

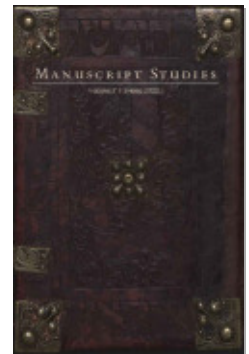


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Shorthand Crosses the Atlantic: An Overview and Preliminary Census of Shorthand Manuscripts in Early American Archives

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LIKE HIS FELLOW New England colonists, Cotton Mather believed that the physical and spiritual worlds were intertwined. In the prairie and the parish, God spoke to his chosen people in special ways.¹ There were certain events that required rumination and explication: what did the ill omen—the blight on a neighbor’s crop or the sick farm animal—mean for the community? When was it proper to fast, and for how long? To look for signs also entailed the need to interpret them, something less straightforward in practice than principle. Still, there was some evidence of God’s handiwork that was self-evident, plain, simple, and thus all the more perturbing for Mather when it went unacknowledged, even taken for granted. In a September 1711 diary entry, the minister reflected with palpable irritation: “There are certain Points, wherein the great God has infinitely obliged Mankind, and yet they take little Notice of His Goodness.” Wont as always

1 David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 71. Making sense of signs was a popular genre of writing in early New England. Among noteworthy examples is Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (Boston: Printed by R.P., 1689).

to offer advice, Mather continued: “I would bespeak the Praises of devout Minds unto God, on these occasions. Such are, the Use of *Spectacles*, the *Mariner’s Compass*, Printing; *Shorthand*; the Instruments whereby *Time* is measured.”² On this day, the colonial Puritan did not dwell on the point, for there were other apparent vices to lament. It is not too difficult, however, to fathom what Mather meant. These were technical innovations that both revealed and reinforced God’s majesty: spectacles allowed one to witness God’s bounty; the compass enabled travel to new places, like pilgrimage from old to new world; the press facilitated the proliferation of God’s word; and the measurement of time itself functioned almost like a global book of hours that imposed structure and order for God’s work on Earth. But *what* was shorthand? And *how* could it be numbered among other such useful inventions?

What follows in this present article is one of the first attempts to examine the particularities of early American shorthand writings. Mather was not alone in marveling at shorthand—that is, a form of compact writing that, in principle, was the scribal equivalent of the modern tape recorder. Scores of New England men and women actually noticed shorthand’s utility and reflected on the pious, or otherwise pragmatic uses that the specific type of notetaking could serve. Shorthand appeared in the classroom and courtroom, in merchant records and meetinghouse sermon notes, in songs and psalms, in margins of printed works and scraps of reused paper. Despite shorthand’s widespread prevalence, few historians have ever ventured to account for this scribal practice, let alone read many of the shorthand manuscripts. The time is ripe to take stock of the thousands of shorthand manuscripts habitually ignored in the archive, but which may offer insight into the social, scribal, political, religious, civil, and domestic life of early America.

Historical Context

The history of shorthand is a long one. Easily dating back to antiquity, and stretching up to the present day, shorthand has captured the attention of

2 Cotton Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather, 1681–1724*, vol. 2 (Boston: The Society, 1911), 110.

many historical notetakers. In his life of Cato the Younger, first-century historian Plutarch credits Cicero with promulgating the practice.³ Pliny the Elder, author of a massive ancient encyclopedia on natural history, further attests to Cicero's fascination with compendious penmanship: "Keeness of sight has achieved instances transcending belief in the highest degree. Cicero records that a parchment copy of Homer's poem *The Iliad* was enclosed in a nutshell."⁴ Whether or not we are to trust this nutty parable remains open for debate. It is clear, though, that abbreviated writing caught the attention of other classical writers, as Seneca, Manilius, and Martial likewise praised how the pen could outpace the tongue.⁵ Further, there is good evidence that Marcus Tullius Tiro, Cicero's slave and amanuensis, developed a system of characters that proved influential.⁶ During the Middle Ages, various methods appeared for recording speech via symbols, signs, and abbreviations.⁷

3 Plutarch, *Lives: Sertorius and Eumenes: Phocion and Cato the Younger*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 221. "The Romans did not employ or even possess what are called shorthand writers, but then for the first time, we are told, the first steps toward the practice were taken."

4 Pliny, *Natural History*, Books 3–7, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 561.

5 Martial, *Epigrammata*, 14:208–20 and 10:62; Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 90; and Manilius, *Astronomicon*, 4 197–200.

6 For a brief overview of Tironian shorthand, see Peter T. Daniels, "Shorthand," in *The World's Writing Systems*, ed. Peter T. Daniels and William Bright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 807–9. William Schmitz, *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1893), also contains rich charts on Tironian shorthand. On classical Greek shorthand, see Herbert Boge, *Griechische Tachygraphie und Tironische Noten* (Hildersheim: Olms, 1975).

7 M. B. Parkes, "Tachygraphy in the Middle Ages: Writing Techniques Employed For Reportations of Lectures and Sermons," in *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation, and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), 19–34; H. C. Teitler, *Notarii and Exceptores: An Inquiry into the Role and Significance of Shorthand Writers in the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Bureaucracy of the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1985); Carl Nordenfalk, "An Early Medieval Shorthand Alphabet," *Speculum* 14, no. 4 (1939): 443–47; and David Ganz, "On the History of Tironian Notes," in *Tironische Noten*, ed. Peter Ganz (Wiesbaden: Otton Harrassowitz, 1990), 35–51. A broad, synthetic survey of scribal practices can be found in Leila Avrin, *Scribes, Script, and Books: The Book Arts from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1991); and in the lengthy, information-rich introduction to John Haines, *The Notory Art of Shorthand (ars notoria notarie): A Curious Chapter in the History of Writing in the West* (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 1–81.

For the purposes of placing Mather's statement in the context of colonial New England, it is best to focus specifically on early modern England, a time and place of scribal fascination, competition, and innovation.⁸ In 1588, Dr. Timothy Bright introduced a type of proto-shorthand called *characterie*.⁹ Through a series of arbitrarily assigned symbols that could be adapted under certain prefixed rules, Bright promised English men and women a means by which "a swifte hande may therewith write orations, or publike actions of speech, uttered as becommeth the gravitie of such actions, verbatim."¹⁰ Bright's system was not without its difficulties; like mastering Mandarin, it required the memorization of hundreds of base forms that bore little resemblance to a noticeable alphabet. Still, *characterie* caught on.¹¹ The ineluctable appeal to Bright's method, albeit if more fiction than fact, rested in its raw ambition to capture information entirely. Even in antiquity, and especially in the early modern period, learned men and women frequently

8 Michael Mendle, Peter Stallybrass, and Heather Wolfe, *Technologies of Writing in the Age of Print*, 28 September 2006–17 February 2007, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC, online exhibition, https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Technologies_of_Writing_in_the_Age_of_Print. An extended account of manuscript culture in early modern England can be found in Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

9 Though brief, a rich descriptive bibliography of Bright's printed works can be found in Geoffrey Keynes, *Dr. Timothie Bright, 1550–1615: A Survey of His Life with a Bibliography of His Writings* (London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1962). A discussion of a manuscript handbook for Bright's on secret writing can be found in W. J. Carlton, "An Unrecorded Manuscript by Dr. Timothy Bright," *Notes and Queries* 11, no. 12 (1964): 463–65; and more broadly on Bright, W. J. Carlton, *Timothe Bright, doctor of phisicke: A memoir of the "father of modern shorthand"* (London: Elliot Stock, 1911). For more recent assessments of Bright's impact, see Patricia Brewerton, "Several Keys to Ope' the Character': The Political and Cultural Significance of Timothy Bright's 'Characterie,'" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 4 (2002): 945–61; and Lori Anne Ferrell, "Method as Knowledge: Scribal Theology, Protestantism, and the Reinvention of Shorthand in Sixteenth-Century England," in *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects, and Texts, 1400–1800*, ed. Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 163–77.

10 Timothie Bright, *Characterie: An Arte of Shorte, Swifte, and Secrete Writing by Character* (London: I. Windet, 1588), A3.

11 Frances Henderson, "'Swiftie and Secrete Writing' in Seventeenth-Century England, and Samuel Shelton's *Brachygraphy*," *Electronic British Library Journal* (2008), article 5.

complained about feelings of information overload.¹² If printed and manuscript material already engendered a sense of excess, the myriad lectures, sermons, speeches, orations, cases, and conversations in the early modern university, church, guild, court, council, and household did little to alleviate this anxiety. What Bright offered was not so much a means to manage oral information, but a manner to master it entirely. As early modern historian James Fleming aptly puts it: “if longhand notes were an attempt to gather the fruits from a discourse, characterie was an attempt to pluck up the whole tree. In that sense, it was actually an entirely different kind of writing technology from longhand note-taking.”¹³ Even if promise proved out of step with practice, compendious writing remained popular for decades to come.¹⁴

Not long after Bright’s characterie, more recognizable forms of shorthand (known also by various other names: stenography, tachygraphy, brachygraphy, zeilographia) arrived. Like Bright’s, these methods used an array of preselected characters, but this time in the interest of forming an alphabet. Through the manipulation of consonants placed either above, below, or beside one another, a user could elide vowels and express entire words in just a few strokes of the pen. Some textbooks still offered sets of random symbols to memorize, but the obvious advantage of shorthand over characterie was that it weighed less on the memory, the difference being a base alphabet to learn, rather than hundreds of words. Interest in shorthand soon exploded.

12 Ann Blair, “Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload, ca. 1550–1700,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 11–28; and Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

13 James Fleming, *The Mirror of Information in Early Modern England (John Wilkins and the Universal Character* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 78.

14 Kelly Minot McCay, “All the World Writes Short Hand: The Phenomenon of Shorthand in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Book History* 24 (2021): 1–36. See also Edward H. Butler, *The Story of British Shorthand* (London: Pitman, 1951); and Isaac Pitman, *A History of Shorthand*, 3rd ed. (London: Pitman & Sons, 1891). Briefer, but just as useful discussions of early modern English shorthand culture can be found in Adele Davidson, *Shakespeare in Shorthand: The Textual Mystery of King Lear* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 33–102; and James Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600–1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 7–43.

English shorthand reached its heyday at the turn of the seventeenth century, expanding beyond the elite interest of a few and “becoming something of a national craze.”¹⁵ Again, Fleming intimately understands the excitement shorthand caused for early modern men and women. “What occurs in brachigraphy [i.e., shorthand], almost miraculously, is a kind of hermeneutic splash—from voice onto page. . . . The tongue vanishes; it flees; it is crippled; tied. Command and control of the oral, represented by shorthand, is directed toward an orality that resists command and control.”¹⁶ Shorthand stood out as an enticing improvement to the already enticing practice of *characterie*.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, every author of a “new” stenographic approach floridly boasted his was the most expedient and innovative on the market. A particularly popular method, such as Thomas Shelton’s, would run through twenty-two editions (some unauthorized) in half a century, each one supposedly new, enlarged, or corrected.¹⁷ Another famed manual could, in the early eighteenth century, proudly profess its fifty-fifth edition.¹⁸ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at least one hundred different English men authored works on shorthand.¹⁹ The sheer variety of manuals should not be taken as evidence against the art’s efficacy, but rather as an indication of the popularity and market

15 Michael Mendle, “News and the Pamphlet Culture of Mid-Seventeenth-Century England,” in *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Dooley and Sabrina Baron (London: Routledge, 2001), 63.

16 Fleming, *The Mirror of Information*, 96.

17 Frances Henderson, “Shelton, Thomas (1600/01–1650?), Stenographer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2 November 2018, available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-25319> (accessed 5 March 2020).

18 Theophilus Metcalfe, *Short-writing the most easie, exact, lineal and speedy method that hath ever been obtained or taught: Composed by Theophilus Metcalfe, author and professor of the said art. The fifty-fifth edition* (London: Edmund Parker, 1721), referred to in Mendle, Stallybrass, and Wolfe, *Technologies of Writing in the Age of Print*.

19 This figure is based off the charts in Julius E. Rockwell, *Shorthand Instruction and Practice* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Education, 1893), 14–15. On the market competition among different shorthand authors, see Joel L. Gold, “The Battle of the Shorthand Books, 1635–1800,” *Publishing History* 15 (1984): 5–29.

competition in teaching different methods.²⁰ Of course, contemporaries did occasionally complain that shorthand manuals were equal parts alluring and elusive, a means to curry interest in a particular method, but with the real purpose of funneling befuddled readers to shorthand masters, often the authors of the very same manuals.

Shorthand in New England

Despite the modest attention dedicated to shorthand in early modern England, the place of this practice has gone largely unremarked upon in the context of the new world, where the historical stakes of shorthand research are far from self-apparent. Even the most magisterial historians of the book and manuscript culture in early America—David Hall, Meredith Neuman, Michael Brown, David Shields, Hugh Amory, Amy Morris, Michael Warner, or Jennifer Monaghan—treat shorthand only in passing, spending at most a single page on the scribal practice. Francis Sypher offers a blunt explanation for this inattention: “the reason that shorthand manuscripts have been neglected is not far to seek: at first sight shorthand writing has a baffling, discouraging appearance.”²¹ Making sense of shorthand almost invariably means making sense of seeming nonsense. A search through colonial archives not only turns up plentiful examples of shorthand, but likewise myriad instances of scholarly desperation. A note from an early nineteenth-century researcher trying to read shorthand was less than sanguine: “After considerable labor I despair of being able to decipher the short

20 Mendle, “News and the Pamphlet Culture,” 64. In *The Mirror of Information*, Fleming makes a similar point: “It’s perhaps a bit like the differences between operating systems today: programmers may care a lot about the different ways they work, but consumers care only that the work they do is mostly the same. Early modern short-writing systems were different technical means to a shared and marketable end” (81).

21 Francis Sypher, “The ‘Dayly Obseruation’ of an Impassioned Puritan: A Seventeenth-Century Shorthand Diary Attributed to Deputy Governor Francis Willoughby of Massachusetts,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 91 (1981): 91.

hand minutes of the conference, without other help than this book alone affords. . . . At best, it is bad chirography.”²²

Those that have tried to tackle the scribal practice have mainly been the editors of large-scale collections of colonial papers. Not without a tinge of uneasy superiority, L. H. Butterfield, the twentieth-century editor of the Adams papers, waxed eloquently: “Unlike the biographer or the monograph writer, the comprehensive editor . . . must cope with all varieties of wretched handwriting, with standard and idiosyncratic forms of shorthand.”²³ Understandably enough, the few editors who have been able to read shorthand in their particular source material have offered only brief notes on the text, without considering wider scribal practices and cultures. Even the most recent “decoding” of a shorthand manuscript of Roger Williams’s is a perfect case in point: for all the fanfare about unveiling supposed secrets, the study failed to recognize manifest details about shorthand’s use, culture, and prevalence.²⁴

The two most sustained efforts to uncover the place of shorthand in American history have come from practicing twentieth-century stenographers. Unfortunately, in both cases, these talented researchers never saw their projects to completion.²⁵ Perhaps it is time to finally pick the project

22 As quoted in Merdeith Neuman, *Jeremiah’s Scribes: Creating Sermon Literature in Puritan New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 223. Sypher, “The ‘Dayly Obseruation’ of an Impassioned Puritan,” 96, chronicles similar difficulties among other archivists.

23 L. H. Butterfield, “Editing Historical Documents,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 78 (1966): 99.

24 Linford D. Fisher and Lucas Mason-Brown, “By ‘Treachery and Seduction’: Indian Baptism and Conversion in the Roger Williams Code,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2014): 175–202.

25 This pair was Charles Currier Beale (1864–1909) and Horace Grant Healey (1867–1938). Beyond his teaching of shorthand and handwriting throughout different parts of New England, Beale avidly collected historical manuscripts, concerning which he often wrote article in venues like *The Phonographic Magazine*. Beale’s papers, kept at the New York Public Library special collections (MSS Col 235, especially box 4), are a veritable gold mine of stenographic riches. Beyond his own draft sketches of few early American practitioners of shorthand, Beale’s papers include numerous early modern English manuscripts in shorthand. Healey was

back up and consider the masses of manuscripts that we have largely ignored. After all, there is much to consider. Presented here for the first time is an original census of the myriad number of shorthand manuscripts that lie unexamined throughout New England archives and beyond.

The census is an initial, though by no means comprehensive, attempt to chronicle the quantity and diversity of early American shorthand manuscripts from roughly 1600 to 1800. In terms of style, content, form, and extent of shorthand, these items vary. I have grouped manuscripts that have broadly shared characteristics, though even among the same headings, considerable variety is to be found. Scrupulous readers will quickly notice that most of these items are now in New England institutions, with a few outliers in New Jersey or New York. The limited geographic spread is largely due to the realities of my own research mobility (especially in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, beginning in spring 2020). Undoubtedly, there must be ample surviving examples of early American shorthand to be found in collections in other colonial states. It is hoped that this census, incomplete though it may be, will serve as a source of inspiration and contextualization for librarians and historians across American archives trying to make sense of their own colonial shorthand records.

also a teacher of penmanship and involved in various stenography related publications. His papers too are a treasure trove of shorthand material. Preserved at the Yale University Archives (MS 1027), Healey's notebooks showcase a history of shorthand that he too was planning. Judging from the scrapbooks, Healey was interested in the early modern origins of English shorthand, as well as contemporary stenographers. Healey's notebooks include photos, transcripts, and images of various shorthand specimens. It is a shame that both stenographers never saw their projects to full completion, but any researcher interested in shorthand from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries should know how rich these collections are.

TABLE 1. Early American Shorthand Manuscripts

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
<i>Sermon Notes</i>			
Notes on Sermons by George Moxon	John Pynchon	1640	Congregational Library and Archives
Sermon Notes, possible those of Jon Pinch	John Pynchon	1640–1641	American Antiquarian Society
Notes on Sermons Delivered at the First Church in Ipswich, Massachusetts		1645–1646	Massachusetts Historical Society
Notebook, 1649	Michael Wigglesworth	1649	New England Historic Genealogical Society
Sermon Notes	Anon/Richard Mather	ca. 1650	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript
Notes on Sermons [in Shepard Family Papers]	Thomas Shepard I	ca. 1650	American Antiquarian Society
Notes: on sermons, manuscript, 1651–1652	John Chickering	1651–1652	Houghton Library
Notebook, 1652–1653	Michael Wigglesworth	1652–1653	New England Historic Genealogical Society
Notebook 1658–1763	Michael Wigglesworth and Edward Wigglesworth	1658–1763	New England Historic Genealogical Society
Notes on Sermons [in Shepard Family Papers]	Thomas Shepard II	ca. 1660	American Antiquarian Society
Notes on Sermons Delivered by Joshua Moodey and Others	Anon.	1686–1688	Massachusetts Historical Society
Notebook	William Patridge	1686	Beinecke Library
Sermons: manuscript, 1689–1690. Ms Am 738		1689–1690	Houghton Library
Eliphalet Adams notes on Sermons	Eliphalet Adams	1697–1703; 1735	Connecticut Historical Society
Commonplace book (Sermon Notes)	John Leverett	1711	Massachusetts Historical Society
Edward Bromfield Sermon Notes	Edward Bromfield	1713–1721	Massachusetts Historical Society
Edward Holyoke Papers	Edward Holyoke	12 May 1720	Harvard University Archives

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
Edward Holyoke Papers	Edward Holyoke	May 1720	Harvard University Archives
Edward Holyoke Papers	Edward Holyoke	24 May 1722	Harvard University Archives
Notes on Sermons Delivered in Boston, 1722–1723		1722–1723	Massachusetts Historical Society
Edward Holyoke Papers	Edward Holyoke	29 June 1731	Harvard University Archives
Edward Holyoke Papers	Edward Holyoke	September/October 1732	Harvard University Archives
Sermon on Luke 19:42	Edward Holyoke	1735	Houghton Library
Sermons, 1701–1771	John Odlin/ Anon.	1736–1738	Massachusetts Historical Society
Daniel Bliss Sermons	Daniel Bliss	1738–1756	Peabody Essex Phillips Library
Notes on Sermons Delivered in Boston, 1743–1745, 6 vols.		1743–1745	Massachusetts Historical Society
Notebook of Sermons	Jacob Cushing	ca. 1750	New York Public Library [Beale Shorthand Collection]
Edward Goddard Sermon Notes	Edward Goddard	ca. 1750	Massachusetts Historical Society
Jonathan Edwards Papers [1752 Sermon Note]	Jonathan Edwards	1752	Beinecke Library
Sermon Notes, 1754–1769	Adonijah Bidwell	1754–1769	Congregational Library and Archives
Sermons: 1755–1776	Samuel Langdon	1755–1776	Harvard University Archives
Sermon Notes, 1757–1781	Adonijah Bidwell	1757–1781	Congregational Library and Archives
Sermon on John 12:46–48	Samuel Langdon	1761	Houghton Library
Samuel Camp Sermons	Samuel Camp/Anon.	1771–1773	Connecticut Historical Society
Thomas Allen letters and sermons [two sermons]	Thomas Allen/Anon.	1777; 1794	New York Historical Society
Sermons 1774–1792	Thomas Allen/Edward Ballard	1774–1792	Maine Historical Society

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
Sermon 1797; 1799	Joseph Buckminster/ Edward Ballard	1797; 1799	Maine Historical Society
Sermon Notes	David Smith	1834–1835	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript
Sermons, manuscript, 1837	Jonathan Fisher	1837	Houghton Library
William Hudson Ballard Papers	William Hudson Ballard		Massachusetts Historical Society
Notes on Sermons Taken by Matthew Bridge	Matthew Bridge		Massachusetts Historical Society
Notes on Sermons Taken by Benjamin Webb	Benjamin Webb/ Anonymous		Massachusetts Historical Society
<i>Manuscript Shorthand Manuals</i>			
Notebook [extracts from Shelton's shorthand manual]	John Clark	1690	Beinecke Library
A New Art of Shorthand Writing [Richard Bartlot]	Jacob Beale/Richard Bartlet	1705	Massachusetts Historical Society
Notebook of Obadiah Ayer, 1708–1716 [tachygraphy]	Obadiah Ayer	1708–1716	Harvard University Archives
Goddard Family Papers (folder 7)		1713–1881	American Antiquarian Society
Stenographia: or short-hand in a far more easy, exact, speedy, lineal, and legible method than any yet extant	James Weston/ C. Philipps/Anonymous	ca. 1727	Houghton Library
System of Shorthand	James Weston/ Anonymous	1727	Smithsonian Library
[Stenography], vel notis excipere or short-hand in a much more easy, exact, speedy, lineal, and ledgible method than any yet extant	C. . Phillips/Anonymous	ca. 1730	Houghton Library
ΣΤΗΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ . . . or shorthand in a much more easy . . . method than any yet extant	Edward Bromfield	1741	Senate House Library London
Short-Writing The most easy, exact, & lineal & speedy Method	Robert Treat Paine/ Theophilus Metcalf	1745	Massachusetts Historical Society

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
Bracography	Robert Treat Paine	ca. 1745	Massachusetts Historical Society
Ample Vocabulary of practical examples to the whole art of short-writing	Mather Byles/Peter Pelham/William Mason	ca. 1750	Houghton Library
Meshech Weare Papers [brachigraphy]	Meshech Weare	ca. 1750	New Hampshire Historical Society
Zeiglographia, or, A New Art of Short Writing Never Before Published	Thomas Shelton/ Jeremy Belknap	1757	Massachusetts Historical Society
[Shorthand Manuscript Notebook]	Timothy Pickering	1768/69	Peabody Essex Phillips Library
Stenography Book	Solomon Drowne	ca. 1769	John Hay Library
The Art of Writing Character or Short Hand: Manuscript, 1766	Thomas Shelton/Anon.	1776	Houghton Library
A New Method of Shorthand	William Parker/Jeremy Belknap	ca. 1779	Massachusetts Historical Society
A Standard of Stenography	Samuel Taylor/David Benedict	post 1786	Rhode Island Historical Society
[Samuel Taylor shorthand table]	Anon./John Bell	ca. 1800	New York Public Library [Beale Shorthand Collection]
A system of shorthand	Aaron Dutton	ca. 1800	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript
Miscellanea Ms Manual of Shorthand	Anon.[in papers of Grew Family]		Houghton Library
A study of shorthand: manuscript (in an unidentified hand)	Anon.[Joshua Atwater Papers]		Houghton Library
Jennison Family Papers, 1729–1860	Samuel Jennison, Jr.		American Antiquarian Society
<i>Diary/Almanac Entries</i>			
Michael Wigglesworth Diary	Michael Wigglesworth	1653–1658	Massachusetts Historical Society
Stirke Arcana Naturae, etc Sloane 3711	George Starkey	1655	The British Library
Peter Thatcher Diaries	Peter Thatcher	1679–1690; 1698–1699	Massachusetts Historical Society

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
Diary of a sea voyage from Sleago to New England [Joshua Atwater Papers]	Joshua Atwater	1681–1682	Houghton Library
John May Diary	John May	1686–1770	American Antiquarian Society
Samuel Sewall Papers	Samuel Sewall	ca. 1700	Massachusetts Historical Society
1715 Almanac	Thomas Paine	1715	Harvard University Archives
Diary	William Byrd	1717–1721	Virginia Historical Society
Diary [reportedly nine volumes]	Ivory Hovey	1738–1803	Unlocated [attested to in Sibley's Harvard Graduates, 9:543–48]
Diaries of Edward August Holyoke	Edward August Holyoke	1742	Harvard University Archives
Diaries of Edward August Holyoke	Edward August Holyoke	1743	Harvard University Archives
Diaries of Edward August Holyoke	Edward August Holyoke	1744	Harvard University Archives
Diaries of Edward August Holyoke	Edward August Holyoke	1746	Harvard University Archives
Diary	Robter Treat Paine	1745–1750; 1755–1756	Massachusetts Historical Society
Benjamin Wadsworth Diary and Account Book	Benjamin Wadsworth	ca. 1750	Massachusetts Historical Society
Diary of Ephraim Langdon	Ephraim Langdon	1752	Rhode Island Historical Society
Joseph Mason Diary, 1753	Joseph Mason	1753	American Antiquarian Society
Diary	Samuel Hopkins	1754–1756	Beinecke Library
Peres Forbes Commonplace Book and Diary	Peres Forbes	1768–1769	New England Historic Genealogical Society
Paul Litchfield Diary	Paul Litchfield Diary	1775	Massachusetts Historical Society
Cipher Diary, 1776–1845	Anon.	ca. 1800	Massachusetts Historical Society

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
<i>Letters</i>			
Winthrop Family Papers	Edward Howes	1632	Massachusetts Historical Society
Winthrop Family Papers	Martha Winthrop; John Winthrop Jr.	1633	Massachusetts Historical Society
Winthrop Family Papers	John Pynchon to John Winthrop	1673	Massachusetts Historical Society
Edward Taylor Collection [miscellaneous notes and letters in shorthand]	Edward Taylor	ca. 1700	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript
Clap Family Papers [letter from Jonathan to Nathan Clapp]	Jonathan Clap	1707	Massachusetts Historical Society
Letter [Solomon Williams to Rev Samuel Wood]	Solomon Williams	12 November 1761	Dartmouth College Library
Letter [George Whitefield to Peter Vanbrugh]	George Whitefield	27 February 1766	Dartmouth College Library
William Coleman Letters	William Coleman	1787–1791	New York Historical Society
Wendell Family Papers Letters to John Wendell from Jonathan Sherburne	Jonathan Sherburne	1806	Houghton Library
<i>Merchant Records/Accounting</i>			
John Hull Papers	John Hull	1624–1685	American Antiquarian Society
Peter Burr Account Book, 1695–1699	Peter Burr	1695–1699	Massachusetts Historical Society
Paul Wentworth Cipher List	Paul Wentworth	1775	Massachusetts Historical Society
<i>Hymns/Poems</i>			
Collection of Poems	Ezekiel Cheever/Anon.	1631	Boston Athenaeum
New Testament and Psalms [in Thomas Shepard Papers]	Henry Richard [in Thomas Shepard Papers]	1671	Houghton Library
Commonplace book of Poems	Ruth Barrel Andrew		Massachusetts Historical Society
Tate and Brady’s Psalms and Hymns, written in shorthand	Samuel Freeman	1765	Maine Historical Society

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
[Collection of Hymns][Beale Shorthand Collection]	Thomas Shephard	1778	New York Public Library (Special Collections)
Commonplace Book	Waller Holladay	1799	Virginia Historical Society
<i>Academic Texts/Notes</i>			
Notebook, 1650–1653 [notes on Ramus’s Dialect in Latin and shorthand]	Michael Wigglesworth	1650–1653	New England Genealogical Historical Society
Jonathan Edwards Papers [Notes on Natural Science]	Jonathan Edwards	ca. 1725–50	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript
Lectures	Apollos King	ca. 1780	New York Historical Society
<i>Marginalia</i>			
An Essay Towards the Reconciling of Differences Among Christian [shorthand marginalia notes]	Roger Williams	ca. 1645	John Carter Brown Library
A Companion for Communicants [shorthand notes in inside cover]	Anon.	ca. 1700	Private Collection (sold by Heritage Auctions for \$11,5000)
Declaration signed by students to not speak in the vernacular	Thomas Foxcroft et al.	1712	Harvard University Archives
Harvard Faculty Minutes	Harvard Corporation	1742	Harvard University Archives
<i>Miscellaneous</i>			
Notebook Kept by Thomas Lechford	Thomas Lechford	1638–1641	American Antiquarian Society
Thomas Danforth Notebook	Thomas Danforth	1662–1666	Massachusetts Historical Society
Examination of Geo–Burroughs, 1692	Samuel Parris	1692	Massachusetts Historical Society
Records of The Congregational Church in Topsfield	Joseph Capen	ca. 1700	Topsfield Historical Society
Prayers: manuscript [Joshua Atwater Papers]	Joshua Atwater/Anon.	1713	Houghton Library
Samuel Sewall Papers [Probate Records]	Samuel Sewall	1715–1728	Massachusetts Historical Society

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Archive</i>
Jacob Green Papers [collections of Ashbel Green]	Jacob Green	1744–1811	Princeton University Library
Sample of short-writing	Robert Treat Paine	1748	Massachusetts Historical Society
Thomas Hutchinson Papers	Thomas Hutchinson	ca. 1750	Massachusetts Archives
Note with Francis Willet about Narragansett farm	Anon.	1753	Harvard University Archives
Extract from President George Washington's Speech in the First Congress	Anon.	30 April 1789	Maryland Historical Society
The Columbian Primer	Samuel Freeman/Anon.	1790	Maine Historical Society

Conclusion

Tens of thousands of pages of shorthand notes are waiting to be read for the first time. The only guard to this veritable treasure trove of humble writing is the linguistic Grendel of learning early modern shorthand for ourselves. In my experience at least, this has not been the easiest of tasks: learning early forms of shorthand today almost invariably entails prolonged periods of extreme tedium and toil. Inevitably, there will be moments of frustration, even desperation. But it is ultimately worth the effort to try to begin to make sense of these seemingly nonsensical manuscripts, which touch upon just about every aspect of early American life.