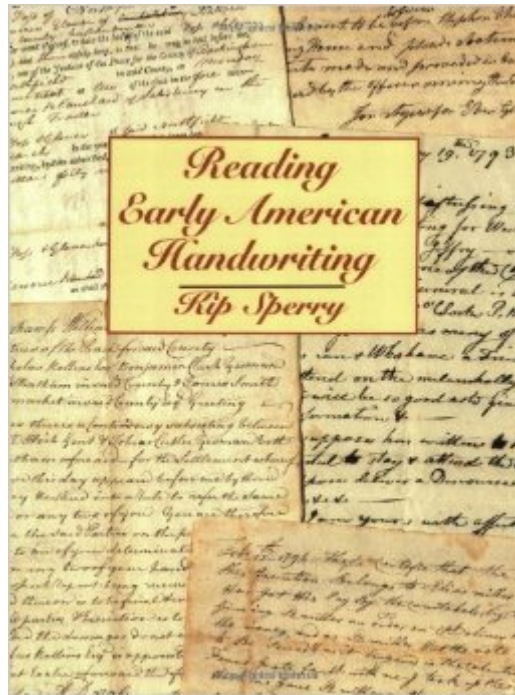


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# Reading Early American Handwriting



## Synopsis

This book is designed to teach you how to read and understand the handwriting found in documents commonly used in genealogical research. It explains techniques for reading early American documents; provides samples of alphabets and letter forms; defines terms and abbreviations commonly used in early American documents such as wills, deeds, and church records; and, furthermore, presents numerous examples of early American records for the reader to work with. Each document--nearly 100 of them at various stages of complexity--appears with the author's transcription on a facing page, enabling the reader to check his own transcription. Also covered in the work, with particular emphasis on handwriting, are numbers and roman numerals, dates and the change from the Julian Calendar to the Gregorian Calendar, abbreviations and contractions, and standard terms found in early American records.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (26 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

A serious genealogist does not depend on published versions of records but goes directly to the originals at the courthouse or the archives, and in doing this, he runs immediately into a sometimes startling realization: People in previous centuries often wrote things in a handwriting style that differs markedly from that used today. Generally, the farther back in time one goes, the more difficult reading original documents is likely to be. Kip Sperry (who is Certified, Accredited, and a Fellow of three national genealogical societies, as well as an experienced teacher) has addressed this problem by bringing together in this book a wide variety of examples of penmanship for the reader to practice on. However, he limits himself to only early American handwriting in English, so one will

find only limited assistance here in deciphering colonial Louisiana records in French and Spanish (which is of particular interest to me, unfortunately). An introductory chapter outlines the history of writing implements themselves, followed by an overview of the styles of penmanship that were taught in the early days of this country. Then he establishes guidelines for reading old documents, and on using context to puzzle out problem words, and also notes the limitations of reading them on microfilm. He describes the challenges of spelling variation, antique abbreviation and contraction, and idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation. Other chapters consider in detail the legal terminology one is likely to encounter, the forms that Arabic and Roman numerals are apt to take, and the effects of the 18th century calendar change. Four sample alphabets (with many variations in each) are reproduced from historical sources.

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