in 1829 at age 93, there had been seven U.S. presidents of the nation that Matlack's pen declared independent from Great Britain in 1776.

The Declaration of Independence as it was lettered by Holly Monroe using steel nibs in oblique pen holders. These pointed pens best replicate the pressure-sensitive quill pens made from goose or swan feathers that were used by the scribe and the signers.

Note the word "only" that scribes Matlack (and Monroe) added with a caret symbol, one of just two words omitted and corrected by the 18th-century engrosser.

View a short clip from a PBS/NOVA documentary showing Brody Neuenschwander using a quill pen to sign "John Hancock": www.tinyurl.com/Brody-Hancock

Writing History: United States Constitution

Jacob Shallus:
Engrosser of the Constitution of the United States, 1787

Written in 1787, ratified in 1788, and the law of the land since 1789, the United States Constitution is the world's longest surviving written charter of government. Its first three words—"**We the People**"—affirm that the government of the United States would exist to serve its citizens.

The scribe who engrossed the Constitution lettered those three words taller than the others. Yet for 150 years his identity was a mystery. In advance of the Constitution's sesquicentennial celebration in 1937, research finally identified **Jacob Shallus** as the scribe of the historic document.

His place in history was cemented during a very busy weekend in September 1787 in what is now Independence Hall in Philadelphia. As the Constitution was nearing its final draft, the 37-year-old son of a German immigrant was serving as assistant clerk for the Pennsylvania General Assembly, meeting one floor above.

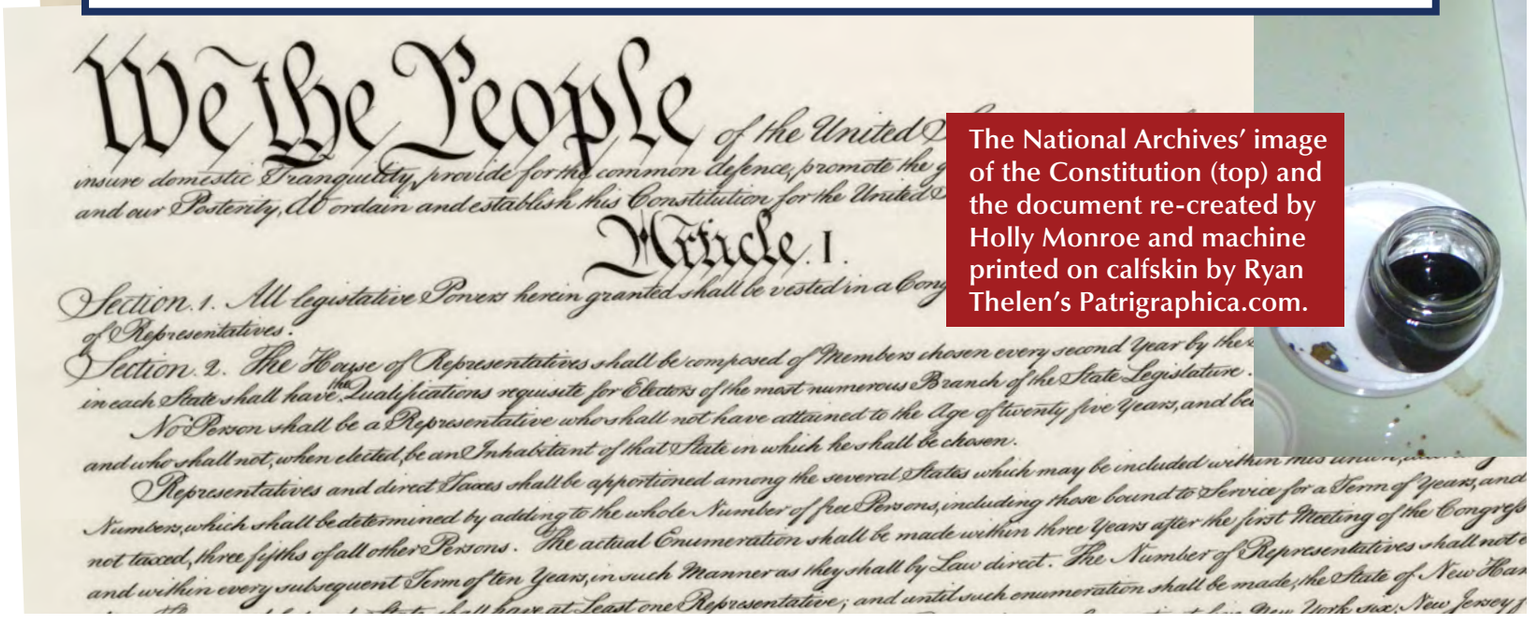
Then on Saturday evening delegates to the Constitutional Convention voted unanimously to accept the latest draft of the Constitution.

As George Washington wrote in his diary, the convention "adjourned till Monday [September 17, 1787] that the Constitution which it was proposed to offer to the People might be engrossed."

It turns out that an accomplished penman was in the building. Jacob Shallus agreed to accept a payment of $30 to engross some 4,400 words on four large skins measuring about 24"w x 29"h. A biographer estimated that, leaving a minimum amount of time for sleeping and eating, Shallus would have lettered at least 160 words per hour.

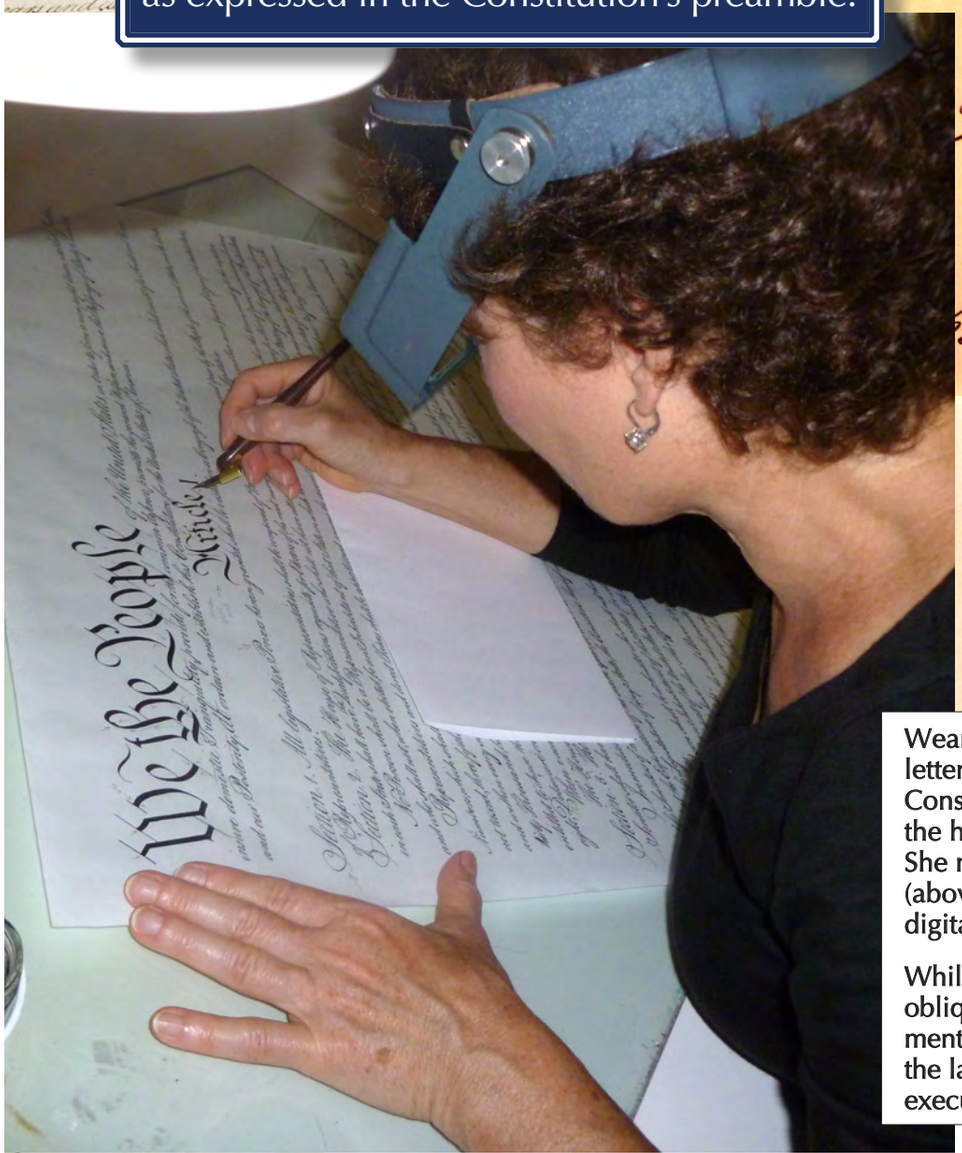
He made the Monday morning deadline yet his hand still could not rest. He lettered a short *errata* and added a conclusion penned by Benjamin Franklin. Later that historic day, Constitutional Convention President George Washington was the first to sign, followed by each state delegation.

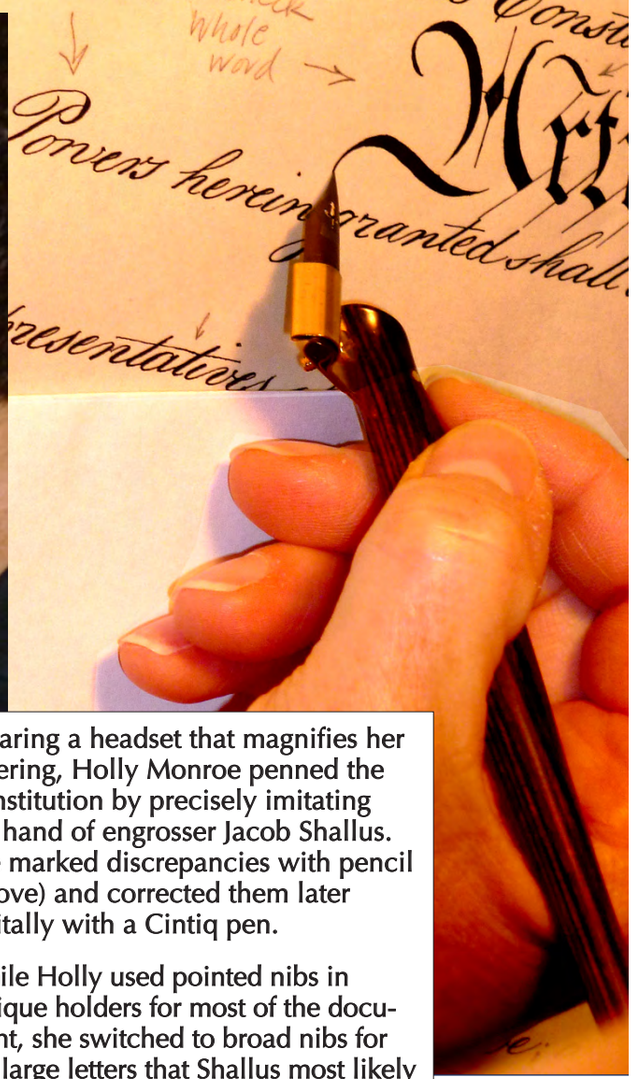
The document they signed, which Jacob Shallus engrossed, was the culmination of three hot summer months of equally heated debate that forged a completely new system of government and established a more unified nation.



The National Archives' image of the Constitution (top) and the document re-created by Holly Monroe and machine printed on calfskin by Ryan Thelen's Patrigraphica.com.

The Founding Documents established the nation's principles that have inspired Americans for nearly 250 years to pursue *a more perfect Union,* as expressed in the Constitution's preamble.





Wearing a headset that magnifies her lettering, Holly Monroe penned the Constitution by precisely imitating the hand of engrosser Jacob Shallus. She marked discrepancies with pencil (above) and corrected them later digitally with a Cintiq pen.

While Holly used pointed nibs in oblique holders for most of the document, she switched to broad nibs for the large letters that Shallus most likely executed with a blunt-cut goose quill.

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Writing History: The Bill of Rights

William Lambert:

Engrosser of the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights, 1789

A passionate advocate for a Bill of Rights to the Constitution that would protect individual liberties, James Madison spent the summer of 1789 reconciling the many proposals into 17 amendments.

The First Congress, meeting in Federal Hall in New York City, passed 12 of these on September 25, 1789. But before they could be sent to the states for ratification, the draft document required the services of two engrossers: William Lambert, clerk for the House of Representatives; and Benjamin Bankson, clerk for the Senate.

Over three days the scribes engrossed 14 parchments, each about 28"w x 30"h.

President Washington sent 13 to the states for ratification, and the "file copy" remained in New York City for signing on September 28.

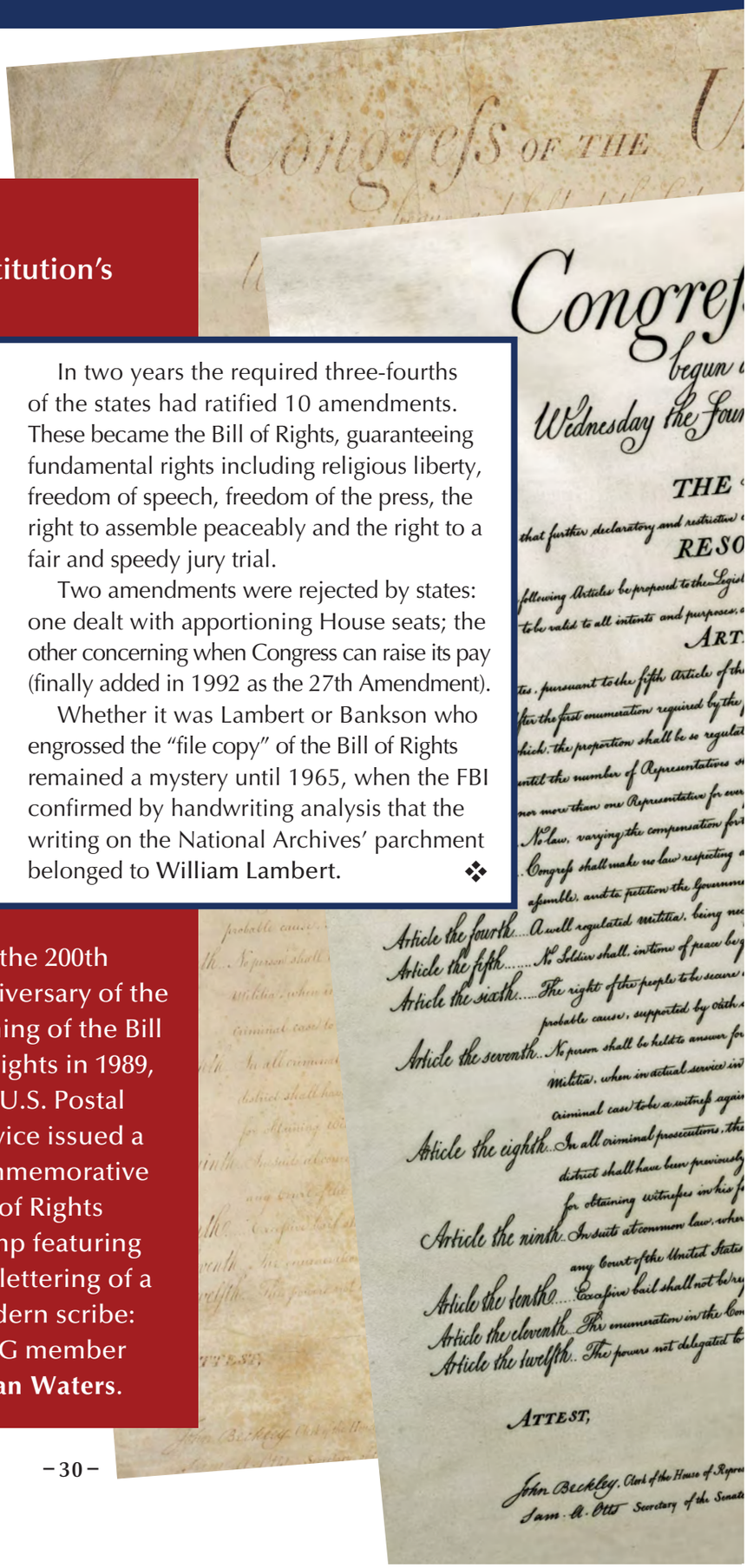
In two years the required three-fourths of the states had ratified 10 amendments. These became the Bill of Rights, guaranteeing fundamental rights including religious liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assemble peaceably and the right to a fair and speedy jury trial.

Two amendments were rejected by states: one dealt with apportioning House seats; the other concerning when Congress can raise its pay (finally added in 1992 as the 27th Amendment).

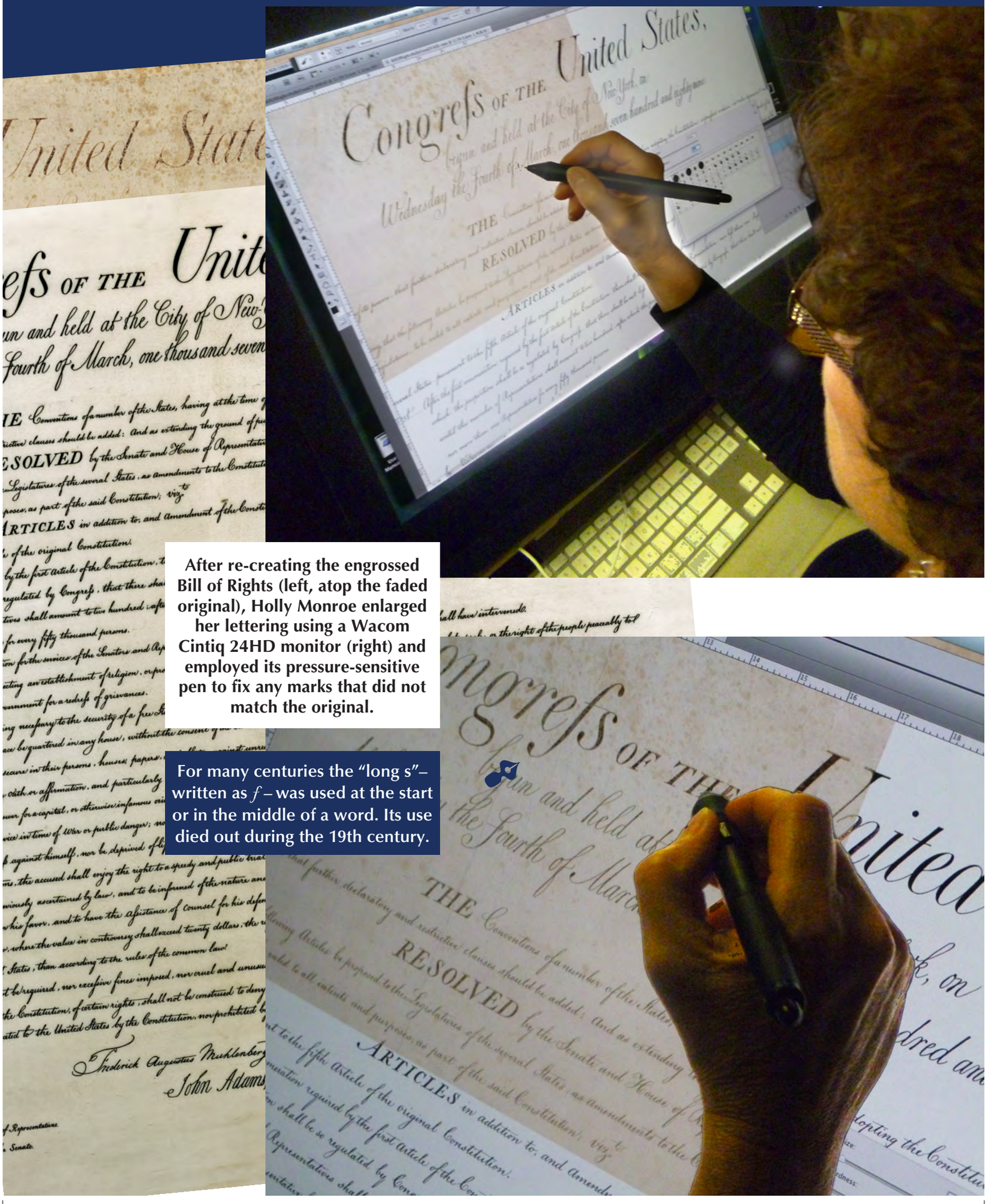
Whether it was Lambert or Bankson who engrossed the "file copy" of the Bill of Rights remained a mystery until 1965, when the FBI confirmed by handwriting analysis that the writing on the National Archives' parchment belonged to William Lambert. ❖



For the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Bill of Rights in 1989, the U.S. Postal Service issued a commemorative Bill of Rights stamp featuring the lettering of a modern scribe: WCG member **Julian Waters**.



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After re-creating the engrossed Bill of Rights (left, atop the faded original), Holly Monroe enlarged her lettering using a Wacom Cintiq 24HD monitor (right) and employed its pressure-sensitive pen to fix any marks that did not match the original.

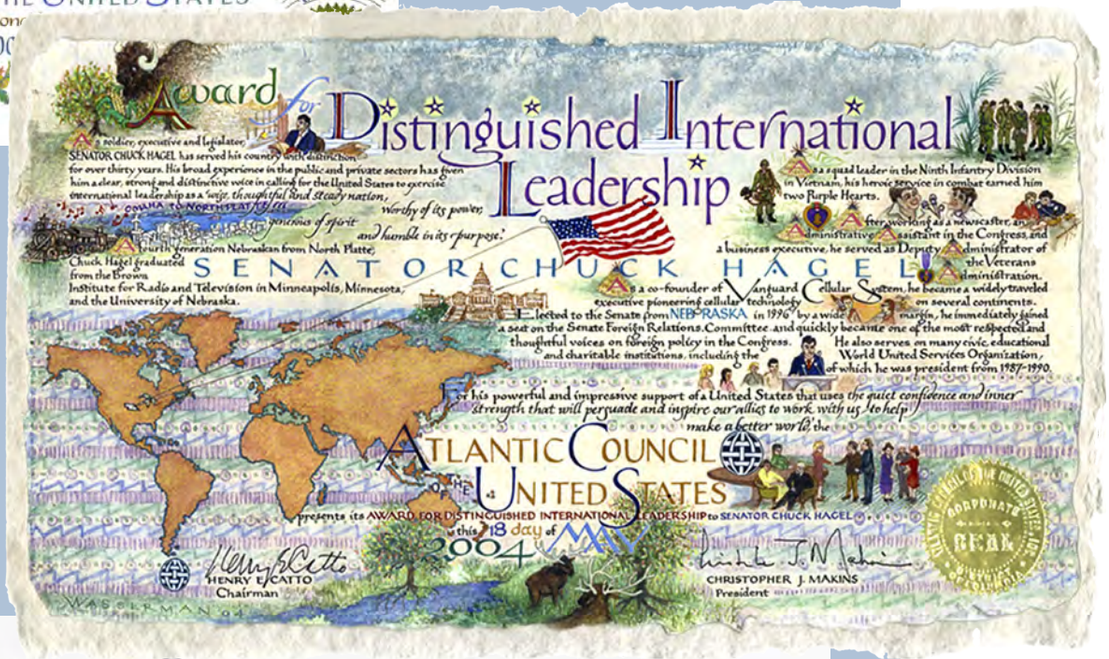
For many centuries the "long s"—written as *ſ*—was used at the start or in the middle of a word. Its use died out during the 19th century.

Unique Commission

Joanne Wasserman

Commissioned to create testimonials for the Atlantic Council of the United States' Distinguished Leadership Awards, Joanne Wasserman designed what she calls MODERN ILLUMINATION FOR MODERN LEADERS. The WCG member depicts in sumi ink and watercolor each recipient's accomplishments, capturing in the span of 24 inches wide key moments in his life and contributions.







Unique Commission

Tamara Stoneburner

Tamara Stoneburner, a former WCG president, was commissioned to design elements of the Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song from 2012 to 2017. The prestigious award, named after George and Ira Gershwin, is given to a composer or performer for their lifetime contributions to American popular music.



To highlight each recipient's name without competing with the gold foil-stamped logo created for the prize, in 2013 Tamara designed a backdrop in light grey of the opening bars of the first song each artist published. For their name she used Diotima by Gudrun Zapf von Hesse. The text is in Bickham's Script. She selected both to complement the logo.

To complete each year's presentation, Tamara Stoneburner crafted custom folders using Japanese Unryu and mulberry papers with ribbon-tie corners and closures. Each was color-themed to the tribute concert and banquet.





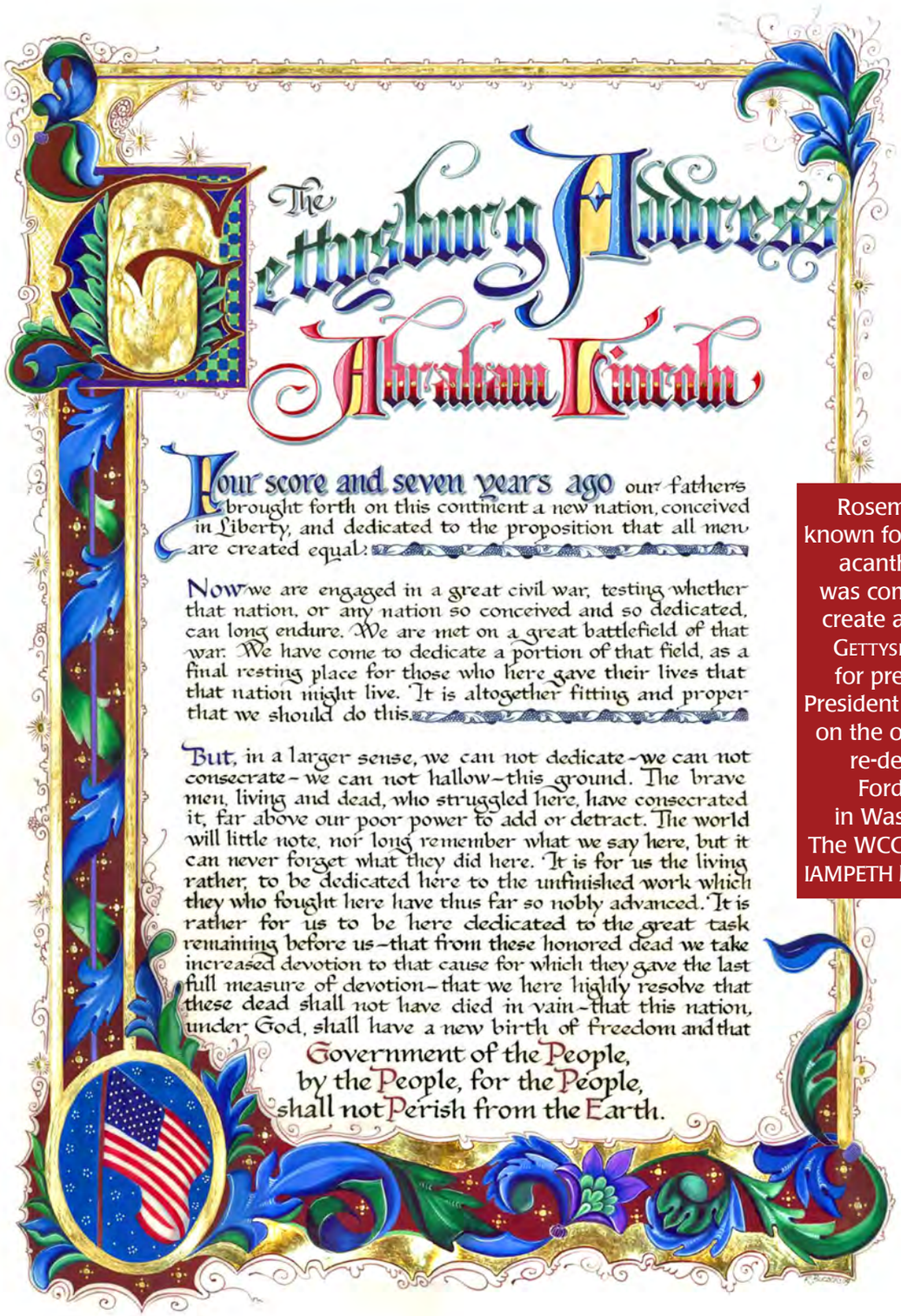
For the names on the 2012 awards for Hal David and Burt Bacharach, Tamara modified the Windlass font by adding diamond accents and hand painting them afterwards.



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Unique Commission

Rosemary Buczek



Rosemary Buczek, known for her exuberant acanthus borders, was commissioned to create an illuminated Gettysburg Address for presentation to President Barack Obama on the occasion of the re-dedication of Ford's Theatre in Washington DC. The WCG member is an IAMPETH Master Penman.