

Meandering through page after page of notes taken on the subject of engrossing, I am taken with how much a certificate serves as a wonderful exemplar of the skill set necessary to be a Master Penman. But before I can tell you about the objective skills required, I need to answer the subjective question as to why. Why would anyone in their right mind want to learn these skills and become a Master Penman? Actually, in my humble opinion, it's an oxymoron. No one in his or her RIGHT mind would want to become a master penman. You have to be out of your mind, or at least your rational mind.

The quest to be a master penman is done purely and simply for the love of the craft. It is done because you love to spend your waking hours immersed in the designs of the penman that came before you, poring over every bit of instruction that you can get your hands on to improve your technique.

The pursuit can require the patience of Job and being a little OCD doesn't hurt, either. You have to be willing to practice over and over and over again until you get it right because you, yourself, could never settle for less than your best. As a calligrapher it helps to take absolute responsibility for your own learning path, tracking down the instructors who have the skills that you want to learn and moving whatever mountains necessary to get them to teach you.

The journey is a lengthy process of working diligently on your lettering, design, illustrative and illumination skills, along with all that entails. But not just any calligraphy skills will do, mind you. The skills that were set out by the Zanerian Manual and the artists therein are what is used as the gold standard to this day.

The skills themselves are much older than the Zanerian Manual, which dates back to 1918. Many of the same skills can be found in illuminated manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages, although in slightly different form. Acanthus leaves, filigree, decorated initials, text lettering, painting, gilding and much more are found throughout books of Hours and have their beginnings there, or even earlier. It is a noble tradition we practice.

The purpose of engrossing, the general work of the master penman, is to acknowledge significant persons, organizations or events by creating an artistic text of recognition to commemorate worthy achievement. It is not the same type of work that one would do when rendering a poem or prose in a calligraphic style. Lets take a look at a certificate and I'll show you what I mean.

Before a layout can begin an artist has to know the correct bits of information to assemble so that he or she can fill in all the required elements. Here are some of the pertinent questions to ask:

- **Size required**

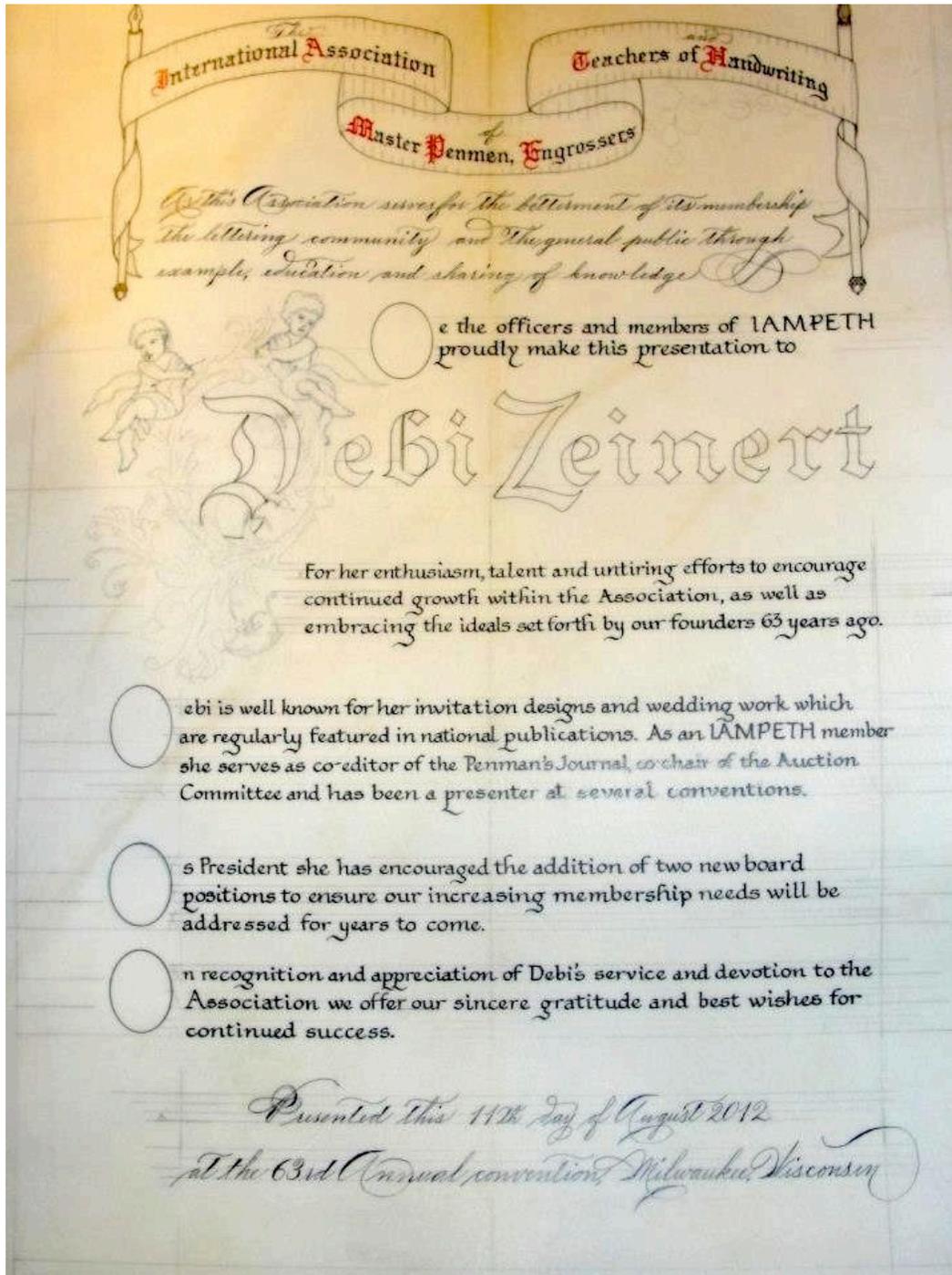
- **The hierarchy of information**, which should be largest to smallest- most often the largest will be the person's name who is the recipient of the award or certificate, but it could also be the name of an organization or the presenting organization. There can be instances where the information should be the same size.
- **The name of the presenting organization** or person
- **The type of document** they are looking for (i.e. certificate of appreciation, diploma, scroll of honor, proclamation, resolution etc).
- **The name of the honoree** (person, organization or event being recognized)
- **The body of text** stating why that person or organization is being recognized
- **The location and date of the presentation**
- **Signature(s)** of presenting organization's representative(s) if needed.
- **Decoration requests** (is logo to be included, color scheme, styles of lettering, scrolls, ribbons etc.)

You can see that even before you begin to put ink to paper, organization is a must! You can also see why it is important to know several different styles of lettering as different elements may require different techniques. The lettering style used as the body of text will not necessarily be the same one used as the recipient's name and those may or may not match the style used for the presenting organization. Once the larger elements are designed the engrosser can move on to addressing smaller open areas with the inclusion of filigree, off-hand flourishing or other decoration as they see fit. In order to add these, the engrosser must first know how to execute the different decorative techniques and, perhaps just as importantly, when to stop adding them! Engrossed pieces do tend to have many more elements than normal calligraphic pieces, but if not kept in proper balance the information can be lost in the execution.

Many of you were able to see the certificate I rendered for IAMPETH President Debi Zeinert at the conclusion of her tenure last year. I would like to show you the process of that certificate as a way to illustrate the included elements and why a Master Penman needs to be familiar with them.

First, I gathered information from several of Debi's friends as to her favorite colors (deeper jewel colors), favorite hobbies (drinking beer in the time honored tradition of Milwaukee), and other preferences. It was not a secret that I was doing Debi's certificate, but how it would look was left largely to my discretion. Jenny Muffler, the outgoing President that preceded Debi, provided the verbiage. I was able to letter the bulk of the certificate prior to leaving for the convention. All my pencil sketches and computer layouts were done prior to inking in the wording.

Because I have had several of my hand lettering styles turned into true type fonts in the past, it makes it easy for me to approximate word spacing on a computer page. Pencil spacing works just as well once you learn your own spacing preferences. Lettering is always done prior to the gilding and painting. Lettering is the most time consuming and important work, so you don't want to gild before lettering or your efforts could be wasted.



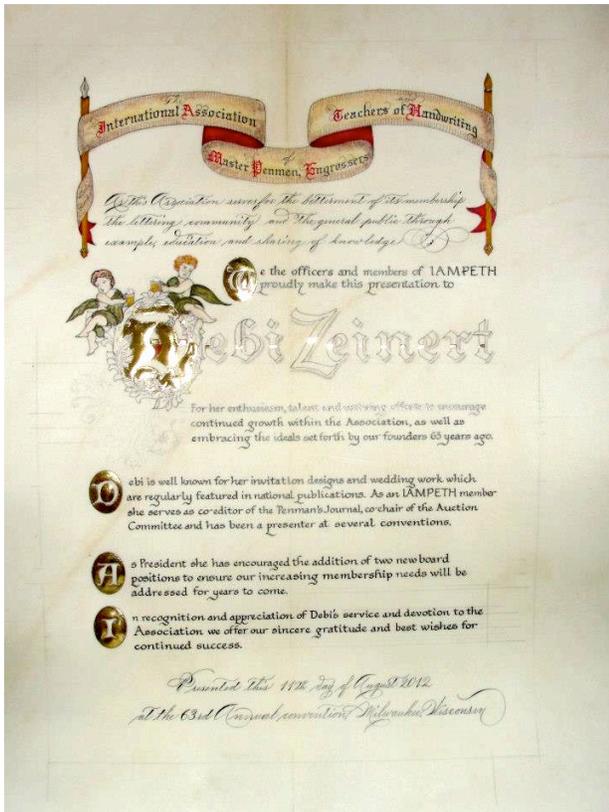
It was decided that there would not be any signatures this year so the piece could be framed prior to presentation. You can see penciled in the general design of the acanthus leaves oval shape that I wanted to place around the

initial D, and the oval shape set aside for paragraph beginning. On the right hand side, under the top ribbon, you can see where I thought I'd add some filigree work with the pattern to be determined later. Although I wanted the cherubs to be holding beer steins, I wanted to triple check with Debi's friends with make sure Debi wouldn't mind a light-hearted approach. In the meantime, I had them holding on to parts of the acanthus leaves.

Working top to bottom, I added a little color to the background of the top banner with the pen and brush holders both being a warm brown, and the back side of the ribbon being a deep red.

After changing out the the cherubs leaves for beer steins, I lightly painted them in to make sure I was happy with the appearance. Because I was working on calf skin vellum, revisions could be easily accomplished at this point. Happy with the results, I started to float instacol into the background of the main letter. It's not difficult, but it does take a little practice. After waiting the proper amount of drying time, the gold was applied. Usually an hour is sufficient when using Instacol thinned to the proper consistency.





The rest of the Lombardic capitals were penciled into the ovals and gilded in the same manner. Tooling the gold, or placing designs into gold with a small embosser, is done after the gold has set for 24 hours. The remainder of Debi's name was then painted. One reason that painting is done after gold is applied is that paint also has binder in it that could cause the gold to stick to the paint as well.

Next up, filigree and decoration. I added a light border of filigree in between the ovals that make up the text lettering. I also added a decorative element to function as a spacer taking the text out to the margins using the same color and pointed nib. Some light floral work, off hand flourishing and a few last touches were added near the end to finish off the design.

I often change my mind about finishing touches as I go along and prefer not to make those decisions until the bulk of the work is done. It helps me to create a more balanced certificate when I add them in relation to completed work. A big thank you to Heather Held for lending me her pastels for the banner and to Monica Lima for helping me with a particular type of dove I was trying to do - one that I had seen on her Christmas card and fell in love with. I wanted to incorporate it into the banner design. I also need to thank Jane Farr not only for the pictures, but for her patience as I spread art supplies out all over our room.



We live in an amazing age. Although the designs from the Zanerian manual were done long ago we are now able to study them up close with the invention of the internet. IAMPETH has a wealth of information open to all for the asking with its remarkable website. Now the Healy Collection is a remarkable addition to that collection. We all owe Michael Sull such a debt of gratitude for bringing this collection to IAMPETH's attention and for so many other things he has done on behalf of us all, to further the love of this distinguished craft.

Many of us were able to gather in Kansas City for two days in 2010 to see this astounding collection in person, and now IAMPETH has many of the images of this collection on its website. What a treasure trove to study in depth. What a

great time to be a nerd who loves to study this craft endlessly. Which brings my last point back to my first. Why would anyone in their right mind want to be a Master Penman? Because they wouldn't have it any other way.