



FRIENDS OF CALLIGRAPHY

PURPOSE

It is the custom to ascribe to institutions the high ambitions and tender sentiments that few of us are able to wear with graceful ease. A case in point is the Friends of Calligraphy. Its announced purposes are *to promote the study and practice of calligraphy, to encourage individual excellence, and to foster a wider appreciation and deeper understanding of calligraphy, its history and applications.* These are certainly creditable goals, well served by the Friends. But there is about them the ponderous ring of the epitaph: **They served so that uncials may live.**

But the Friends is not a ponderous organization at all. Whatever missionary ambition might be found in its affairs is inconspicuous. Ordinary concerns of ordinary calligraphers — that's the main business of the Friends! If answering these unastonishing concerns also serves nobler ends, then so much to the good. Anyone bent on making the world safe for calligraphy will find only a mildly zealous congregation in the Friends.

In the fall of 1974, when a group of twenty calligraphers, teachers and students met in Berkeley to organize the Friends, the desirability of having a local calligraphy cell was plain. There were only a few classes in the area then — mostly at the beginners' level — but battalions of students had already trooped through them and were starting to stamp the floors for more advanced instruction. Here were hundreds of people hot for the serif. To all but a handful of them, however, the opportunities for further study, or even contact with other scribes outside the classroom, were limited.

It was also the time when a small, but steady, flow of gypsy writing-masters began showing up in various parts of the country — offering precisely the expertise and esoterica in demand by American calligraphers. If San Francisco was to be included as a regular stop on these itineraries, it would need a network of scribes who were prepared to deal with the organizational and financial requirements of a latter-day lyceum. Such a network would also open up all sorts of other opportunities. In addition to providing advanced classes, it could support other activities and serve as a meeting-ground where lettermakers would gather to gabble among themselves.

HISTORY

MAKE-UP OF MEMBERSHIP

If not militant reformers, just who are the Friends? The question is of no small concern to newer calligraphers. It is they who are often heard to ask: *Would I fit in among the Friends? Don't you have to be awfully good?* Such apprehensions are groundless in the case of the Friends. With a membership of about 500, drawn from across the continent, Europe and Asia, the gamut of reputations and personalities in the Friends runs riot. Whatever he may be, lion or gerbil, the applicant is bound to find refuge within. Calligraphy's fools and princes, peacocks and mudhens, common scolds and even a mellow *felis domesticus*, who goes by the name of Sebastian and works as the lynx-eyed praetorian of a local bookbindery — all are Friends in good standing.

According to the by-laws, everyone is afforded the same class of membership, but inevitably, some members are less equal than others. In this instance, that means the officers and members of the Board of Directors, the Newsletter Editor, and forty or so others who are appointed to serve on various *ad hoc* committees. To these volunteers, at once "honored" and luckless, fall the burdens of scheduling and managing the affairs of the Friends. The seven directors and the editor are elected annually, but lettering ability has no bearing on their right to hold office. As chance would have it, the make-up of the board has always reflected a balanced mix of skills. Meetings of the board are held every six weeks or so, usually on Friday nights, at each other's homes and all members of the organization are invited to participate.

THE BOSSSES

WORK- SHOPS

For many Friends, the workshop is perhaps the most attractive benefit of membership. About five or six of these classes are scheduled each year. In the past the list of instructors has included such notable teachers as Maury Nemoy, Donald Jackson, David Mekelburg, Karlgeorg Hoefler, Sheila Waters and Jaki Svaren. Most of the classes are one- to two-day sessions — occasionally, a week-long workshop is also offered. Although the topics address a variety of interests and skill levels, they all are within reach to most calligraphers with no more than a couple of classes behind them. Depending upon expenses, the course fees vary from one workshop to another. However, an attempt is made to hold member cost down to about thirty dollars per day and enrollment to about twenty students per session.

LECTURES

Throughout the year the Friends also sponsors several lectures by recognized authorities on calligraphy and related fields. The list of guest lecturers has included such notables as David Howells, James Hayes, Ieuan Rees, Byron Macdonald, Lloyd Reynolds and Arne Wolf. Usually the lectures are open to the public and free of charge.

The Friends of Calligraphy Newsletter, published three times a year, is the one benefit shared by all the members, regardless of wherever they may live. Although it was not originally conceived of as such, the newsletter has become established as a major undertaking for the group. The cost of printing and mailing accounts for approximately seventy-five percent of the annual dues. What started out in the fall of 1975 as a two-page issue has snowballed into a substantial publication of articles and illustrations. Without attempting to be a scholarly publication, the newsletter is rather a journal of calligraphic affairs. Articles of general and offbeat interest, reports on workshops and lectures in San Francisco and elsewhere, profiles of leading calligraphers, book reviews, etcetera, are grist for the newsletter.

NEWS- LETTER

At Santa Sabina in San Rafael during the spring of 1978 the Friends sponsored the first of what has become an annual calligraphy retreat. Its purpose is to provide an otherwise impossible opportunity for most calligraphers to work for an entire weekend in an atmosphere, free from the normal interruptions of everyday life. Participation is limited to forty calligraphers.

RETREAT

The first members' exhibition, titled *Kalligraphia*, was held during the summer and fall of 1976. It was a non-jury show of about 100 pieces by 53 exhibitors. In what is expected to become a regularly scheduled event, a second exhibition was held in 1979.

EXHIBITION

MEET- INGS

An Annual General Meeting is held in late May at which time election of the next year's Board of Directors takes place and the organization's other business is transacted. It has become customary to follow this with an informal talk or display of work presented by an invited member.

In previous years the Christmas season was the occasion for a Friends' lecture. The pattern was changed, however, in 1978, and this second annual meeting was given over to festive celebration and general tomfoolery. Judging by the reactions of those who attended, Pickwickian pleasures will rule forevermore.

DUES

The payment of fifteen dollars, due annually on the first day of July, is the sole requirement for membership in the Friends. It would help if the applicant is also head over heels in love with letters and lettermakers, but that is not a pressing stipulation. Membership lasts from July to July, but persons joining after the first of April will enjoy extended membership through the succeeding year.