

John D. Williams (1829-1871)

(taken from Gaskell's Compendium of Forms (1882 Ed.)

This superior teacher was widely known; probably a very considerable number who read this knew him personally. He was at one time "general superintendent of Ornamental Penmanship for the Bryant & Stratton chain of colleges," and was undoubtedly one of the finest penmen the world ever produced.

"John D., " as his friends always called him, was in boyhood a tailor's apprentice, and a very ill shiftless, useless fellow," his employer used to say, who- wasted his chalk in drawing eagles, flourishing swans, and caricaturing the tailors. Mr. Duff, a writing-teacher who had opened a commercial school in Pittsburgh, dropped into the tailor's one day, and, happening to see the lad and some of his chalk-marks, was surprised at the fellow's skill; and, as his employer was thoroughly convinced he would never make a tailor, Mr. Duff told him that he could attend his school and learn to write. This was just the chance the boy had long wanted, and he made good use of his opportunity. He became a teacher in Duff's, and subsequently taught large and successful classes in that vicinity.

Afterward he was connected with some of the leading business schools; and, lastly, with Packard's, in New York. It was here, while associated with Mr. Packard, that he, in connection with the latter, published his "Gems of Penmanship." He prepared also "Williams' Packard's Guide." Although Mr. Williams' style of writing was essentially the same as that of other teachers of the better class, he was much opposed to the exact style some follow, of submitting every stroke to geometrical measurement. As a result, his penmanship was more free and natural than that of most penmen who confine themselves exclusively to copy-writing and "specimen work." Mr. Williams was one of the first to adopt a simpler form of analysis, reducing the principles to the simple and compound curves and the straight line, a great improvement on the copy-book systems. He was born in the city of Pittsburgh in 1829, and died at Albany, N.Y., in January 1871.