

Let's Talk About Ink

with Ed & Lucy Faulkner

Inwells

As long as mankind has been writing, there has been a need for an ink container of some sort. Books could be written (and have been) on all the different kinds of inkwells through the years. A lot of bottle collectors have no interest in inkwells, but from a historical standpoint, a few can add interest to the bottle collection.

The first inkstand patented in this country was in 1811, by A. H. Quincy, of Boston, Massachusetts. (This patent is unavailable.) From about 1840 through the beginning of the 20th century, hundreds of inkwells, inkstands, and ink bottles were patented.

Many, earlier and later, exist that were

not patented. Inkwells were made in sandstone, ceramic, marble, glass, all types of metals, wood, paper mache, and combinations of these. They varied from simple ceramic to gold, silver, and art glass by Tiffany and Loetz. For the man, there were even inkwells made from the hooves of deer and others like a deer head with the antlers for pen rests.

With literacy increasing in the masses of the population, decorative inkstands were a popular item to have sitting out in the home. As travel increased, there was a need for "traveling inkwells". These were usually a bottle enclosed in a wooden, metal, or paper mache container of some sort. There were also traveling writing "desks" containing an inkwell and sander as well as room for paper and pens. Many companies used inkwells as advertising giveaways in the late 19th to the early 20th century.

The twentieth century saw the decline of inkwells. Most people were now using fountain pens and just filled the pen directly from the bottle and inkwells for dipping pens were no longer needed. By the 1930s, inkwells were beginning to be a thing of the past. A few pen and ink companies made pen-inkwell combinations for the desk, but

for the most part, inkwells were no longer used except by the U.S. post office. And even they gave up dip pens in 1957.

Figure 1 is a traveling inkwell, circa 1775-1825. A similar one is pictured in the *COLLECTORS ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION* by Neuman and Kravic, as well as in Covill's. It has a small pontiled glass bottle and on either side, a place for two quills. I have seen a number of these and the cases had different decorations. The second one pictured [**Figure 2**] is by the S. Silliman Company of Chester, Connecticut and was listed on an 1850s price sheet by them. These were popular during the Civil War and were carried by soldiers. Some, as the one pictured, have carvings on the lid, presumably done by the owner.

Metal inkwells with a quill holder, similar to **Figure 3**, are shown in paintings dating to the early 17th century. This quill holder type was popular for at least 200 years. I believe the one pictured dates to the early 1800s. It is not pewter, but some other type of base metal.

The inkstands we commonly call "snail" inks were used from the 1870s until after the turn of the century. The first patent dates we could find were 1879 and 1880. This

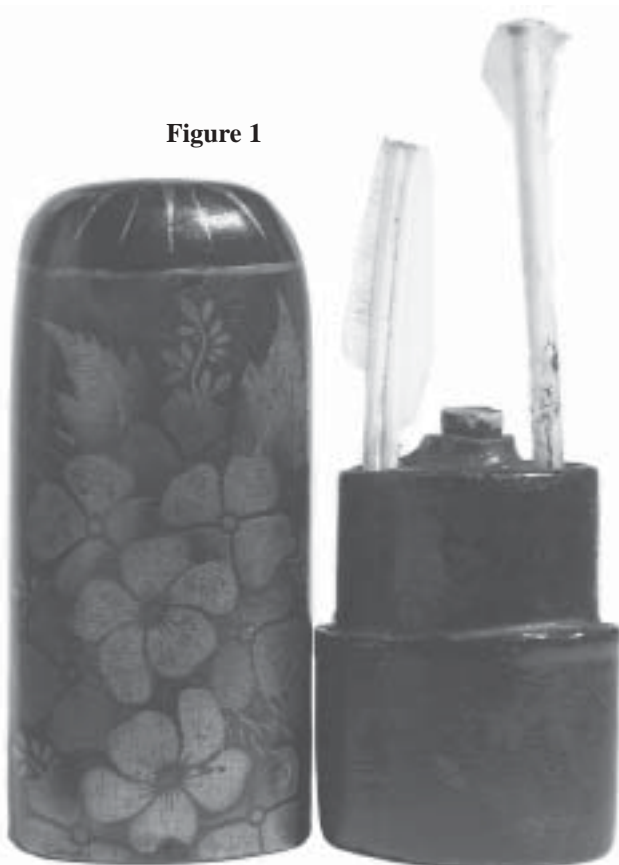


Figure 1



Figure 2

\$1.00 Library Inkstand For Only 35c.
No. 3R5716 Enameled Inkstand, containing two heavy flint glass bottles, mounted on an iron rack; size, 4½x4 inches.
Our special price.....35c

Weight, packed for shipment, 20 ounces.

Figure 3

type was still being used in 1902 as seen in the Sears catalog ad, however, it may have been falling out of favor by then as Sears had reduced the price from one dollar to thirty-five cents. [Figures 4 - 5]

Colored glass inkwells [Figure 6] date from mid-1800s to 1920s, according to some sources. The last 30 years of the 19th century was a time of popularity for this type inkwell. Colored glass could be easily made and at a low enough cost that most could afford a dainty glass inkwell. The vaseline inkwell pictured is one such example. (The early 1800-1840 Pitkin and geometric inks

are not included here - that is a completely different category.)

There are hundreds of advertising inkwells known, as most businesses had them as promotional items or for office use. The one pictured here [Figures 7a and 7b] came from a jewelry shop in Richmond, Va., that was in operation beginning about 1880. It is glazed ceramic and has Omega Watches and the face of a pocket watch on it. Dealers probably received these to give to customers.

Figure 8 is a letterhead from the Emry Davis Company, which was a large inkwell manufacturer. The letterhead states they

sold these inkstands to insurance companies, railroads, U.S. Steel and others. The ink they made was advertised as being in use by the government for its most permanent records.

While this article will probably not convince anyone to go out and buy inkwells, we hope it will show how important they were in the lives of our ancestors. Probably every home had one of some type. The market had to be there for sales, as there were so many patents for inkwells, and so many different styles made for every taste of both men and women.



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7a



Figure 7b



Figure 8