A Brief History of Writing Instruments

Part Two: The History of the Fountain Pen

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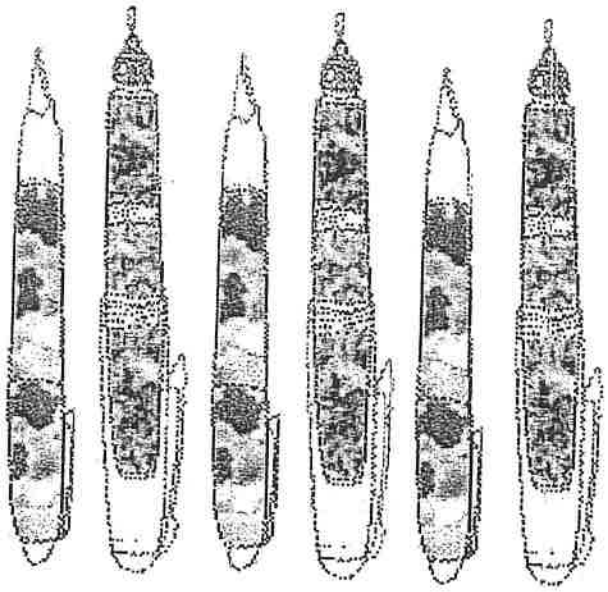

Part One: Introduction to the History of Writing Instruments

Lewis Edson Waterman patented the first practical fountain pen in 1884. Writing

instruments designed to carry their own supply of ink had existed in principle for over one hundred years before Waterman's patent. For example, Peregrin Williamson, a Baltimore shoemaker, received the first American patent for a pen in 1809. But Williamson's pen and other early fountain pen models were plagued by ink spills and other failures that left them impractical and hard to sell.

The fountain pen's design came after a thousand years of using quill-pens. Early inventors observed the apparent natural ink reserve found in the hollow channel of a bird's feather and tried to produce a similar effect, with a man-made pen that would h more ink and not require constant dipping into the ink well. But a feather is not a pen, only a natural object modified to suit man's needs. Filling a long thin reservoir made o hard rubber with ink and sticking a metal 'nib' at the bottom was not enough to produc a smooth writing instrument. Waterman, an insurance salesmen, was inspired to improve the early fountain pen designs after destroying a valuable sales contract with leaky-pen ink. Waterman's idea was to add an air hole in the nib and three grooves inside the feed mechanism.

A fountain pen mechanism is composed of three main parts. The nib, which ha the contact with the paper. The feed or black part under the nib controls the in flow from the reservoir to the nib. The round barrel that holds the nib and feed on the writing end, protects the ink reservoir internally (this is the part that you grip while writing).

All fountain pens contain an internal reservoir for ink. The different ways that reservoirs filled, proved to be one of the most competitive areas in the pen industry. The earliest 19th century fountain pens used an eyedropper, by 1915 most pens had switched to having a self-filling soft and flexible rubber sac as a ink reservoir. To refill these pens, the reservoirs were squeezed flat by an internal plate, then the pen's nib was inserted into a bottle of ink and the pressure on the internal plate was released so that the ink sac would fill up drawing in a fresh supply of ink.