

From the Penman's Newsletter, January 1974:

JC Ryan, The Handless Penman

Congratulations and many thanks to Leland Watkins of Fargo, N.D. for sending the most fantastic collection of penmanship you could ever hope to see - expert, top quality penmanship done by a man who had no hands. You may recall the cards in ornamental penmanship written for R. B. Riffle by this handless penman that were included in a previous issue. This material had been collected by W. C. Brownfield. Included in the collection is this picture on the cover. You will notice that his desk is his trunk - he was a traveling man. There are several letters to "Friend Brownfield" some in very fine business writing. They all indicate that he was a very optimistic person. For example, on June 26, 1917 he said, "I am doing the biggest business in my life... I am getting 35 cents per dozen cards, 50 cents with address, so that is a good price." Another dated Sept. 16, 1916 said, "I am back in good old Mo. business is good. I called on Tamblyn, a fine fellow."

Here is a story written by the late W.C. Brownfield and published in the Sept. 14, 1917 Park City Daily News, Bowling Green, Ky. (The old newspaper copy is blurred in part, difficult to reproduce - Ed.)

"Yesterday I saw in your paper the results of an interview with J.C. Ryan, the handless penman. He has been here twice before and as hardly a week goes by that someone does not ask me about him, I am taking the liberty of answering some of the questions.

To begin with, he is an optimist, he is a prodigious worker and a quick worker. He has patience, a world of it, but not lazy patience. He lost his hands in a Dakota blizzard when about 22 years of age. After several years of sad and almost hopeless effort to learn to work again he went on the road with a show. There he learned to write with his feet, but as that was very inconvenient, he tried using the stumps of his arms. With this method he has been quite successful as his work attests. When I first met him I found him studying from the ornamental writing of one greatest of all ornamental writers the late L. Madarasz. Having been a personal student of Madarasz, I explained the methods he used and some of the finer points on movement used in the finest professional writing. For this he seemed to feel indebted and deeply grateful.

He travels farm city to city and has in his time met and called on all the best penmen of the profession. He knows all their secrets of working and is a master at handling ink and putting it into condition.

The movement he uses is mainly body motion flowing out through both arms, though his left arm does most of the propelling. The resting of his arms and the rolling on the muscles with precision gives him much the same control gotten by the best professional penmen through aid of the fingers. His life is an example of courage and should be an inspiration to those who have hands and don't train them. He has earned, not with his hands, but with his stumps, as much as \$30, day writing cards. He is always smiling and

happy and who would not give him a boost? He was lately 'run' here in a PA Weekly as an illustration of what crippled soldiers could do.

The leading penmanship journal, The Business Educator, March '17 ran his picture, reproductions of his work and editorial remarks.