

THE BEGINNINGS OF A MOVEMENT

by Mark Oatis

The "birth" of the Letterheads took place during the winter months of 1974-75. Bob Mitchell, Mike Rielley and I were then union apprentices, attending weekly classes together.

One night, Mike Rielley suggested that we meet after school to pay a visit to a signshop he'd discovered. It turned out to be Rustic Sign Studio.

Arriving about 10:00 p.m., we found Rick Flores putting a finish coat on some sandblasted signs. To say the least, our awe-struck enthusiasm and Rick's friendliness proved a good combination that very night.

We ended up, hours later, eating green chili and drinking beer at Bob's house. When I finally got to bed, my mind was swimming with designs and ideas. I was too excited to sleep. (Maybe the chili had something to do with it, too.)

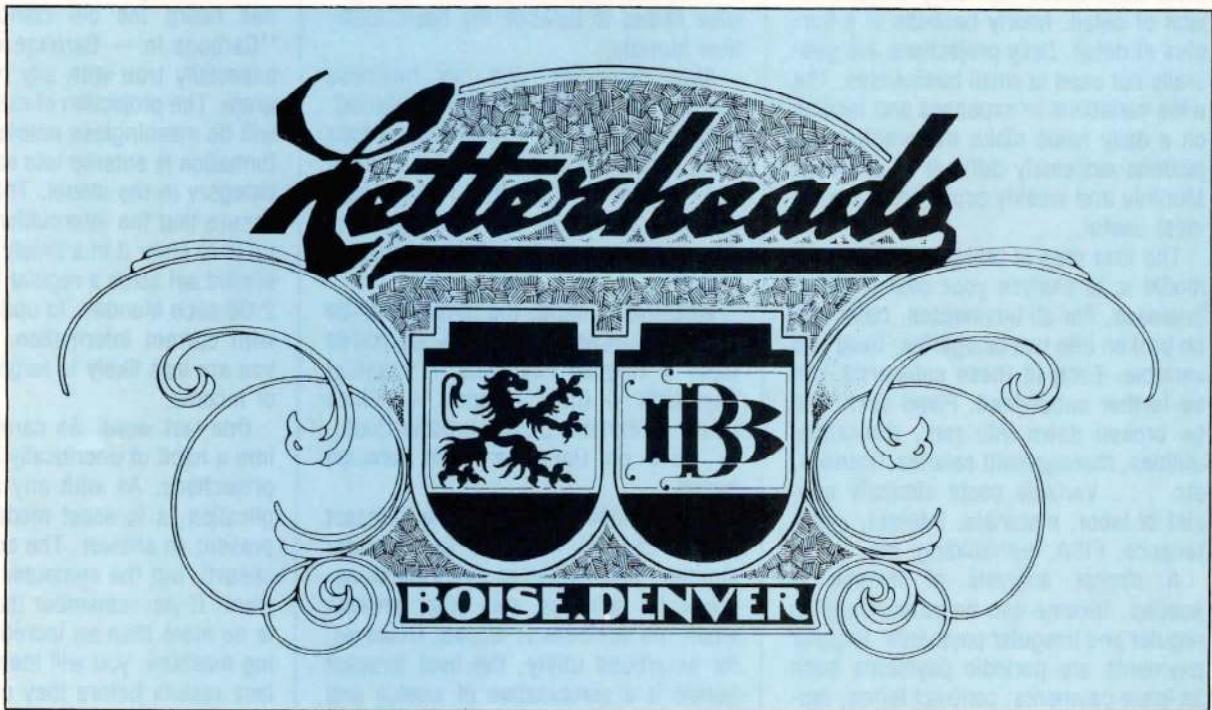
Soon after, Rick joined our classes and the "after school" meetings

became routine. Earl Vehill, himself a graduate and journeyman, and a friend of Rick's, often joined us in our rambles . . . usually to a local watering hole or some other refuge featuring strictly "wholesome entertainment."

Late in 1975, I went to work at Rick's shop, and our gatherings began to include more signpainters and were held on nights other than after-school. The year of 1976 was the high point of those early years. We began to meet regularly, or at least bi-monthly, often inviting guest artists. Noel Weber became involved, bringing along with him, Larry Albaugh.

Rick's trip that year to Chicago and the National Hotel and Restaurant show prompted new and more experimental work, which, in turn, inspired more projects. Lakewood Sign Co. began to blossom with Letterhead-inspired designs.

We began searching out and collect-



J.L. Frazier / 1980