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A History of Penmen, Early Business Education, and Educators in America

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In July, 1867, the principals of the Bryant and Stratton schools assembled in Buffalo, which was the first meeting held after the death of Mr. Stratton. On this occasion, Mr. Bryant, surviving member of the firm of Bryant and Stratton, delivered a memorable and appropriate address reviewing the history of the enterprise and paying an appreciative and affectionate tribute to the memory of Mr. H. D. Stratton, his life, and character and labors. The circumstances of this gathering rendered it one of the most deeply affecting occasions in the history of American Business Schools. The men, who but a few months before, were arrayed against one another in bitter antagonism were melted by mutual tenderness, and the old ties of fraternal interest and concord were renewed and strengthened. R. C. Spencer and S. S. Packard, who were the leaders of the contending parties, had long been mutual friends and co-laborers, each holding the other in high personal and professional esteem. At this meeting they met for the first time after the death of Mr. Stratton, under whose splendid leadership they had wrought shoulder to shoulder, and heart to heart, in the chain of colleges. Mr. Packard was a man of noble nature, generous impulses, and warm sympathies, who could harbor no malice. The spirit in which his old friend R. C. Spencer met him was most sincerely cordial. From that time forward these two men stood side by side in the close ties of fraternal relationship and mutual appreciation. Correspondence between them covering a period of more than thirty years after the death of Mr. Stratton and through the personal meetings and intercourse, professional and otherwise, were marked by a manifestation of esteem and affection. In justice to both of these men so prominent in the Bryant and Stratton chain of colleges, and in the progress of business education, it is proper to say that Mr. Packard in his adherence to his friends and benefactors, Bryant and Stratton, during the aforesaid controversy, was using his personal influence privately with Bryant and Stratton to persuade them to accept in some form the measures proposed by the dissatisfied principals of the chain of colleges as represented by R. C. Spencer. Mr. H. B. Bryant voluntarily informed Mr. Spencer that had they early yielded to his persuasions and advice regarding the causes of complaint on the part of local principals, that they would not only have avoided much unhappiness, but would have saved themselves from heavy pecuniary losses. At the Buffalo meeting in 1867 a new organization was formed under the title of the International Association of Business Colleges, membership in which was largely based upon former affiliations with the Bryant and Stratton chain.

The close of the war for the Union and the disbanding of the armies set free a vast number of young men from the military service of the country, ambitious for commercial employment, who flocked to the Business colleges to equip themselves for such pursuits. No more enterprising, earnest, and noble young men ever served their country in war or in peace. They filled the commercial schools to their fullest capacity, which were much enlarged to meet the extraordinary demand. With the courage and self-reliance gained by army experience, and a practical patriotism of the highest order, these young men, using the commercial and business colleges as stepping stones and avenues, entered actively into the industrial, mercantile, commercial, and financial business of the country to the prosperity and growth of which they greatly contributed, and in which they became potent factors. The financial revulsion and general depression of business which followed the inflation of an irredeemable currency occasioned by the extraordinary exigency of the war seriously affected the business in commercial schools of the country. The patronage which had been so large after the close of the war, was now reduced to the minimum, both in numbers and revenues. Schools that had been prosperous were closed or consolidated. The meetings and conventions of commercial teachers were for a time suspended, awaiting the revival of business. During this period few new schools were opened and a much younger class of students was enrolled. The gradual revival of business that followed the resumption of specie payments increased the demand for young people who had received a business college training, giving a fresh impetus to commercial schools and education throughout the country. Old schools revived and prospered, and new schools were opened. From mercenary motives there was an influx of young, inexperienced, insufficiently equipped men into the profession as

proprietors of commercial schools detrimental to the cause, and tended to impair confidence in commercial schools. Happily, however, there were among these new accessories to the profession, a -considerable number of well equipped, high-mined, ambitious young men, who have done much for the advancement of business education and commercial schools. It is to this better class of young men, the honored pioneers of the profession have looked with hope and pride for the progress, expansion, and elevation of the great movement, the diffusion and perfecting of commercial education.

The purpose of Bryant and Stratton which prevailed with most of the members of the Chain, aimed at monopolizing business education throughout the country and attempts were made to absorb or destroy all strong business schools and men that would not be driven or coaxed into their chain. While Eastman of Poughkeepsie, Spencer of Milwaukee, Jones of St. Louis, Nelson of Cincinnati, Comer of Boston, and Schofield of Providence, could not be wiped- out by Bryant and Stratton's efforts at competition, Mr. Bryant discovered his master as a competitor when Eastman opened his Chicago college and created an immense school. Among many who were driven out of their prosperous schools, was Mr. D. T. Ames, who in Syracuse was offered the privilege of yielding his entire interests to Bryant and Stratton, accepting one-third of his customary profits or being driven out by competition. He chose the latter, feeling that himself and his large business and reputation was strong enough to withstand Bryant and Stratton's coercive methods. A Bryant and Stratton college was established at Syracuse; strong teachers were borrowed from various schools of the chain; abusive circulars were spread broadcast; rates were cut; unscrupulous solicitors were set to work to give free tuition, intercept at trains incoming students and to misrepresent competition. Thoroughly disheartened with unfair methods, Mr. Ames went to New York City, where, through the Penman's Art Journal, the first organ of business education, educators and penmen, for twenty years he did much toward uplifting the profession by exposing fake schools, fake teachers and their methods. In Pittsburgh, the Iron City, Duff's colleges were too strong in their hold upon the public, in their methods and management, and with Alexander Cowley and John D. Williams as peerless penmen, Bryant and Stratton attempted no attack. It was partly through Bryant and Stratton that Spencerian penmanship became the national system of writing. They, being associated with the Spencers, secured interests in the copyrights of the copy books of the Spencerian system which were then being introduced as the first and best throughout the public schools of the country. They secured for their colleges nearly every leading penman in the country and required him to teach and advocate only Spencerian penmanship. As these teachers -trained and sent out thousands of Spencerian teachers and students, it gave the system an impetus and popularity that remained for years.