

Letter Arts Review

The word,
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and content.

MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN



\$14.50



Dear Friends,

One of the goals of LAR is help each reader, regardless of skill level, to reach the next level. This means improving technique, and also thinking more deeply about the work, and seeing more in the work. This issue offers articles on all three of these topics.

"What's in a Grip?" analyzes how adjusting your pen-hold can make a world of difference in your letters.

Calligraphy has been described as a marriage of music (movement) and architecture (shape). "Are Letterforms a Threat to Calligraphy?" boldly asks how these two aspects work together and against each other to convey different kinds of meaning.

A profile of letter artist and type designer Michael Clark allows us to look "with a microscope" at the tiny but important decisions any letter artist needs to address to produce his best work.

"The Critics' Corner" takes us into a group-critique session where a piece by Beth House is analyzed to find its weak and strong points.

"Best of the Web" once again takes us on a tour of the best calligraphic websites in cyberville, and "Scribbler to Scribe" offers encouragement by showing how every master scribe had her start as a beginning scribbler.

Enjoy!

Rose Folsom

Editor

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Michael Clark, see article on
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Quilted Torah cover by
Melissa Dinwiddie, see article
on page 52.

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FROM CHAOS TO
CONTINUITY

The Calligraphic Designs of Michael Clark

by Rose Folsom

Sweepy, a font by lettering artist and type designer Michael Clark, was chosen by the Type Directors Club of New York for inclusion in their 27th Annual international exhibition of the best typography and type designs of the year. We visited Michael in his home studio near Richmond, Virginia, to talk about his evolution from self-taught calligrapher to type designer.

LAR: How did you get started in lettering?

MC: I don't have an art background. I was a banker and then, in 1980, went to work for a local type house. The first thing I did was set headline faces on a Phototypesetter, which explains my affinity for headline faces as opposed to text faces. I got to set some of the greats, one letter at a time: Solemnis by Gunther Gerhard Lange; Michelangelo by Hermann Zapf; Snell Roundhand by Matthew Carter. At the same time I ran across a copy of U&Lc magazine. I was totally unaffected by the text faces I saw. In that same issue

was a gallery of calligraphy. That was my introduction to lettering.

LAR: Who were your teachers?

MC: I mainly learned by looking at books. My inspirations have come from the great German calligraphers: Poppl, Schneider, Zapf.

LAR: What was the inspiration for Sweepy?

MC: It came from several pieces of lettering I had done. Sweepy is like another face of mine, Pooper Black, but it's lighter and more scripty – the letters connect. I was looking for a lighter weight than the original lettering sample, so I did trim it down quite a bit.

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Opposite
Michael Clark with
son Jacob

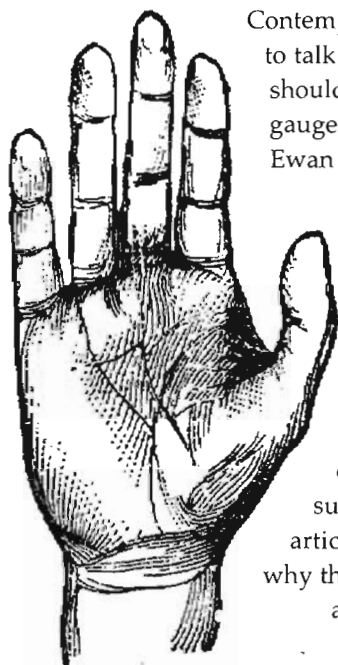
Right
Sweepy was originally
entitled "Slide" but the
name had been taken
by another type
designer. Clark
christened it Sweepy
after the little-known
eighth dwarf. It is
available at p22.com.

Left
Hand lettered piece
that inspired the font
Sweepy

WHAT'S IN A GRIP?

A STUDY OF HISTORICAL PEN HOLDS

by Peter Gilderdale



Contemporary scribes don't seem to talk much about how the pen should be held. This can be gauged by the fact that neither Ewan Clayton nor John Nash give the subject any detailed coverage in their chapters in *Handwriting: Everyone's Art*.¹ Yet two hundred years ago, every manual of writing devoted very considerable space to the subject.² The following article is an attempt to explain why this neglect has occurred, and why the study of pen hold may be more worthy of attention

from calligraphers and calligraphy teachers than is currently the case. It does this through three separate sections, which need not necessarily be read in sequence – indeed the casual reader may prefer to first skim through the historical overview before returning to the initial explanations.

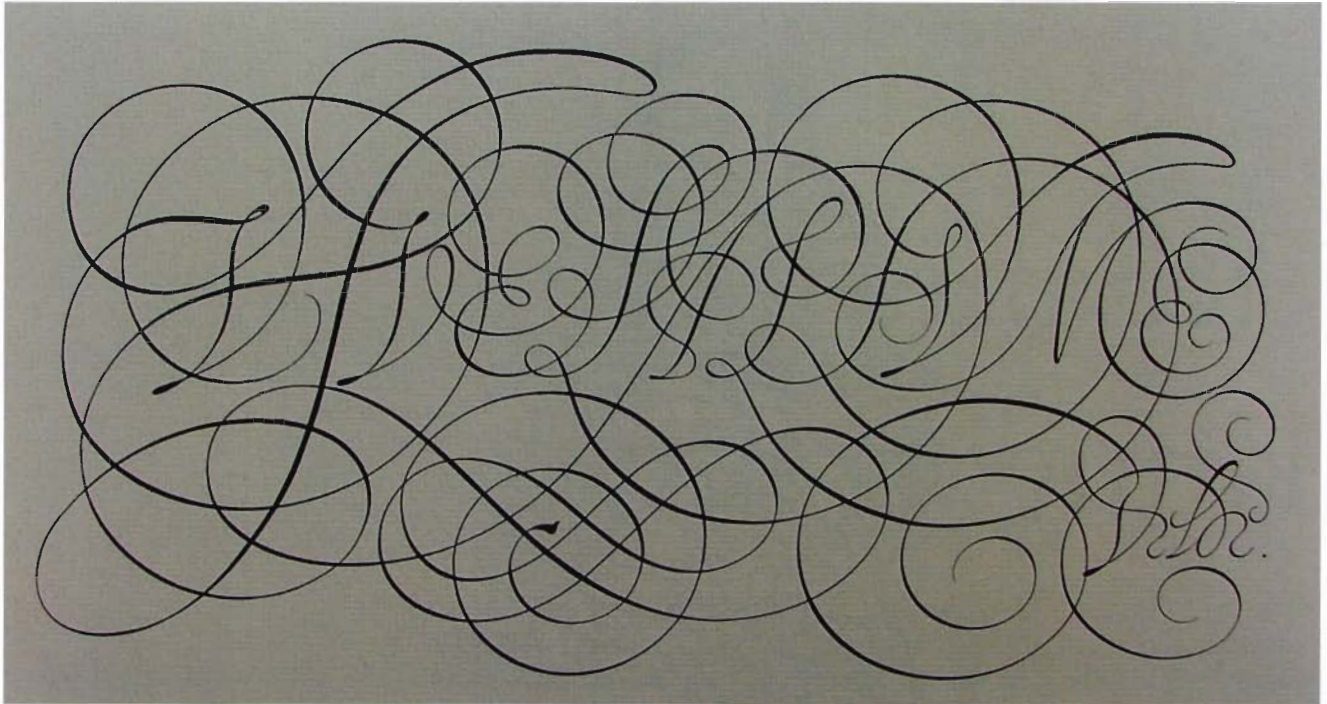
In the three sections which follow, we will do three things: 1) examine the

underlying reasons why we are reluctant to think of pen hold as significant; 2) put forward a model which will allow the examination of the effect that differing pen holds may have on our writing; 3) give an overview of how the pen has been held at different times in history, whilst also discussing the way that these holds related to the alphabets then in current use. Finally we will take stock of the current situation, and make some suggestions as to how an improved understanding of the pen hold may be of help to serious scribes and teachers.

INTRODUCTION

OR, WHY DOES NO ONE WANT TO TALK ABOUT PEN HOLDS NOWADAYS?

In his seminal book the *The Story of Writing*, Donald Jackson writes, "Every time we write we reveal something of ourselves, and each mark is as individual as a section of our fingerprint."³ Jackson is here discussing signatures, but most calligraphers rather cherish that quirky individuality which means that we can spot our own version of italic from everyone else's. In fact, we so value that "fingerprint" quality that we tend to shy



THE CALLIGRAPHERS' TOAST: *Vive la Plume*

by Peter Gilderdale

Most calligraphers are aware that they have a patron devil. Mark Drogin's work¹ brought the diabolic Titivillus to the attention of the calligraphic community. The fact that calligraphers have their own toast with which to quaff the demon drink, however, does not seem to be so widely known. Whilst the phrase "Vive la Plume" (Long live the Pen) is by no means unknown, it has been understood as a motto. The point of this article is to show that, historically, "vive la plume" (which anyone who has ever read Bickham's "The

Universal Penman"² will have encountered) functioned as more than a catchy phrase. It was also a toast, and as such fulfilled an important social role for calligraphers of the period.

The evidence that "vive la plume" was used as a toast is incontrovertible. In his book "The Penman's Employment"³, Joseph Champion has a plate on which the following is said: "The Penman's Toast, viz Vive la Plume, that is, Let the Pen Live." As such we know that in 1762, there was an accepted Penman's toast. What is less clear

Fig. 2 (above)
Page from Jan van
den Velde's
copybook of 1605