

The Story of the Pen

James McInnis, '41

When we use a fountain pen we scarcely ever think of the different stages of development through which it has passed before reaching its present excellence. Yet, because of its great utility and almost universal use, the pen may be numbered among the world's really great inventions.

In earliest times, the crude pens produced took the form of painted bodkins of metal, bone, or ivory. These were employed in making inscriptions on wax tablets. They were advanced another step towards perfection when the ancients fashioned them out of the hollow joints of bamboo and stalks of grasses.

The introduction of paper, however, necessitated pens of a finer quality. It was then that men began to make pens from quills. They gathered suitable quills whose outer coverings they removed by burying them in sand for a couple of days. In some instances these pens were colored by a chemical process. In 1809, Joseph Bramah devised and patented a machine for dividing the whole quill into parts which he called "nibs." It was his idea that familiarized the public with the separate nib and holder. Quill pens were used extensively until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The first steel pen was invented by Byron Donkin, an Englishman, and first appeared in England about 1803. This pen was very hard and stiff. The prohibitive price (from two to three dollars) placed on it sufficiently explains why it did not become popular. A further stage of the pen's development was reached by James Perry. In 1828, he made pens that were far superior to all earlier ones. He added another improvement in 1830 through the invention of the hole in the center of the nib and the two lateral slits on each side of the central one. Perry's improvements were by far the most important developments in the history of the pen. In 1831, Joseph Gillot invented the elongated points. These too were a much needed improvement. In the production of this pen, the metal was annealed in a furnace and then treated with dilute sulphuric acid. The shape of the nib was fashioned with its slits marked in their proper places. After the nib had been cut it was rounded into its familiar semi-circular

shape. This process was slow and tedious. Though pens go through a much more elaborate process to-day, still, through the use of machinery they are manufactured much more quickly and with much less labor.

In 1850, John Hawkins introduced diamonds or rubies into pen points to make them more durable. His next step was to make gold plated pens with tips made from diamonds or iridium. At first the work was slow and laborious. The cost of these pens was from five to ten dollars each, but, when the use of machinery became more widespread, prices dropped greatly.

There were attempts during the middle of the nineteenth century to make a fountain pen—a pen with a reservoir of ink which automatically fed the nib when the instrument was in use. In the course of a few years other improvements were added that have brought the fountain pen to its present perfection. The manufacture of the fountain pen to-day requires over two hundred separate operations and materials from all parts of the world.



What Price Friendship ?

Augustine J. Campbell, '40

The sun poured down relentlessly on Far Rockaway Beach, where a small part of New York's crowded population found relief from the sweltering heat. Bob Grant and John Colbert, knee deep in the water, sauntered towards the shore. This was their first meeting since College had closed, and in less than a month they would be back again.

"Let's sit down here and have a chat, John," said Bob.

"I thought we had talked enough in College last year, to do both of us for the rest of our days," replied John, stroking back his wet brown hair.

"You know John," continued Bob, "I think that friendships formed at College are more lasting than friendships formed elsewhere."

"I never gave it much consideration but I am rather inclined to disagree with you. After all we are together in College for only four or five years, and, in that time, for only a part of each year."