

Historical Highlight

Thomas Ewing French (1871–1944)

Like many other notable men, Thomas E. French had many interests: etching, bookplates, paper making, traveling, and many more. The most important of his interests was probably engineering drawing. He was both a teacher and a writer in this subject area. In fact, he even was influential in coining the term “engineering drawing.”

French was born and raised in Ohio. There he attended public school, Cooper Academy, and Miami Business College. It was during high school that he also took a night class in mechanical drawing and qualified as a draftsman. He was hired at the Smith-Vale Company and quickly advanced to chief draftsman. However, French decided he was meant for a slightly different path. While working for Smith-Vale he also had taught a drawing class at the YMCA, and this helped lead to his decision to leave his job and attend Ohio State University.

French did well at Ohio State, assisting one of his professors with a book on mechanics, and upon graduating he immediately was hired as a professor. When the university

created a Department of Engineering Drawing, French was appointed department head at age 35. French went on to write and collaborate on many textbooks, the first of which was called *A Manual of Engineering Drawing* and was written for the newly created McGraw-Hill Book Company. Another book that he helped to write was *Mechanical Drawing for High Schools*, which was written to help standardize the teaching of engineering drawing in the public school system. These were just two of many books that he wrote, and all of his books were used very widely.

Thomas E. French was an influential teacher, author, and man. His students found him to be a wonderful teacher, and his books were used everywhere. After his death, his family created a fellowship for the Engineering Graphics Department at Ohio State University. This fellowship is used to support graduate students working in engineering graphics. The lead author of this text, Gary Bertoline, was a recipient of this fellowship.