



Alphabet

The JOURNAL of the FRIENDS of CALLIGRAPHY



MY SWEET AND SOUR GIRLFRIEND

by **Andrea Grimes**

J MET THE REMARKABLE SUSIE TAYLOR during my time working on Friday afternoons in the San Francisco History Center, sometime in the late 1980s; it wasn't until my first curated exhibition in 1992 that I found a way to work with her. The exhibition was *Cool City: Poets, Printers, & Publishers in San Francisco*. I had been working with the literature collection for several years, and observed that the Special Collections Department on the third floor of the old Main Library had a wonderful San Francisco press collection. I shyly approached Susie for assistance, and she immediately took me under her wing. I still remember her taking me into the Rare Book Room, where she stood on a stool (we still have that stool!), making selection after selection of letterpress showmanship, advising me all the while about why this one or that one would be important for my exhibition. I marveled at her knowledge, little knowing how this would characterize our relationship over the next twenty-five years. Susie, ever the mentor, critic, and counselor; I, the eager, slightly befuddled, but always grateful, student. I saw my role as her Mrs. Malaprop; she was the Queen.

Susie's sure eye, years of practice, and keen application of design rules (some meant to be broken) made my learning experience inordinately easy. These were thrifty days, where exhibitions were planned using the tools at hand. One of those tools was the hand of Susie Taylor. This first exhibition with Susie was a revelation and a success, though I did not allow myself to ask for a hand lettered flyer, much to my everlasting regret.

Susie's artistry was found throughout the Library and City Hall, from the signage in our department to City Hall requests (letters, letterhead, declarations, announcements, flyers, and exhibitions), to the workaday lists of library facility contacts.

Susie Taylor
Curator, Harrison Collection of
Calligraphy & Lettering

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Special Collections Department

Ever practical, especially during our “poor-mouth years,” Susie made do by cleverly devising archival enclosures and repurposing items such as check book boxes to hold our collection of hand written labels. When considering donations of duplicate items, she would advise keeping “an heir and a spare,” just in case. Her collection of beautiful handmade papers was used for the lettering of posters or decoration; smaller pieces were kept in the prep room drawers. The virtue of saving was driven home over and over again. It was during this time, before the move to the new Main Library, that Susie and I worked together to transfer significant materials to Book Arts & Special Collections, moving book trucks full of books that we could not bear to lose to the landfill of Altamont.

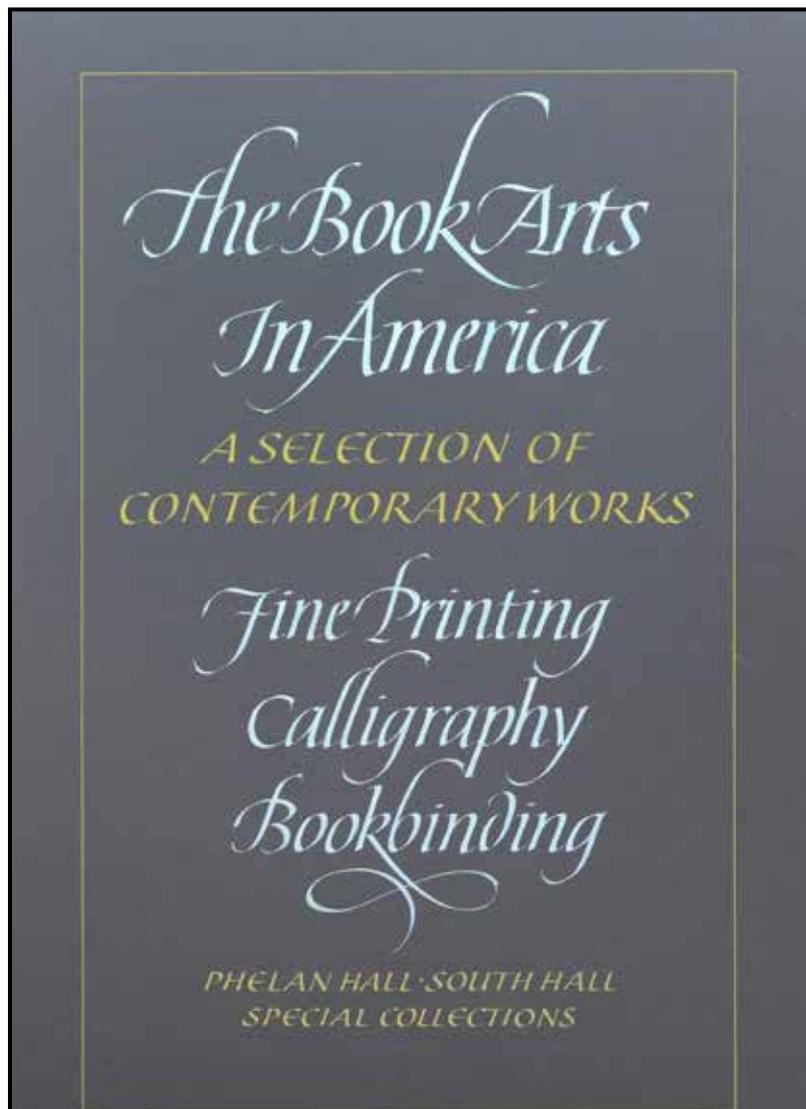
Susie was well known for her reluctance to show her own calligraphy, in fact she refused, always deferring to the outstanding works in the Richard Harrison Collection of Calligraphy & Lettering. She was so modest that it was all I could do to retrieve the bits and pieces — scraps of her work — from the trash can; I squirreled them away just in case she would leave forever and we would have nothing to mark her lettering presence. Of course that was wrongheaded: Susie’s calligraphy surrounds us everywhere, from the labels written out for archival boxes, to signs for the Rare Book Room and stacks, to exhibition captions and posters, to the “Please use PENCILS only” reminders on reading room tables, to the catalog information she wrote out on envelopes and phase boxes.

Still, I pestered her, and she would mutter about something hidden someplace somewhere, until one day not long ago I found two large portfolios of her work: Robert Frost and Anne S. Perlman poems written out for two City exhibitions. They were immediately shown to overjoyed calligraphers. Later, I went through the flat files in the prep room where Susie worked right up until the end. There I found a stack of original exhibition post-

ers; the next day I found an archival box full of mixed original work and photocopies. I’m still not finished, and hope to discover more library calligraphy from this extraordinary artist.

Finally, after many years of learning the history of lettering through osmosis, I realized the necessity of taking calligraphy classes. The sweetest class was Italic Handwriting, offered through the Friends of Calligraphy.

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"FORGET·ME·NOT"

Victorian Valentines

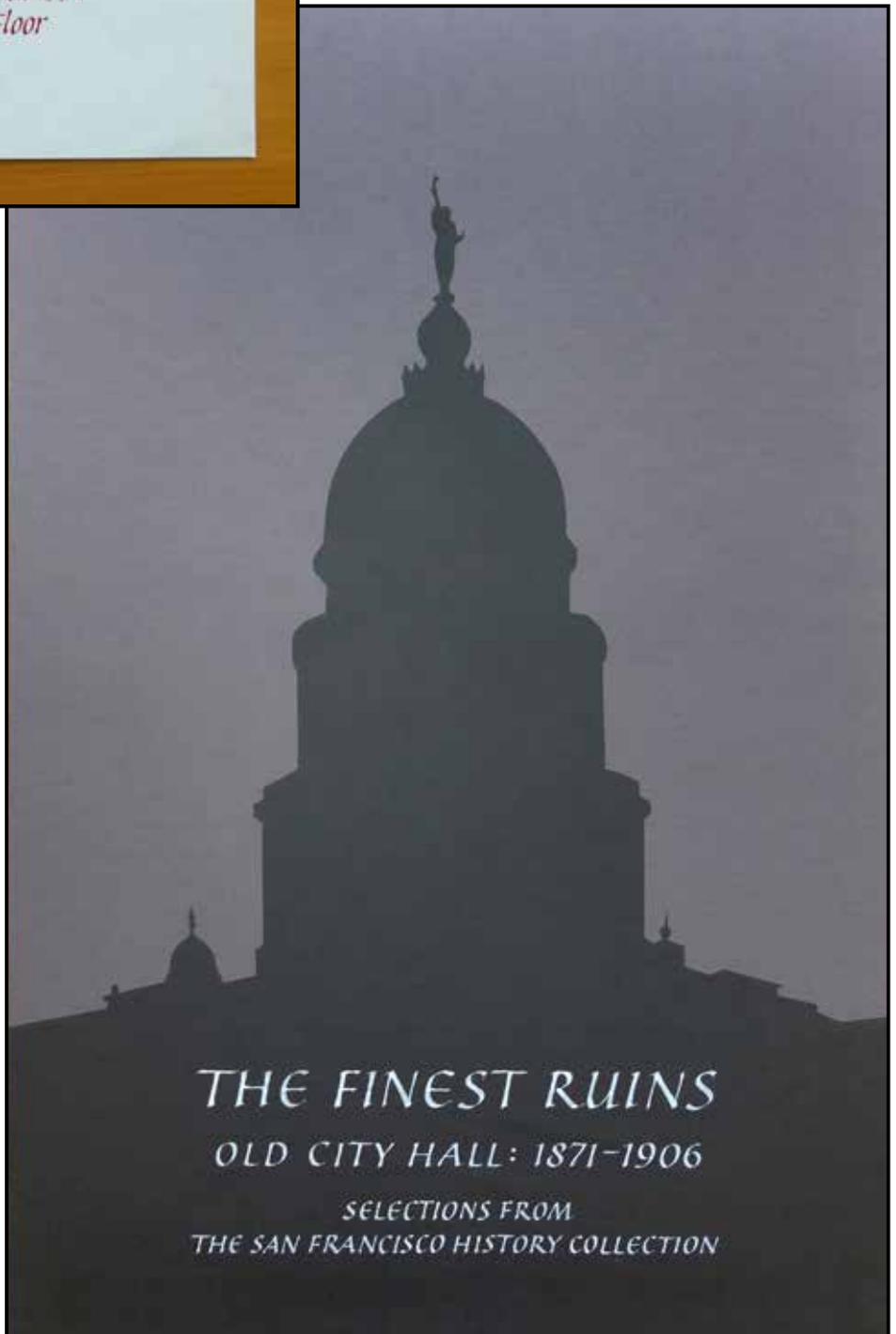
*selected from
The Duane Weston Collection,
Book Arts &
Special Collections
Center*



*22 January through 3 March 1997
Skylight Gallery · Sixth Floor*

Here was my heart's desire: to improve my handwriting. Susie would regularly sit and practice with me in the prep room; since I was left-handed she tried her hand at that, and through this effort I imagine that she forgave me my many transgressions. More encouragement came from other quarters: Linnea Lundquist's advice to practice even with shopping lists and everyday to-do lists was invaluable. The point being to practice every day. Sometime in 2015, as we were practicing again in the prep room, Susie told me my handwriting was very good! She was equal parts teacher and sidekick; when she approved of something she said it out loud. When she found a piece of beautiful lettering she made sure I really looked at it. She left me notes attached to a calligrapher's handwriting, ephemera that might otherwise

be tossed, showing me the effortless, "the easy grace" that went into that simple act of writing. Twenty-five years of working with my immensely creative, plain spoken co-worker Susie Taylor has broadened my knowledge of the world of calligraphy and lettering arts, but it will never be enough to fill the hole she has left at the library. She almost single-handedly built the Harrison Collection of Calligraphy & Lettering into the major research collection it is today. People come from around the world to see the calligraphic wonders of the San Francisco Public Library. I



*THE FINEST RUINS
OLD CITY HALL: 1871-1906
SELECTIONS FROM
THE SAN FRANCISCO HISTORY COLLECTION*

witnessed Susie share her love of the Library's treasures, and the sheer joy she took in her work was an incredible spectacle; we will surely never come this way again.

SUSIE WAS AN ENABLER: she urged me on and enabled me to better appreciate calligraphy, by including me in this world of letterforms, introducing me to the practitioners and their work,

BAY SAMPLER

*Bay Area Book Arts Celebrate
the New Main Library Opening*

18 APRIL - 9 JUNE 1996

*This exhibition is dedicated in memoriam to
JOYCE LANCASTER WILSON
25 August 1914 - 11 April 1996*



The BEAST in me



*A Selection of Cartoon Animals
from The Schmulowitz Collection of
Wit and Humor (SCOWAH)*

and by her interest in my development. I well remember the visits of many artists to Special Collections and the Rare Book Room, a remembrance engrained now by the accompaniment of Susie's hand lettered work. To have taken all of this for granted is something I rather regret, but who dreamed the end would arrive so soon?

If I've benefited in any way from this long-time friendship it is to say this: Lady Fortune smiled on me, and her name is Susie Taylor. My beloved sweet and sour girlfriend — never to be forgotten. 💰

ANDREA V. GRIMES is a Special Collections Librarian in the Marjorie G. & Carl W. Stern Book Arts & Special Collections Center at the San Francisco Public Library, and has the tough job of filling Susie's shoes as Curator of the Harrison Collection.

*Eo son sì ricco della povertate,
Che i'poria fornir Roma e Parise,
Genova, Pisa, Fiorenza, ed Assise,
Asti, Venezia, Padua civitate;
Perch' i' ho di possession tante fiata
Tra nihil e niente, ed altre guise,
Che i' recoglio all'anno com' si dise
Fra nulla e cica ben mille carrate.
Ed ho in danari liberi ed in gioie
Che val ben cento cifre, e fien ne gotta;
E sovra ciò gli amici empio di vento.
Sì che per spendre assai non mi spavento,
Purch' i' briganti vegnan a dirotta,
A mia ricchezza tollen tutte noie.*

BARTOLOMEO DI SANT'ANGELO