

GUEST COLUMN

What's in a letter?

In 2023, the personal letter is becoming a rare object as people turn to more immediate forms of communication (phone calls, video calls, email, instant messaging apps, etc.); however, in Bradford and Helen Brinton's day (1920s and 30s) the personal letter was the main means of communication.

Recently, while going through our archives, I came across a typewritten message to Helen Brinton by the well-known cowboy artist, Edward Borein (1872-1945), whose artwork is the focus of

after gallbladder surgery in February of 1936.

In the remainder of the letter, the artist asks Helen if she has any beadwork that she would like to trade for some of his etchings or watercolors. He also goes on to eulogize Brinton.

"Bradford was one of the finest men I ever knew, and I counted him as one of my very best friends, and I miss him very much. I was glad to hear from you, and if you ever come through Santa Barbara, I will be very glad to see you."

As the longtime curator of this institution, I for one am exceedingly grateful that Ed and Helen conducted their communication through the U. S. Post Office in a time before instant messaging.

Although the letter is typed on a half-page of Borein's letterhead, it carries a wealth of information about Borein, and his relationship to Bradford as well as conveying the fact that Helen was acquiring provenance for the collection she inherited from her brother, so that the institution she would eventually create, the Bradford Brinton Memorial, would possess that knowledge.

While touring the museum, remember that you are like the captain of the Titanic you are only seeing the tip of the iceberg, so stop, take in the objects, notice the gallery in which they are displayed, picture the building in which they are housed and imagine all the people who make the institution function in a setting that is second to none, situated in these rolling verdant foothills of the Bighorn Mountains.

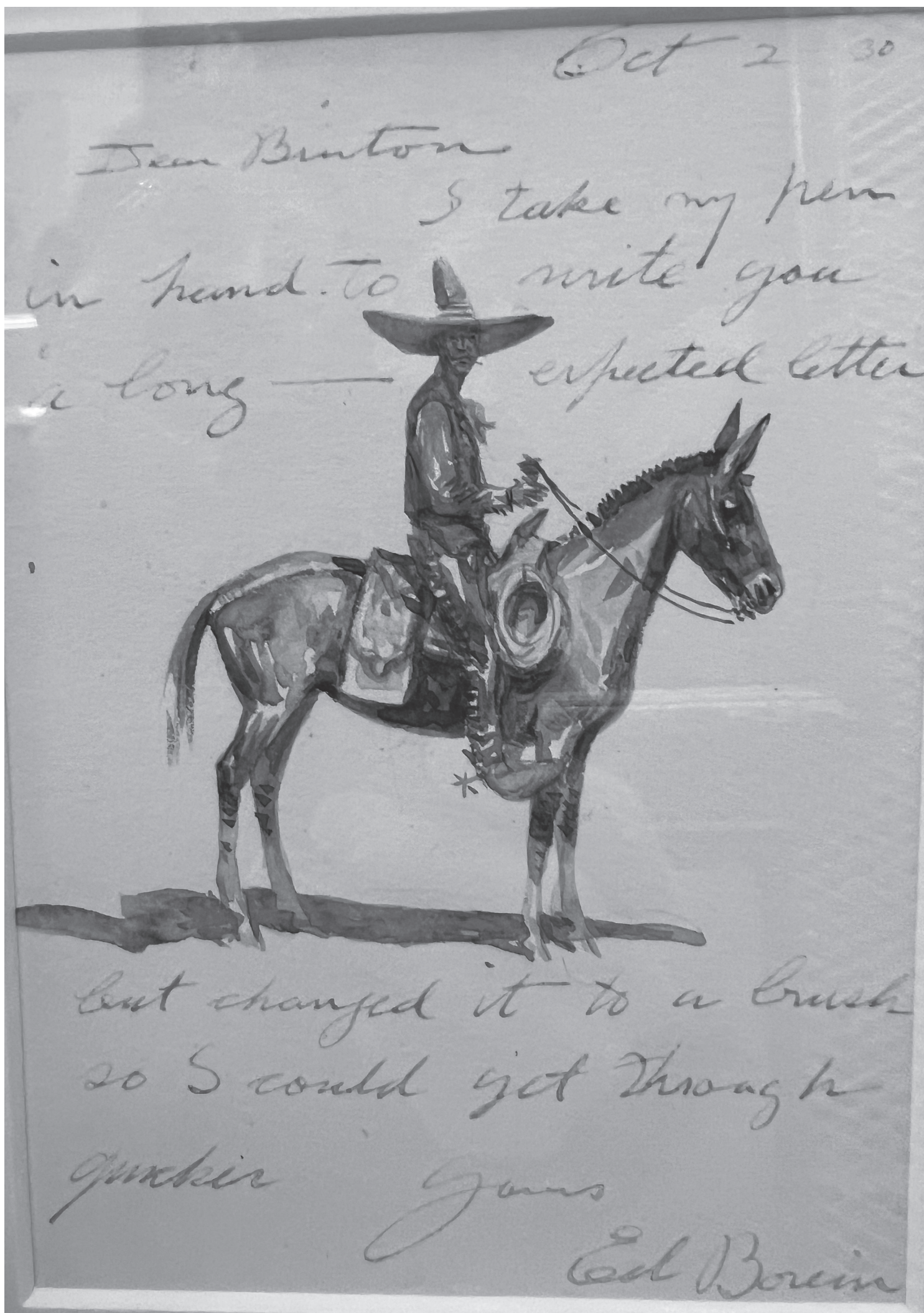
Then whip out your camera, take a selfie and send it off to a friend and invite them to come enjoy an experience that has been in the making for over a century. Or you could just write all that information down on a postcard or in a letter and create a record for posterity.

our upcoming exhibition "Edward Borein in Brush & Ink." The letter is dated October 24th, 1940 (sic) and is addressed to Miss Helen Brinton, Big Horn, Wyoming. It is the second of two documents Borein writes to Helen on that date. The other letter is a holograph written in response to a letter he received from Helen requesting authentication of the India ink frieze panels gracing the walls of Bradford's living room here on the Quarter Circle A Ranch.

In the second communication he relates to Helen that the last time he saw Bradford, "We had lunch together here at the Paseo, and I sold him a big Watercolor." (sic) Borein goes on to relate that he didn't want money for the artwork but would rather have worked out a trade with Brinton for some Indian beadwork if Brinton had any to spare. Bradford said that he had a lot of it, but that Borein would have to journey to the ranch to visit him to make the trade.

"But that never happened owing to circumstances." Bradford died suddenly

KENNETH L. SCHUSTER is curatorial director for The Brinton Museum.



Borein writes a letter to Bradford Brinton Oct. 2, 1930, that is now displayed at The Brinton Museum.

COURTESY PHOTO | THE BRINTON MUSEUM