

Forging History: The Detection of Fake Letters & Documents. By Kenneth W. Rendell. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. Pp. vi, 171. Illustrations, selected bibliography, index. \$24.95.)

This is a fascinating and informative book by an internationally recognized expert and dealer in rare historical documents. At the outset of the book Kenneth W. Rendell explains and illustrates the different ways in which experts detect frauds by the meticulous analysis of handwriting. In illustration after illustration he shows that under a microscope the formation of letters, the lifting of the pen, the extent of pressure, and the nature of an individual writing instrument can betray the work of a forger. Rendell also explains the difference in the methods of the document examiner who testifies in court and the document dealer who validates what he sells. (Never buy anything without a lifetime guarantee.) Ironically, this book could serve as a guide to forgers on ways to avoid detection.

The reader will be intrigued by and will enjoy studying the book's illustrations and trying to see the extent of the differences in each of the examples given. Rendell provides samples of the genuine and forged hands of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Adolph Hitler, and many others. He also imparts fascinating information on ink, paper, watermarks, and other pieces of physical evidence.

The initial technical chapters may be off-putting to the lay person, but when Rendell discusses great forgeries and recent frauds, it becomes clear why he has included them: the science and art of detection cannot be understood or appreciated without an explanation of technical materials. Most readers will be interested in famous recent forgeries, and here Rendell is excellent as he writes about episodes in which he participated and people he has known. The history of the spurious Hitler diaries; the astonishing and tragic story of the fraudulent Mormon documents that shook that church; and the tale of Jack the Ripper, where Rendell played a role in exposing the forgeries, are in themselves worth the cost of the book.

Rendell sounds a tad self-serving in depicting his role in these events, but not without some justification. By-and-large, he deserves credit for what he has accomplished. Rendell has few kind words for historians who, he feels, are too easily duped; they should leave validation to experts. What comes through clearly in the book is that forgers are human: they make mistakes and they will be found out. The simplest mistake they make, he observes, is the anachronism—the use of words and ideas that do not fit together chronologically. This reviewer, with eyes sensitized to that particular flaw, cannot resist pointing out that Rendell, who is no forger,

writes of "the United States in the late 1750s" (p. 36)! No historian worth his salt would make that error.

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The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Culture Comes to Kansas City.

By Kristie C. Wolferman. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993. Pp. viii, 225. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

The history of American art museums is, in many respects, the history of American civic pride, of American grand tourists gaining awareness of and emulating European culture, and of American private patronage. No such history is more fascinating or impressive than that of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. That history is admirably recounted by Kristie C. Wolferman in her recently published book, written for the sixtieth anniversary of the museum. Wolferman relates how, between 1911 and 1933, the aspirations of Mary Atkins and William Rockhill Nelson produced one of the finest civic art museums in the country. It was an astonishing accomplishment: the trustees of the Atkins and Nelson estates planned, designed, and built the museum even before a real collection had been created.

The trustees began a serious collection just a few years before the museum was due to open in 1933. A combination of common sense, good taste, ambition, and intelligence enabled this remarkable group of men and women to assemble important works by great masters and equally important great works by then lesser known figures. When the museum did open, the collections included masterpieces of European and Eastern cultures set in a grand, neoclassically designed structure embellished with particularly fine landscaping of the kind that had long been the hallmark of Kansas City's urban design.

Wolferman recounts the story of the museum clearly and concisely. Her introduction places the development of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art within the context of American museums in general. Her first chapter is devoted to Atkins, whose bequest of one million dollars started the project. A rather more lengthy chapter is devoted to the fascinating character of Nelson, who should be of interest to Hoosiers since his roots lie in Indiana: he received his degree at Notre Dame, and he lived and practiced law in Fort Wayne.

Anyone interested in midwestern history cannot fail to enjoy this book, which focuses on one of the Midwest's major institutions.