

Nib Noise



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

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The robot that sends *Nib Noise* out refuses to learn to read. If you have comments or questions, send email to:

richard@richardspens.com

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Back in the day, major department stores' pen counters were among the busiest counters in the stores during the Christmas season. Customers would come in shopping for a small, affordable gift for a parent, a teenager, a brother or sister, or any number of other relatives and friends. They'd hope they could afford a nice pen, and when it turned out that the big names were out of their budget, the clerks would show them something with the store's own name on it, sometimes something that came from a first-tier factory but, because the maker's name wasn't on it, was offered at a lower price. (Can you see anything like that below?) Often, the buyer would walk out with a small package to put under the tree for the big day.



Many of those store-brand pens came from the National Pen Products Company, owned by Clarence E. Barrett. National Pen Products cranked out millions of parts and thousands of pens like the one in the illustration at the beginning of this issue, a Sears brand called the Comrade. The Comrade came in short and long versions; the one above is long, and here is the short one.



Distinctively styled with a pointy back end and a clip that emerges from the center of the cap crown to sweep down along the barrel after the manner of the J. G. Rider "Perfection" Pen from the 1910s, the Comrade was something different in a sea of pens that, from five feet away, looked largely the same. In case you haven't caught my drift here, it's that the Golden Age produced many good house-branded pens, and those "big box" pens deserve more respect than they usually get.

FROM THE CRYPT

A decade ago, I wrote a series of seven quickie articles that I posted somewhere. The Internet being a graveyard, I've exhumed them, and I'll be running them here. Here's the fourth:

How smart was Francis C. Brown, really?

Most, if not all, collectors of vintage pens know what a Waterman safety is. It's that cool retractable pen with the knob on the back, like this No. 15S:



Many collectors also know that Waterman didn't invent this design. They licensed it from Francis C. Brown, who patented it in 1898 (U.S. Patent N° 612,013) and used it in his own Caw's pens, like this N° 327:



What most of us don't know, however, is that Brown wasn't the first, either. In 1895, three years before he received his patent, he had bought from the Horton Pen Company, of New Haven, Connecticut, some machinery on which to make his pen. Horton, having been founded in 1894, was already selling the Horton Nonleakable Fountain Pen, built to U.S. Patents N°s 523,234 and 551,895, and working on the same helical-cam principle. This drawing is from the first of the Horton patents.

Fig. 1.

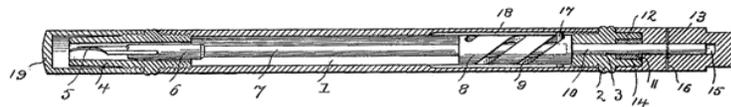
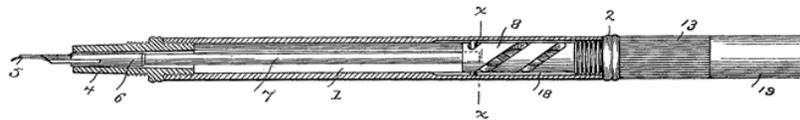
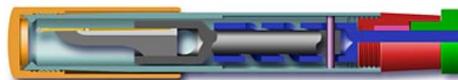
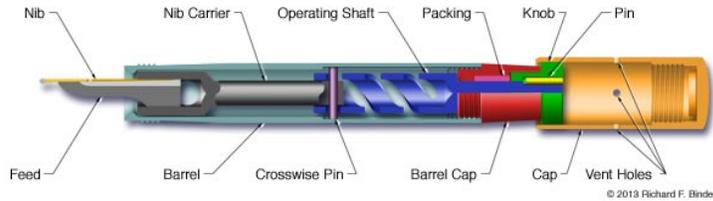


Fig. 2.



And this is my drawings of a Waterman safety. Look familiar?





Actually, there is an essential difference, and this is why Brown got his patent. Looking at the Horton drawing, you can see that the nib carrier slides through a closely fitted (but not tight) bore in the gripping section, which is removable for filling. This sliding fit is how inventors Peck and O'Meara kept their pen from leaking during use. In the Waterman version, which is based on Brown's U.S. Patent N^o 949,752 (issued in 1910), there is no separate gripping section. The front end of the nib carrier seals by pressing against a conical seat on the inside of the open end of the barrel.

And Speaking of the Crypt...

To delay the time when my Crypt articles will be moldering away in unmarked graves, I've added a From the Crypt section to the Reference Pages area of my website. I've already seeded the new section with the first three articles, and each of the remaining articles will appear there a month after you've received it here in *Nib Noise*.

BROAD STROKES

Some pen collectors — and users — gravitate to oversize pens. Now, some of those pens might seem too big to use comfortably, but this is not a bad thing, it's merely a preference. Let us not forget, however, that there are little pens out there, too, many of them truly beautiful and useful. And collectible.

With that in mind, let's look at one of the ranges of little pens from the Golden Age. I've had an article about the Parker Pastels on my site for some time, but it's just come out of the shop with a new coat of paint, a couple of desk accessories, and a cushy new interior with Parker Ivorine detailing. Which actually makes it about *two* ranges of little pens, one of them halfway pre-Golden Age. Oh, and it has a new title that even Dorothy Gale would approve of: **Ivory, Pastel, and Moire, Oh My!**



The Nib Noise Archive

For those who love delving into history, the *Nib Noise Archive* is on line.

PEN WORLD and Me

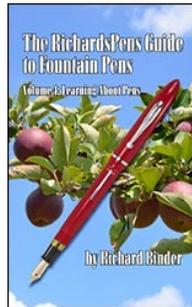
Part I of my new series for *PEN WORLD* Magazine was published in October, and Part II is slated for this month. This is a two-parter, stepping back 25 years in time from my obsession with World War II to look at the trench pens of the Great War. (The image for Part II came from a pre-production copy; the magazine will be out later this month.)



If you don't already subscribe to *PEN WORLD*, I recommend it as good reading and an excellent way to keep abreast with what's going on in the (pun intended) pen world. Print editions are available by subscription or on newsstands, and digital editions are available by subscription. Back issues are available.

My Books

There's nothing new in *The RichardsPens Guide to Fountain Pens, Volume 4: Learning About Pens*, except that for someone on your list who's just getting into pens and would benefit from the beginner's course. For that person, well, there's nothing like this book anywhere.



I invite you to visit my website's **Books page**. It has a complete listing of all my books, with direct links to the vendors' pages where you can buy them for all your close pen friends — or for your own library.



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By Don Fluckinger

December 2004: Modern Vintage Style

After several years of vintage militancy, I've warmed a little to modern pens again. Here are the best that caught my eye in this year's FPH catalog.



Pelikan M800 Souverän. Photo courtesy of [Fountain Pen Hospital](#). Used with permission.

From the *Glossopedia*

With more than 1,600 entries comprising (with subentries) more than 1,750 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.

Golden Age The period spanning the years from about the end of World War I (1918) to the end of World War II (1945), during which the fountain pen flourished to its greatest extent. The preceding decades of experimentation had laid the groundwork, with the design difficulties largely worked out and the materials and technologies becoming available to support large-scale production of inexpensive, reliable, and durable pens. After World War II, the ballpoint pen's ascendancy rang in the decline of the fountain pen. ¶ Most of the pens that collectors today recognize as classics, including such greats as the Conklin [Nozac](#); the Eversharp [Doric](#) and [Skyline](#); the Parker [Duofold](#), [Vacumatic](#), and "51"; Sheaffer's Flat-Top, [Balance](#), and "[TRIUMPH](#)"; and [Waterman's No 7](#) and [Hundred Year Pen](#), were products of the Golden Age.

If you would like to suggest an entry for the *Glossopedia*, I invite you to send an email to me at 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 133 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. When I release the next edition, your ebook vendor will notify you (or make the update silently).

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.

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. This month, just in time for the Christmas gift-giving season, here's what the Pen Doctor prescribes for newcomers who will be discovering how handy it is to have a blotter or three around.

Q: I have a packet of blotting paper and I do not know how to use it. I was just given a fountain pen and I infer that it is used somehow in the course of writing with a fountain pen. I just don't know how. I would like to know the proper way to use blotting paper if possible. I greatly appreciate any instruction or advice you can impart.

R: I'm sure you know this, but the purpose of blotting paper is to remove excess ink from a written page. There are two reasons for wanting to do this:

- The obvious reason for blotting is to dry your writing if there isn't time to allow it to dry naturally.
- A less obvious reason is to prevent bleeding or feathering. If you're using a paper with a finish that can't handle very wet ink lines such as the monster strokes you get from a superflex nib, you can write a few words, give the ink a few seconds to set onto the paper but not long enough to begin feathering, and then blot the writing before going on. This is perhaps inconvenient, but the end result may well be worth it.

The use of blotter paper is actually very simple, but it takes a moment of thought to see why the right way works.

You'll need to lay your pen down, or at least park it between your lips (*never your teeth!*) or two fingers (like a cigarette). Pick up the sheet of blotter paper with two hands and position it over the text you want to blot — but don't just quickly press it down willy-nilly. If you do, you can actually spread a very wet, heavy ink line (such as you get when you push a superflex nib), squishing it like a bug and making a splat on the paper. Instead, lay one edge of the blotter on the paper, hold that edge gently with a finger or two, and "roll" the blotter down onto the paper. This allows the blotter to absorb the excess ink in an orderly manner.



If you find yourself blotting frequently, you may want to add a *rocker blotter*. A rocker blotter, so called because it rocks back and forth like a baby's cradle, is a small "platform" with a cylindrically curved under surface. Attached to the under surface is a sheet of blotting paper. Most rocker blotters have handles, but some are designed so that you pick them up just by gripping the long sides.

To use a rocker blotter, you don't need to lay your pen down. Just pick up the blotter, lay one end of it against the paper, and roll it across the writing you want to blot.



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