

# Notes from New York

Spring 2012

The Newsletter of the Society of Scribes, Ltd.



Master Engrosser's Certificate by Harvest Crittenden.



Our spring guest instructor, Harvest Crittenden, will be teaching an illumination workshop on April 20-21. If you can't make the workshop, be sure to come meet her at her talk: "Journey of a Master Penman" on Friday evening, April 19. She will show and describe the making of her Master Engrosser's Certificate, a kind of exam in which the calligrapher demonstrates her/his skills by creating an award. Details about the talk and workshop are on the website: [societyofscribes.org](http://societyofscribes.org)

# Harvest Crittenden

*How did you begin doing calligraphy, and were you attracted by illumination from the start?*

I have been interested in art and writing from my earliest childhood and have loved writing — the physical act of writing with pen on paper — from the second grade. I went to parochial schools where faith was an integral part of everything I did. That truly did take root in my heart and was the focus of my artwork. I loved poring over books about illuminated manuscripts. I grew up in Michigan, but after college moved to Arizona. Missing the camaraderie of other artists, I signed up for a calligraphy class at Northern Arizona University taught by Dick Beasley. Though Beas was known for his colorful and expressive work, he insisted that his beginning students learn correct forms, angle and technique right from the start. He was able to bring together my love of art and my love of lettering. That was in 1978 and I have been a calligrapher ever since then.

I think it's important to note that my parents are art dealers and certified restoration specialists. So I grew up in a house where my parents were either cleaning, restoring or selling paintings by Winslow Homer, Eastman Johnson, Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, Anthony Van Dyck and Jan Lievens and etchings by Albrecht Durer among others. I was able to study them closely and really take in all the details of color, brush work and perspective. Color was discussed in depth as the restoration process unfolded and it was amazing to grow up in such an environment!

*I know that you studied illumination in Italy; where did you do that and with whom?*

My studies in Italy centered mostly in Florence, and to a lesser degree, Rome. I had access to manuscripts because of my calligraphy background and could spend as much time with them as I wished. I didn't study with any particular person, although I was able to spend time at some monasteries in Northern Italy. Because I teach for the Religious Sisters of Mercy here in Michigan and they have convents throughout the world, I have an open invitation to stay with them on study trips throughout Europe. Their convent in Rome is near the Vatican, and the Vatican library has been a huge resource for me.

*Is there any particular place that you would especially recommend for looking at manuscripts to members who might be headed to Italy on vacation?*

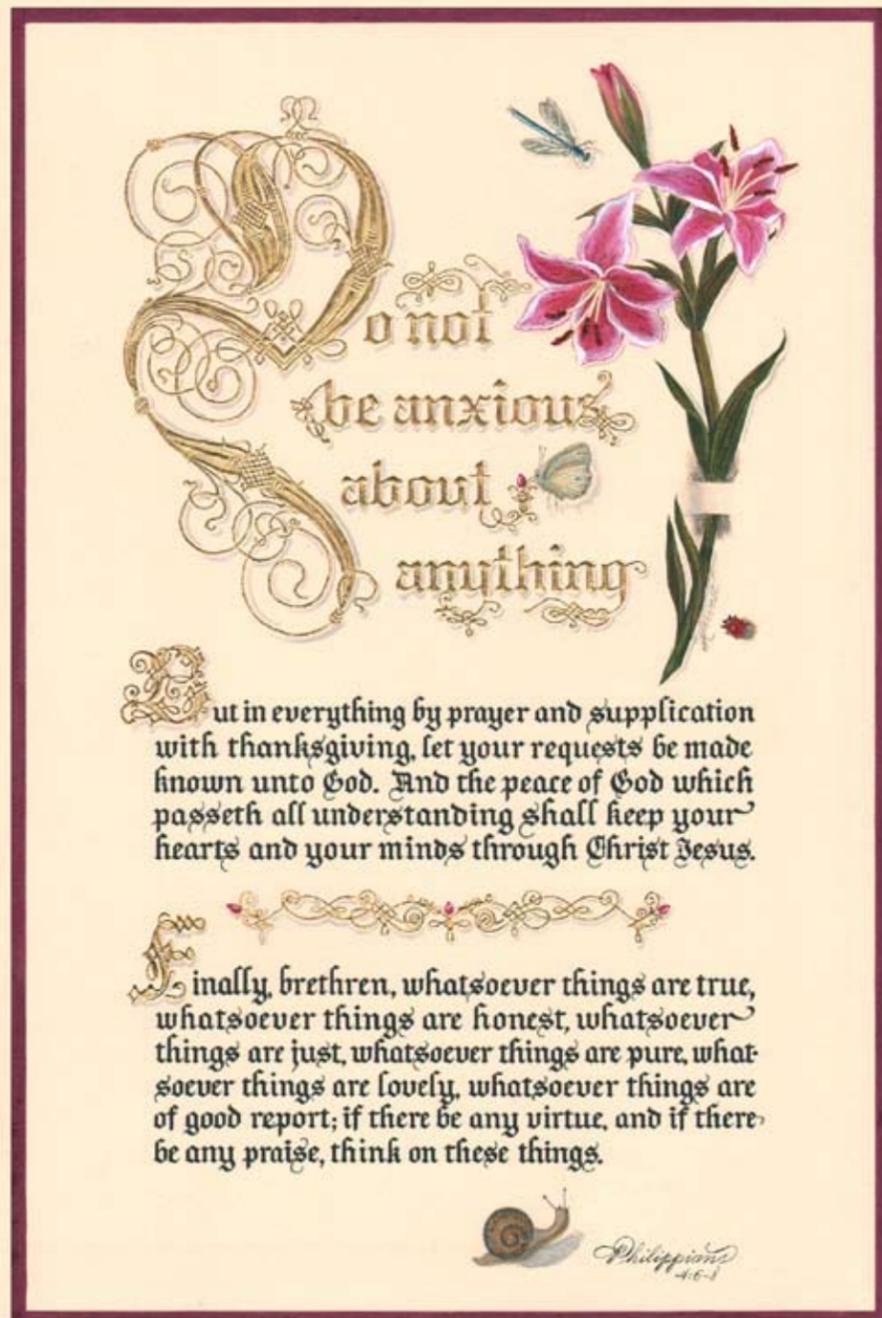
Without question, it would be Florence. Everywhere you go — museums, churches, even just walking around the city — there are examples of historic writing, illumination and religious art. Almost everything is within walking distance or a quick cab ride, and art is in the air that you breathe!

*You'll be the new director of the Spencerian Saga in Ohio; can you tell us broad-edged people a little about that?*

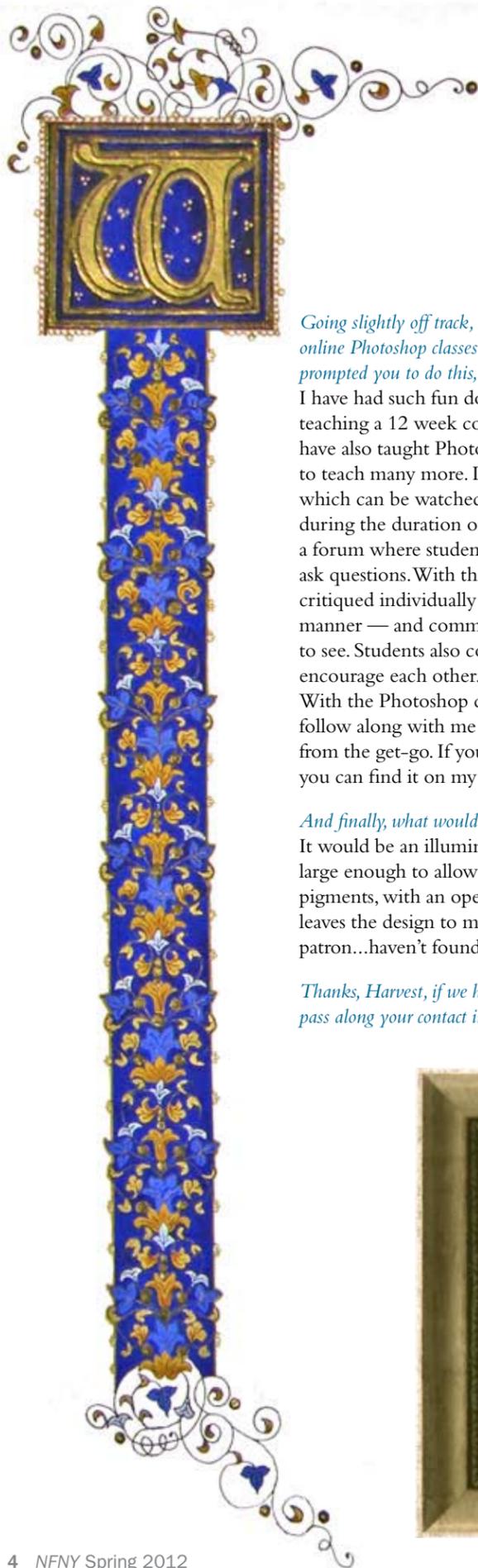
It is such an honor to be named the new director of the Spencerian Saga. Michael Sull started the program 25 years ago and it is still going strong. Spencerian lettering is truly our American heritage. It is unique to our country and was the first handwriting system that was taught throughout the US for 100 years. It is fluid and graceful and there is so much room for variation that it is easy to really personalize it. There are endless ways to write and flourish and it is more quickly written than traditional Copperplate or Engrossers Text as the minuscule letters do not contain all the stops and starts. I first fell in love with it 20 years ago, before I knew Michael, and feel privileged to carry on the tradition of Platt Roger Spencer.

*Your class for the SoS is called Lyrical Lombardics: from Formal to Funky. Do you get many requests from clients for more contemporary illumination? or do they mostly want traditional styles? Do you use both in your own personal work?*

I do use both in my studio work. I have spent a good deal of time studying the engrossing arts that were so big in our country from early 1800's to the 1950's. There was a huge call for hand done certificates, resolutions, memorial booklets and such. I love doing that type of work, and while the traditional work will always be closest to my heart, there is a call for more modern styles. So I am always playing with ways to adapt the traditional techniques for a contemporary audience.



All artwork on these pages by Harvest Crittenden. Above, a work inspired by the 16th C manuscript *Mira Calligraphiae Monumenta* by G. Bocsday and J. Hoefnagel.



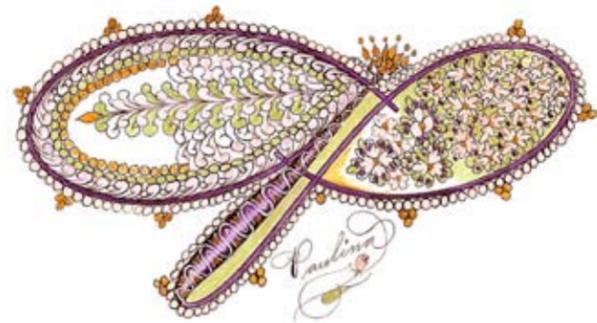
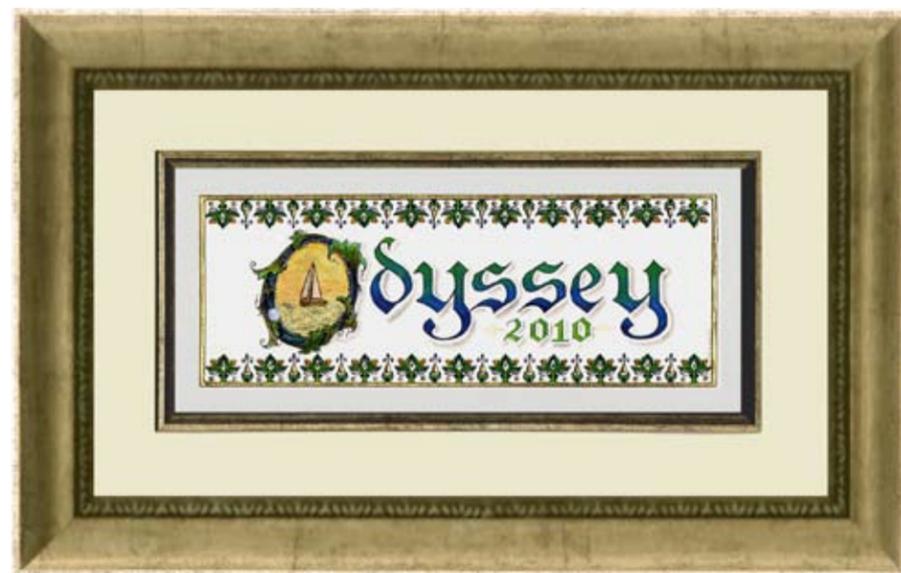
*Going slightly off track, I know you've been offering very popular online Photoshop classes geared specifically for calligraphers. What prompted you to do this, and how does it work?*

I have had such fun doing online classes! I am currently teaching a 12 week course on Spencerian lettering. I have also taught Photoshop for Calligraphers and hope to teach many more. I post one or two videos each week, which can be watched as often and whenever you like, during the duration of the class. There is homework and a forum where students can post their homework and ask questions. With the Spencerian class, homework is critiqued individually — in a very gentle and encouraging manner — and comments are posted for each student to see. Students also comment on each other's work and encourage each other. Examples are downloaded as we go. With the Photoshop class, you see my desktop screen and follow along with me click by click to set up your screen from the get-go. If you'd like info about upcoming classes you can find it on my website: [www.acornarts.org](http://www.acornarts.org)

*And finally, what would your dream commission be?*

It would be an illuminated book or scroll, with a budget large enough to allow for vellum and hand ground pigments, with an open time line and a client who simply leaves the design to me!!! I keep on looking for my Medici patron...haven't found him or her yet!!

*Thanks, Harvest, if we hear of a modern Medici, we'll be sure to pass along your contact info!.*



On these pages, samples of Harvest Crittenden's borders, initials and more. Below: a piece created for the 2010 International Calligraphy Conference in Boston. Right: Ave Maria, commissioned by the Religious Sisters of Mercy, uses ground sumi ink, hand-ground lapis lazuli, Red Sea coral, malachite, baryte, sepia, vermilion and orpiment. Raised and burnished 23K gold and gold powder on Wyndstone parchment.

*For Emily:* This was an exercise in a Masterpiece Flourishing class, to commemorate Harvest's daughter's birthday. The design was reworked from the original pencil sketch to accentuate the heart shape.

