

# CALEB PHILLIPS, A PIONEER SHORTHAND TEACHER.

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On March 20, 1728, the newspaper "Boston Gazette" published the advertisement of the shorthand teacher Caleb Phillips, where he claimed to be a "New Shorthand Method" teacher, offering shorthand lessons by correspondence.

The fact, apparently with no great importance, eventually became a historical fact. Caleb Phillips was being **the first** to use *distance learning*.

Today it is impossible to talk about DL (Distance Learning) without mentioning Caleb Phillips. In any treatise, any study, any research on "distance learning", "e-learning" and "m-learning, the shorthand teacher's name Caleb Phillips is mentioned.

The advertisement of the Boston Gazette, which was the first explicit mentioning of distance learning ever heard about said the following:

*"... any person in this country, desirous to learn this Art, may, by having several lessons sent weekly to them, be perfectly instructed, as those who live in Boston."*

At the time of Caleb Phillips, shorthand was booming. It was widespread to large cities, not only in the U.S., but also in Europe and specially in England, the birthplace of shorthand of the Modern Era.

It all began way before, with Timothy Bright, a physician in London and Healing in Methley and Barwich, who launched his shorthand system "Characterie" in 1588, leading to the rebirth of shorthand. From 1588 onwards, new authors and new shorthand systems turned up, reaching almost all the countries of Europe and then finally reaching the colony... the United States.

In the U.S., British systems were used and autochthonous systems were developed.

The need to put the spoken word on record (at that time, obviously, there were no tape recorders or other mechanical and technological resources for this purpose), political effervescence, speeches, sermons, expansion of trade, need for intensive correspondence exchange, personal diaries, all these found in shorthand the ideal element.

Unlike conventional writing that is, long and slow, shorthand with its abbreviations and fast writing, saved a lot of time! That is when stenographer secretaries began to appear. The head of the company or business, for example, dictated the letter, the secretary wrote it in shorthand and then did the translation. Great personalities, educated people, either knew shorthand or had stenographers to do the work.

It is known that Boston, founded by the British in 1630, became a major culture center of Anglo-Saxon America. Because it was a culture center, it is only natural that it would be the place for shorthand to thrive.

Caleb Phillips' greatest merit was to have dared. Even today, with modern means of online learning, there are people who doubt that it is possible to learn shorthand without onsite classes. At Caleb Phillips' time, disbelief should have certainly been greater. But like all pioneers and idealists, he believed in his audacious initiative. And like all pioneers, eventually went down in history.

Later, others took Caleb Phillips' initiative. An important attempt related to shorthand distance learning was initiated in 1840 in England by Isaac Pitman, the acclaimed author of the Pitman shorthand system. He began to teach shorthand through postcards. He would send postcards to students with passages of the Bible for the students to write in shorthand and then send back to him for correction.

And later, in 1852, his brother, Benn Pitman, great disseminator of the Pitman method in the United States and founder of the Phonographic Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, taught shorthand through correspondence courses.

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