

Taken from The Business Educator: December, 1907

How They Became Penmen - No. 4

By H. W. Ellsworth, New York City.

You ask me to tell you "Why I became a penman?" Same way as friend Isaacs and Topsy did-'specs I grewed into it'. There I was at Fredonia Academy, seventeen years old and I couldn't write for shucks. I was appointed teacher of bookkeeping and sat on the stage at morning exercises with the principal and other assistants. All the students looked up to us for instruction and example.

A natty young fellow, just from Buffalo, came along and organized a writing class. I joined. He was a clipper and set copies that appealed to my callow soul; but they were neat plain and without the everlasting flourish of the traditional professor of penmanship. I imitated his good example for sixteen pages of my writing blank, when the teacher was taken sick and quit.

Soon after, along came a Prof. Selover, a traveling menagerie, card writer, flourisher of birds, animals and fishes and other things not classified, but he could not fill the bill on plain writing or come to time with his appointments to teach. The principal encouraged me to try the job, and I did. With the office to fill and copies to set, I was put to my mettle, and strove to win-or perish in a sea of ink.

About then I saw a glimpse of the coming Bryant and Stratton chain of business colleges and their posters announcing the great Spencer troupe, led by the great P. R., and I got the penmanship fever. A letter from J. W. Lusk, from Buffalo Business College, set me wild to "beat the band" on plain unadorned style. I sandwiched penmanship exercises with splitting wood for my mother, and developed a pure muscular movement worthy of the notice of anyone. I said to myself, "Good penmanship is the road to success for me, as I can get on to its curves with the best of them and, what is

more, I can do some missionary work by preaching better system and pruning down the eccentricities of the 'pure Spencerian' and giving reasons why."

So I was entered for a fifty-year race, now almost run and feel that I have lived to see plain penmanship divorced from the curlicues by sensible penmen and good writers. I don't say I did it with my own little hatchet, but I have hewn to that line myself and, like the good cobbler, stuck to the work I best could do, and let all other matters go, holding this homely proverb fast, "Good cobbler ne'er forsake your last."