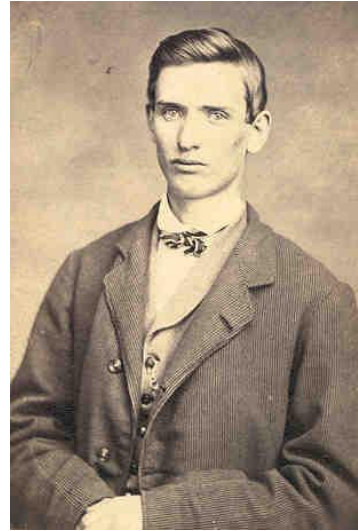


Why Not Learn to Write?

Valorus J. McElheney

1845 - 1911



A beautiful calligraphic drawing was created by Valorus J. McElheney in December 1867 when he was 21 years old and a student at Alfred University.

He lost his right arm during the Civil War while serving as a soldier in Company B, 2nd Regiment of the NY Mounted Rifles of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Since he was right-handed, he was discouraged about his inability to write when he returned to civilian life. At Alfred University he was taught to write and draw with his left hand. His daughter requested that this sketch be presented to the University upon her death as a memento of the excellent rehabilitation services rendered to her father by the institution.

Penmanship skills were frequently taught during the 19th century and elaborate drawings such as this were often copied from instruction books. Expert penmen also created such drawings as a way to advertise their skills. The large scale of this work sets it apart from most other penmanship pieces since they were typically much smaller and only on one sheet of paper.

Two other 19th century Alfred University students' drawings, almost exact replicas, are part of the collections of the National Museum of American Art in Washington, DC and the Genesee Country Museum in Mumfords, NY. A third is owned by a private collector.