

IS SHORTHAND UNDER EMPHASIZED IN
OUR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Statement of Problem	2
	Procedures	3
	Limitations	4
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
	Objectives of Shorthand	5
	Vocational Aspects	5
	Personal Aspects	8
III.	THE DEMANDS OF BUSINESS	11
	Results of Survey	11
	The Stenotype	14
	The Dictating-Transcriber	14
	Comparative Salaries	17
	Qualifications	17
	Supply and Demand	20
IV.	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	22
	Summary	22
	Conclusions	22
	Recommendations	22
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	24
	APPENDIX	26

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Websters New International Dictionary describes shorthand as "A compendious and rapid method of writing by substituting characters, abbreviations, or symbols for letters, words, etc." This definition can be illustrated by a statement by Gladys Peck, "This is a jet age. Shorthand is jet writing."¹

The history of shorthand reveals that a form of abbreviated writing was used in early Greek times. As long ago as 63 B.C., several persons were believed to have developed systems for their own use. There is no evidence, however, that any of these systems were carried over to future generations.

The first patented method of abbreviated writing was introduced by Timothy Bright, an Englishman. Bright published his book, An Arte of Shorte, Swifte, and Secrete Writing by Character, in 1588. Queen Elizabeth I, to whom the book was dedicated, granted the author the exclusive privilege of publishing this book into text form and of teaching this method.

The first commercially used type of shorthand was invented by Sir Isaac Pitman. Sir Isaac mastered the art of shorthand, as it then existed, during his early childhood. Presumably dissatisfied, he devised a system of his own which later became known as the Pitman System. It was while serving as the headmaster of his own private school in 1837,

¹Peck, Gladys, "Counseling Todays Students About Shorthand", Business Education Forum, October, 1963, pp. 15-17.

that he had the Pitman System published as a textbook. After the publication of his text, he was successful in having the teaching of his system approved by the government for public schools in England. Today it is the most prevalent system used by English speaking countries outside of the United States.

The system which is the most predominant in the United States today was invented in 1888 by John Robert Gregg. He had difficulty selling his method in England because of the predominance of the Pitman System. He came to the United States and had his first book, Gregg Shorthand, published in 1893. He discovered that Pitman's System had preceded him here and had gained popularity on the East Coast. He therefore, moved to Chicago and set up his headquarters. He was successful in selling his system to schools in the South, West and Midwest. His method gained rapid popularity and today it is the most common form taught in our schools throughout the United States.

Many abbreviation systems have also been developed in recent years. Some such as Notehand, Speedwriting, and Briefhand are used and taught on a limited basis in business colleges. They will not be discussed in this work even though there may be an overlapping of the various forms in the minds of those who are not familiar with systems but are only concerned with their use.

Statement of Problem

The problem of low enrollment in shorthand classes has confronted many of our administrators and curriculum planners. The question arises as to how the student can be made aware of the vocational potential that is available to him through the study of shorthand.

This study was undertaken to determine the needs of businessmen for people qualified to take shorthand dictation as part of their employment. The ultimate goal of this study was to determine if the study of shorthand is important to the business training of the secretarial aspirant. In an effort to establish a sound basis on which to judge the merits and value of shorthand study, businessmen were contacted. These contacts were made to gain some insight as to whether present enrollments in shorthand will meet their needs for trained personnel in the future as indicated by past and present trends.

Procedures

This writer made a comprehensive survey of business enterprises and government offices in the city of Bismarck, North Dakota. The survey was conducted by personally calling at each office in the state capitol building, city and county offices, and each private business enterprise large enough to warrant employment of office personnel. A request for information was asked for from either the employer or the personnel manager. The cooperation received and the willingness to give the information requested was exceptional. In not a single instance was the author refused admittance nor was he denied any information asked for. At all times, the courtesy extended was of the highest degree.

Employment agencies, which included the North Dakota State Employment Service and the Merit System Council, were contacted by personal interview to gain a comparison of employment opportunities for office workers with and without shorthand. This also afforded the writer the opportunity to obtain comparative wage data for office workers in other

job classifications as compared to the stenographer. Minimum standards for qualification for jobs under the Merit System were obtained.

Limitations

The survey of businessmen, government offices, and employment agencies was limited to Bismarck, North Dakota. The study was limited to such because it is the employment area or center for high school graduates in this author's area. Because of the large number of government offices and private business concerns, it offered a wide variety of office occupations.

Names of persons interviewed will not be used so as not to offend them nor to possibly embarrass them.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The object of shorthand study is to develop a means of writing quickly and accurately and in such a manner that the characters can be transcribed into meaningful typewritten copy. Shorthand is a skill which can be developed to a high degree of proficiency by constant practice. It is a specialization in itself.

All of us have read about prominent people who wrote shorthand and found it of immense value in their work; people like George Bernard Shaw, Woodrow Wilson, James Byrnes, Emil Ludwig, to name a few. Recently we learned of another prominent public servant who writes shorthand: The Honorable Louis J. Lefkowitz, Attorney General of the State of New York. In fact, it was learned that he studied shorthand at the High School of Commerce in New York City. In an address before the New York State Shorthand Reporters Association, Mr. Lefkowitz said, in part:

I took Gregg Shorthand in the High School of Commerce, from which I graduated in 1921. I still use my Gregg. In court I take notes. Often at home I make notes for a speech or draft legislation in shorthand.

With all due respect for such subjects as math, history, science, and the like, I cannot think of any subject that has served me better than the Gregg Shorthand I learned in my high school days. I don't know what I would do without it. I can be on a plane or a train and make shorthand notes and be able to do it in such a short time that it is a pleasure!²

²Zoubek, Charles E., "This and That", Business Teacher, January-February, 1965, p. 8.

Our technological and economic growth brings with it demands for specialization. This introduces a need for broader preparation for the employment markets. An individual aspiring for the best position in the secretarial field has many areas of specialization. As later statements will show, one of the most productive areas is in the field of law and a position as a legal secretary. Because of new and stricter government controls and changing regulations, law is becoming increasingly more important to everyone. As seen by the changes in social security laws, income tax regulations, labor relations, to name a few, the legal implications imposed upon our society are numerous.

Not only are there more law offices today, but the scope of the legal profession has changed. Businessmen are ever mindful of the need to transact their affairs in accordance with the "regulations". Many depend either upon one lawyer or upon a law firm for legal counsel. Many businesses have a lawyer permanently employed as part of their staff. It is very common to find in corporations and most all branches of the government a legal department. Each of these departments in turn employ stenographers as well as other clerical aides.

There are many other fields of specialization for secretaries but the field of law was mentioned here as an example in that it is possibly the most demanding. Many schools, business training institutions more so than high schools, are offering specialized programs in the secretarial field. Courses for legal secretary, medical secretary, insurance underwriting, and others are offered. Only the larger metropolitan high schools or vocational schools are able to attract enough enrollees to offer these specialized courses as a part of their regular curriculum.

From the preceding statements it is not intended to infer that the secretary needs further training than she can obtain in the high school. This is not true. The majority of secretarial positions are open in small business firms. These firms accept lesser trained personnel in many instances than would the offices dealing in more technical work. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook,³ there are three types: stenographers, court reporters, and secretaries. The first two are normally categorized as specialized fields requiring more education and experience. It states that high school training will satisfy most employers. It further states that in 1960, there were nearly two million persons employed in occupations requiring stenographic skills. Of this figure, 95 per cent were women. It estimates that by 1975, four million more will be engaged in this type of work.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts thousands of new openings each year because of business expansion and the increase in government services. In addition, the turnover in the women active on the labor market creates a tremendous demand on the available supply.

Robert A. Baker, in an article syndicated by the UPI and published in daily papers throughout the country, quotes Mr. Herman Miller of the Stenotype Company of California as saying, "There is a definite shortage of qualified secretaries, not only in this area, but nationwide. Girls with good shorthand and typing skills can call their own shots when it

³U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1963, pp. 267-275.

comes to job opportunities. For every two employers who want a 'Girl Friday', there is one applicant for the job."

Mr. Miller noted that the City of Los Angeles will pay \$375 a month for a girl just out of high school and trained in shorthand and typing. He said that there is evidence that the secretarial situation will not improve in the near future. Mr. Miller feels that the school systems are not turning out enough qualified girls. He blames part of the shortage on the fact that vocational avenues previously closed to women are now opening up and many are choosing these other fields of work.

Miller and other authorities see two answers to the problem. High school counselors must point out to students the excellent career possibilities available in the secretarial field. Also, women who did not take secretarial courses in high school must be encouraged to begin training in business schools or night classes to acquire the necessary skills.

The salary quoted for beginning secretaries is very much in accordance with that quoted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1961-1962. According to wage data gathered by them at this time, the average salary of women engaged in the secretarial and stenographic field ranged from \$75.50 to \$94.00 per week. This compared to a range of \$63.50 to \$75.50 per week for typists. There is little doubt that these salary figures have changed considerably in the past four years and are markedly increased.

The study of shorthand by high school students need not be limited to those desirous of becoming secretaries. The teaching profession is

continually in need of persons qualified to teach the subject. Nearly every opening for commercial instructors at the high school level specifies that they must be able to teach shorthand.

Youngsters find shorthand valuable to them in many other ways. The student may use it in taking class notes. He may use it for drafts of various items. Above all, the challenge of studying and succeeding in a class that is basically different can instill a sense of pride in a student.

A survey conducted by Alma Dean⁴ in 1963, showed that 93 per cent of the high school graduates having taken shorthand considered it a valuable course. Ninety per cent of these students were still in school and 87 per cent were still using their shorthand.

This would tend to indicate that more students could benefit by taking the subject. It is realized, of course, that many times our students are guided improperly. In this age of missiles, astronauts, and moon probes, the high school student is often guided into as many science and mathematics courses as possible leaving little time for "useless" subjects in his curriculum of studies.

Bob Vooge made some interesting statements in his article discussing the matter of high school guidance. As a high school student, he desired to take shorthand. Mr. Vooge quotes his administrator as saying,

⁴Dean, Alma, "Do Students Make Use of Their Notehand", Business Education World, September, 1963, p. 22.

"I think you will get much more value out of an additional course in science or math. Why in the world do some of you boys want to take shorthand -- for an easy grade, or to be with your girl friends? . . . A boy would be wasting his time . . . I doubt that many girls will be using shorthand in the future⁵. . ."

It is realized that all administrators and guidance personnel do not take the attitude that Mr. Vooge's administrator did nor are they as direct about expressing it. Even so, it is the thinking of many. Mr. Vooge eventually studied shorthand in college in preparation for a teaching career.

Results of the survey taken and discussed in the next chapter will also tend to indicate the fallacy of this thinking.

⁵Vooge, Bob, "I Didn't Take Shorthand in High School", Business Education World, February, 1964, p. 19.

CHAPTER III
THE DEMANDS OF BUSINESS

The survey of business and government offices was conducted in Bismarck, North Dakota by personally calling at each office. The author called on over sixty government offices including federal, state, county, and city units. Nearly one hundred private business offices were visited. The number of office employees in each office ranged from one to a maximum of eighty-six in the state tax department. The aggregate employment in all offices was 2724 employees. Over nine hundred of these worked in the various government offices and the remainder were employed by private business firms. Employers were asked to enumerate only those who were specifically hired to do office work such as stenographers, typists, file clerks, and bookkeepers, etc. Administrative personnel were not included in the survey.

Four hundred fifty-four or nearly 20 per cent of the office workers were required as a condition of their employment to have the ability to take shorthand dictation. A note of interest here was that 25 per cent of the government employees were required to take shorthand whereas less than 15 per cent of the employees in private businesses used shorthand. In fact, the largest single business employer surveyed was the head office of the Provident Life Insurance Company. The company had seventy-two office employees and only one was required to take shorthand. This lady was employed as the private secretary to the president of the company.

The personnel director of Provident Life Insurance Company commented that they do not use shorthand dictation in any of their offices. All of their correspondence and other material was taken care of by a

TABLE I
EMPLOYEE ANALYSIS

Type of Office	Number of Employees	Number Taking Shorthand Dictation	Dictating-Transcribing Machines in Use
Federal Government	161	48	18
State Government	582	115	140
County Government	86	34	13
City Government	78	29	11
Private Business	1817	228	122

central dictating unit. The director pointed out that they were the first business in Bismarck to install a central dictating-transcribing unit. This unit consisted of one central tape recording unit and a desk station at 32 different desks. The unit had been installed over twenty years ago and was used for all dictation. Four typists were hired to do the transcription. The personnel director stated that it involved a considerable saving to the company as it would take from 15 to 20 stenographers to do the work now handled by the dictating unit and the four transcribing typists.

Provident Life Insurance Company in this case was the exception. Only one other office used a central dictating unit with desk stations. This office, the State Tax Department, had installed their unit within the past two years. This department was the largest single employer with a total of 86 employees doing office work. Thirteen of these employees were used for dictation and one was used to type transcription from the dictating unit. The employment manager pointed out that the dictating-transcribing unit was not used nearly as much as it possibly should be. His observation was that the older executives were reluctant to part with their stenographers and were hesitant in trying the dictating unit. When asked if fewer stenographers would be needed as the executives became more accustomed to the use of the dictating machine, he noted that nearly 50 per cent of dictation would still be taken by stenographers as it involved taking minutes of meetings, short memos, and rush correspondence. It was his view that the stenographic force now employed would be assigned other duties in addition to stenographic work to fill in their time.

Every government office surveyed had at least one person on its staff capable of taking shorthand dictation. Sixty per cent of these same offices had five employees or less. The ratio of stenographers to the total office staff ranged from 20 per cent up to 100 per cent. The legal departments most frequently had all of their staff being used as stenographers. As an example, the offices of the Attorney General and the Assistant Attorney Generals were as a rule small. From two to four girls were employed in each and in all cases these girls were used for shorthand dictation when needed as well as other duties.

Each office surveyed, both government and private, was asked if any Stenotype machines were in use. The Stenotype is a recent invention which types letters and letter combinations using the English alphabet. Its promoters claim that one can become proficient on this machine to a point where he can take dictation on it at a greater speed than in shorthand. Only one of these machines was being used in the nearly 160 offices contacted. Most of the employers expressed little if any knowledge of the Stenotype machine and would not make any commitment as to whether they would use them or not. Upon further investigation, it was determined that none of the business training institutions in Bismarck were training students on the Stenotype machine. The lone machine in use was owned by a secretary who had recently moved to Bismarck from another area of the country. Because of the above mentioned conditions, further mention of the Stenotype will not be made in this article.

Part of this survey was to determine whether the dictating-transcribing machine is replacing the stenographer. There are many types of

this machine. They vary from tape recorders to disk records to a belt type recording device. At no time during the survey was any evaluation of the various machines intended nor will they be evaluated as a part of this author's work.

The information gathered on this phase of the survey was amazing even to this writer. The dictating-transcribing machine had become a regular part of nearly every business. Over 90 per cent of the offices surveyed made use of one type machine or another for a part of their dictation work. Over 300 machines were in use in the various offices in addition to the previously mentioned central dictating units. Every office that employed five or more on its office staff had at least one machine. The only offices, both private business and government, that did not have a dictating machine were the small one or two girl offices.

The State Highway Department was an excellent example of the large office using both shorthand and the dictating-transcribing unit in large quantities. The department employed 75 office workers. Twenty-five or one-third of the staff was used in taking shorthand dictation to some extent. The department also had 45 dictating-transcribing machines in use in the offices. The personnel director stated that the dictating machines were used the majority of the time during the course of the business day by the executives. Shorthand dictation was used for short business letters, taking minutes of meetings and correspondence which needed immediate attention. The personnel director did not feel that their stenographic force had decreased because of the increased use of the dictating machine. He expressed the opinion that the present force of

stenographers would remain very much the same in the future as well. The nature of the work now done by stenographers would remain pretty much constant thereby preventing any reduction in the number employed.

The State Highway Department is cited here as the practices used here were very much indicative of what this writer found elsewhere. The stenographer was needed but the dictating-transcriber was taking over much of the routine dictation work.

As the survey progressed, it was found that the demand for experienced stenographers was very competitive. A girl who could take shorthand well, type rapidly, and use the dictating-transcribing equipment proficiently was the exception according to many business representatives. In almost every instance the employers in government offices in particular emphasized these points:

1. They had to rely on legislative appropriations to run their departments. The appropriations were generally inadequate to hire additional help when needed. Using the dictating-transcriber allowed them to gain more work from the present staff without overloading them. Speed and accuracy in typing, therefore, was a basic necessity.

2. The increased volume of work being required of each department necessitated finding new ways to accomplish routine tasks quickly and with a minimum of personnel involved.

3. The work was continually becoming more technical and more exacting. As a result, it took much longer to train new personnel. Experience as a secretary was almost a necessity before being hired in a majority of the offices.

4. Competition between private business and the government offices for the good experienced secretary has resulted in very attractive salaries being offered to retain or hire new secretarial employees.

It became very evident to this author as the survey progressed that shorthand was a necessary requirement for girls wanting the most competitive positions. The experienced secretary in many offices received a higher wage than the executives in the same office. Salaries of from \$450 to \$600 a month were not uncommon. One department head stated, "We have to keep them if we can even if it means out-bidding someone else. We can't afford to take time to train inexperienced help even if they are excellent people." Another executive verified this statement and was even more specific. He said, "It is not too difficult to find a good shorthand writer or a good typist. Give me a girl who can do both well and she can demand a good salary here."

Beginning salaries for secretaries or stenographers were not nearly as attractive by any means. Only about 10 per cent of the offices paid a higher starting salary to a beginner with shorthand. The main reason given for this was that every girl was given all the way from 30 to 90 days training period. If she proved capable at the end of this training period, then the wage increase would be between \$10 to \$15 higher than for other job classifications with equal experience.

One question asked at all of the offices drew a response that was surprising to this author. When asked what shorthand speed was required as a condition of employment to a position, with few exceptions the answer was 70 to 80 words per minute. Some stated that they made no

stipulation as to speed. To this writer the speed indicated seemed slow but the employers maintained that speed was no problem. A frequent response was that if they could hire a capable, intelligent girl who was really serious about her work, she would improve herself with experience and be very satisfactory. Possibly the most important reason that the employers were not too much concerned about the shorthand capabilities was the fact that most of the secretarial help they hired was hired through the North Dakota State Employment Service. The employment service thoroughly tested applicants in all of the basic skills before recommending them to an employer. The only exception to this seeming lack of concern was, of course, the legal departments and lawyers' offices. They demanded 120 to 150 words a minute or better if they could secure this qualification. It was very evident throughout the city that these people were hard to secure. Their services were at a premium. It was interesting to note that the majority of the secretaries in these law offices had been there for lengthy periods of time.

One young Assistant Attorney General was very expressive in pointing out his views on the problem of securing good legal stenographers. He pointed out that his work many times took him to nearly every county in the state for court hearings and other legal matters pertaining to his office. He stated that it was alarming to him that most of the county legal offices were unable to secure stenographic personnel that were capable of taking dictation rapidly enough to be of any value in court hearings. He cited one instance where in one of the larger county seats he had to rent the services of a stenographer from time to time as one was needed. Securing her services from a private business firm in the

city had cost him and his department as high as \$10 per hour for her services. In other instances, a court reporter from the Attorney General's office had to accompany him out on the road. This was not the most desirable either as it meant removing a person from a job where he was frequently needed. In addition, the department had to pay expenses to the employee while he was on the road.

This young legal assistant expressed his views in areas other than on shorthand and they seem appropriate to mention at this time. In discussing the caliber and training of young women who have made application for employment in the office, he had these comments:

1. "The girls can't spell. The high schools need to emphasize it more."
2. "Many good stenographic applicants are weak in grammar. They can't write a complete sentence that makes sense."
3. "Vocabulary is the biggest drawback for success in any field. It is more so in the legal field because of the terminology used."
4. "Give more shorthand in high school so that girls can enter the labor market sooner. By the time a girl is fully prepared in business training, she is also ready for marriage and lost to us in a short time."
5. "Our high school students are burdened with a college preparatory curriculum that requires subjects such as algebra, geometry, literature, ancient history and other subjects which they never use. They could very easily be replaced by more vocational courses."

The final question asked at all of the offices was: Do you have any difficulty in obtaining enough qualified stenographic applicants for openings on your staff?

To this question the business official gave a negative reply with few exceptions which have already been discussed. The offices that hired inexperienced girls and as a rule had the largest turnover found that the supply was seasonal. When schools dismiss in June, they have 15 to 20 applicants for every job opening. During the winter months the supply of applicants is meager and the selection is poor. The caliber and competence of the applicants during the winter months is generally inferior as the better students go on to college.

The trend indicated by most employers was to anticipate their turnover and hire and train replacement personnel during the summer months. This method had a two-fold purpose. It allowed the businessman to have a good selection from which to choose employees and it gave him replacement personnel in his office while the regular employees were taking their vacations. The summer months were also mentioned as the peak load periods. This not only allowed for new employees to get their training under experienced help but their help was necessary to maintain the business. This period of the year created the big turnover because of marriage and by fall the force was generally stable for the remainder of the year.

Only three young men were found to be working as full-time stenographers. Their salaries were not made available to this writer but it was indicated that they were very well paid individuals. Employers,

when asked if they would hire men as stenographers, generally replied, "Yes, but they just aren't available." Many indicated that this could be the answer to their problems. The employment of men as stenographers would certainly add stabilization to the office force. Men, it was felt, are usually more anxious to seek permanent employment or career opportunities than women. They enter the labor market and continue to be a part of it while women drop out in a relatively short time and marry and raise a family. Some of these women do, of course, re-enter the labor market after their youngsters have entered school or have grown up. After this lapse of time, it is necessary to go through another period of retraining for developing proficiency.

An interview with the employment bureau officials added very little other than to verify statements made by businessmen. They did indicate that only about one-half of the applicants for shorthand positions were able to pass the test which was administered to them. Most of these were girls just out of high school and had only one year of shorthand training. Here again, they felt that the supply and demand were seasonal. They seldom were able to get a stenographer applicant with experience as most of them were able to gain employment on their own.

CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this survey were quite conclusive. The well trained secretary is still in great demand. Premium wages are being paid to secure and retain experienced personnel. The turnover is, as a rule, quite large in all but a few offices. This creates a continual demand for new personnel.

The dictating-transcribing machine is being used to a far greater extent than anticipated. The dictator finds it convenient because he many times does a large portion of his correspondence work after regular office hours. Its use has not resulted in a reduction in the number of office employees but allows for more efficient use being made of them. It does demand that the present stenographer be more versatile and be trained for multi-purpose duties.

A shortage exists for well trained, experienced stenographers particularly in the legal offices. There is normally a plentiful supply of applicants for positions that are open to the inexperienced worker. An absence of young men working as stenographers possibly indicates the tendency to think that it is only a woman's job.

Recommendations

After careful consideration of all the facts, the following recommendations are deemed appropriate.

1. More capable high school students should be encouraged and guided into a career as a stenographer.

2. Two years of shorthand is necessary to qualify a high school graduate for most stenographic positions. It is recommended that all high schools offer a minimum of two years training in shorthand.

3. High schools need to train students to be more proficient in all areas of office work. Shorthand, typing, filing, copying and duplicating machine operation, and adding and calculating machine operation are mentioned as the areas most lacking.

4. Training in the use of the transcribing machines has become a necessity and can be gained with a minimum of time and expense to the high school. It is recommended that high school officials investigate the possibility of purchasing or renting dictating-transcribing machines from local office supply stores. The machines are usually available at a nominal cost to the school and come with complete lesson plans for student transcription practice.

5. More time should be devoted in the high school to development of the basic skills, particularly grammar and spelling.

6. Administrative and guidance personnel need to be made aware of the opportunities available to young men and women through the study of shorthand.

7. More young men should be encouraged to enter the stenographic field. This guidance should start in the high school.

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APPENDIX

