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Welcome to *Nib Noise*. I hope you'll enjoy reading this month's issue.

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[richard@richardspens.com](mailto:richard@richardspens.com)

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## **Will We Ever See Another World's Fair?**

Although none of us attended the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, we all have probably heard of. It wasn't the first world's fair, but it was one of the most famous. The Ferris Wheel was invented, and the first one was built, for the Columbian Exposition.

One of the less well-known world's fairs was the 1915 Panama-Pacific

International Exposition, which ran from February 20 to December 4, 1915, in San Francisco. Primarily a celebration to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal on August 15, 1914, the Exposition also was seen as an opportunity for San Francisco to show off its recovery from the disastrous 1906 earthquake and fire. Shown above, with an Exposition ticket and a souvenir fountain pen laid on it, is a print of the Palace of Fine Arts at night, from an original oil painting of the time. The Palace of Fine Arts is the only surviving structure from the exhibition.

The cone-cap fountain pen in the image above, while it might look rather ordinary, is not ordinary at all. It is one of the earliest successful piston-fillers. The piston mechanism in this pen was a standard single-action screw, a modification of U.S. Patent No [834,373](#), which was issued to Frank O. Ellis on October 30, 1906. The brand name on the pen is Richter-Leblang. The Richter-Leblang Company was a corporation located in New York City, with offices there and in San Francisco, California; founded in 1914 by Henry Kohn, David Richter, and Joseph Leblang, it sold pens, novelties, and general merchandise. Little is now known about the company today, other than that it handled pens like this one, which it jobbed from at least two now-unknown manufacturers. Shown below are examples of two different Exposition souvenir pens, both from Richter-Leblang.



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## I've been stabbed.

Twice, actually, exactly four weeks apart. My wife and I have received both doses of the Pfizer vaccine, and neither of us experienced any reaction to it. Everyone in the United States who is 16 years old or older is now eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccination. The sooner you follow our lead, the sooner we can all enjoy pen shows together again *Get out there and get stabbed!*

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## BROAD STROKES

During most of April, I was dealing with getting my wife ready for back surgery, and I didn't find time to write a new article for my website. With Mike Kennedy's permission, therefore, I've added to my website's Pens and History section Mike's well-researched article on an amazing historical artifact, the James Malarkey Pen, and the man who owned it. Trust me, this is

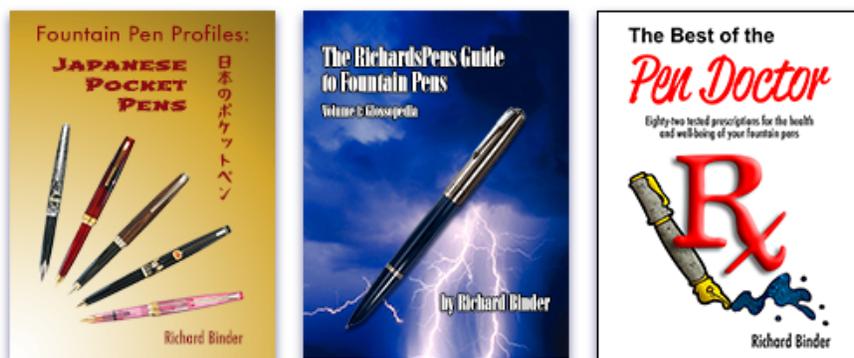
no malarkey.



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## The RichardsPens Bookstore

I don't actually have a bookstore, but I have written a few books, and I let other people do all the work of selling them. Right now, I'm working on the second edition of *Japanese Pocket Pens* and the fifth edition of the *Glossopedia*, and there are new books in the planning stage. If you've noticed a slight change in the image below, you know what the next book is. It'll be out this month. Watch for it.



There's a complete listing of my books on my site, with direct links to pages on Amazon, Apple, Barnes & Noble, and Lulu where you can buy them for your own library.



*By Don Fluckinger*  
*May 2004*

*Those who delight in reading bodice-rippers will go out, purchase them, and take them to bed regardless of whether or not you include kinky stuff in your pen articles.*



Read the whole article: [Writing About Writing About Pens, Chapter One](#).

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### From the *Glossopedia*

With more than 1,550 entries comprising (with subentries) more than 1,700 individual terms, more than 1,000 illustrations, more than 200 patent citations linked to their respective patent documents at various archives, and extensive cross-references, the RichardsPens *Glossopedia* is the most comprehensive resource of its kind anywhere. Each month, *Nib Noise* includes a randomly chosen *Glossopedia* entry.

**Universal** (*Universal Fountain Pen & Pencil Company*, also *Universal Pen & Pencil Company*) A pen company located in Brooklyn, New York; founded in 1945 to supply low-priced writing instruments to department, stationery, and drug stores. Universal began by making fountain pens and mechanical pencils, expanding to the production of stylographic pens and, in the 1950s, ballpoints. Pen prices ranged from \$1.00 for the Buck range of fountain and ballpoint pens (introduced in 1952) to \$3.95 for the company's top-line Uni-Flow fountain pen. ¶ In about 1959, Universal introduced the \$1.49 Aqua-Pen, a fountain pen that used cartridges of dried ink (two for 29¢) and filled with water. Just to confuse things, the pen was marketed as the Empex Aqua-Pen, and the manufacturer of record was the Rohill Company of New York City, with which Universal was affiliated. The Aqua-Pen was listed on page 188 of the 1961-1962 Consumer Bulletin Annual as a novelty pen and was rated as not recommended. It was still being offered into the 1990s, by which time Universal had relocated to Sinking Spring, Pennsylvania, after an earlier move to Union City, New Jersey. Shown below are a Universal V-250 fountain pen, a remarkably well made pen for its time, notable for its semi-hooded nib and polished ribbed aluminum cap (upper), and an Aqua-Pen (lower).



If you would like to suggest an entry for the *Glossopedia*, I invite you to send

an email to me at [richard@richardspens.com](mailto:richard@richardspens.com) with your proposed entry. If you don't have a definition for your entry, I'll do my best to find one.

And if you don't think you can wait more than 129 years (note how this number keeps growing as new entries are added) to see the whole *Glossopedia* here, one entry at a time (if I don't slip up and repeat an entry or three), you can easily jump the gun by purchasing your own copy in ebook form for Amazon's Kindle and Kindle app, Apple's Books app, or Barnes & Noble's NOOK and NOOK app.

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To help you find reference articles on my site that have been edited recently, there is a handy heading right at the top of the reference index, listing the five most recently added or edited reference pages. For edited pages, there are brief descriptions of what was changed.

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## The Pen Doctor

The Pen Doctor is a regular visitor to the Nashua Pen Spa, and every so often he puts a few prescriptions up on my site. Each month (except when I forget), I'll be reprinting one of his past prescriptions here.

**Q:** I just bought on Ebay an older, all black Pelikan (maybe a 1950/60s plain black 400?) and when it arrived the filler cap was partially unscrewed and wouldn't screw back in completely (there was a gap of about 3/8" between the bottom of the cap and the end of the barrel). I disassembled and cleaned the pen thinking that the piston might have been stuck. However that was not the case. No matter what I do I can't seem to get the two parts of the piston screw mechanism together AND have the cap screwed on flush with the back of the barrel. There must be an assembly trick, but I haven't figured it out. Do you have any tips on the re-assembly of the piston filling mechanism?

**Rx:** This happens when the last person who worked on the pen did not assemble the piston unit correctly. If the piston shaft is not set correctly to the piston knob screw, the knob can bottom out on the end of the barrel before the piston is fully retracted, resulting in an incomplete fill; or the knob can stop before it is screwed down all the way, giving you a complete fill but leaving the knob hanging out where it can be damaged. In either case, repair requires removal of the piston unit, which entails a certain amount of risk to the pen.

If you can remove the piston unit safely, the solution is quite simple.



#### CAUTION

These piston units are friction fit, and they can be very difficult to remove. If this is a repair you're not familiar with, you should contact an experienced restorer or return the pen for a refund.

The trick is to install the piston knob and screw it down a couple of turns before you assemble the unit, as shown in the first photo here (illustrated with an M200; the 400 is essentially similar).



Then put the rest of the parts together. Screw the piston knob down until either the knob or the piston itself stops. In this photo, the piston and knob have stopped exactly in the right positions:



If the knob stops first, unscrew things carefully until the knob just barely disengages from the piston shaft. Unscrew the knob  $\frac{1}{2}$  turn further, then push the piston in to engage the knob and screw it all together again. If the piston stops first, unscrew things until the knob just barely disengages, pull the piston away a little, screw the knob down  $\frac{1}{2}$  turn, then push the piston back in and screw it all together again. Repeat this process as necessary until the knob and piston stop together, or as close as you can get it with the piston stopping first. Finally, reinstall the unit in the barrel.

With a modern M200, M400, and others of that size, it's even easier. There is a collar at the front end of the piston housing. (In standard pens, the collar is probably brown; in clear or transparent colored pens, it is clear or some other color.) This collar has a slot in it to prevent the piston from rotating. The collar comes out of the housing, as shown here:



Assemble the pieces without worrying whether they're adjusted right or not. With the collar out of the housing as shown above, screw the knob in until it stops, allowing the piston to turn with the knob. Now hold the knob still and screw the piston in until it stops. Seat the collar back into the housing, and you're done.



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