



Why Don't We Have Our Own Museum? Isn't it Time? See p.11 for details..

Inside

- ✍ Dear Reader
- ✍ Part II: Interview With Andy Beliveau
- ✍ Abrasive Comments: A Primer
- ✍ Pen Shows: Philadelphia & LA
- ✍ Correspondence Without Burden
- ✍ Why Don't We Have Our Own Museum?
- ✍ Mr. Pen

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LET'S NOT WRITE OFF NEW PENS

So many new fountain pens are on the market today that it's almost unavoidable for a vintage pen collector like me not to buy a new pen every now and then. Some of the new pens are so appealing I wonder what I would have collected if they were available when I started collecting twenty-five years ago. We have finally met the reversal of how things were when vintage pens were king. Today, modern pens are in abundance and vintage pens have become nearly impossible to find outside the internet. At pen shows, the number of vintage pen exhibitors grows smaller with each new season. Instead, I am overwhelmed by new pens — glossy pictures in magazines and in catalogues, beautiful displays in shop windows and in stationery stores. And I see rows and rows of new pens on exhibitor's tables at pen shows. Each time someone passes by my vintage pen display to look at the new pens on someone else's table I feel like the odd guy out, and I wonder ... what it is that they see in new pens that they don't see in vintage?

Their attitude towards fountain pens must be different from those of vintage pen collectors like me. I'll bet most new collectors never used a fountain pen in their youth like we did. Nor did the universe of fountain pens back then look anything like it does today. When I started, there simply were no modern fountain pens and I spent my time learning all I could about vintage. I found their history to be as interesting as the pens themselves, and it was a pleasure to find a neglected pen and to put it back into working condition.

Today's collectors face a complete reversal of my early experience, a situation that is bound to influence their

attitudes towards collecting pens. With no prior connection to fountain pens, new collectors are free to choose between old and new. Their interest is fueled by slick advertising and by a growing community of new pen collectors, and because new pens are attractive and easier to learn about. There is even a new breed of collectors who collects only new and unused pens. On the other side, collectors like me pointed to differences between old and new rather than adopting more inclusive strategies. New collectors were the opposing team, and a mountain of slick advertising, fancy packaging, brochures, and pen hype isolated us and made it difficult for each of us to see what was on the other side.

Now, with so many new pen collectors and so few vintage pen collectors left to support me, I feel as though I am being overtaken by new and younger faces and the talk of new pens. Sometimes, the pen hype gets to me, and like a persistent sales person who calls and calls and calls I finally say 'yes'. During that weak moment I forget which side of the fence I'm on and a beautiful new pen comes home with me and I place it beside the vintage pens in my collection. Nestled comfortably in its pen trough, it is unaware of the storm brewing above its pocket clip- caused by being placed too close to its vintage counterparts - much as if it were a Parker placed beside a Sheaffer.

That the popularity of contemporary pens has steadily increased is no surprise. It is their new styling, new materials, and the fresh reinterpretations of classic designs that have reawakened



Pelikan Demonstrator

Continued on page 3

READER'S FORUM



Each quarter EQPR brings vintage pen lovers reports on pen shows, reviews of vintage and contemporary pens, and lively articles and essays on topics from ink to ethics. All in full color and for only \$25.00 for a year's subscription.

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 2007 winter issue of EQPR. This issue begins our fourth year of EQPR, suggesting that many collectors remain committed to vintage fountain pens. Yet, in the course of those four years I have noticed significant changes. Today's collector is younger and it seems as many women collect pens as men do. New pens have grown so important that vintage fountain pens have been driven entirely out of the consciousness of some collectors!

The preference for new has propelled contemporary fountain pens, and the people who collect them, to the forefront of our hobby. As a vintage pen collector, it makes me wonder what the future has in store for us. It may not surprise you, therefore, that in this issue I reflect on my bias towards new pens as I try to adjust to the times ahead. In, **Let's Not Write off New Pens**, Yours Truly suggests reasons for embracing new pens with the enthusiasm we normally reserve for vintage pens- though I should say readers must not take this article as a sign that EQPR will soon be filled with articles about new pens!

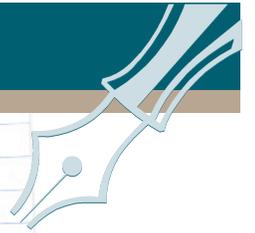
As I finished putting this issue together, a theme became apparent. Almost every article spoke to the fact that vintage pens require more care and understanding than contemporary fountain pens. As vintage pen collectors, there are things that we can do, and things we should not do, to preserve our vintage fountain pens for future generations. And yes, though contemporary pens have changed the hobby, their influence will not prevent future

generations from seeing in vintage pens the qualities we see in them- that is, if we are smart enough to take good care of them and pass on the word about them.

Because their number is finite and because time and inexperienced hands have a way of treating them unkindly, we must do what we can to preserve and protect them. Anthony J. Izzo gives us **Abrasive Comments: a Primer**, an article that explains the pros and cons of using a buffing wheel to restore the luster to vintage fountain pens. **Part II of an Interview with Andy Beliveau** discusses hard rubber pens the way Part I explained what to do and not do to restore vintage celluloid pens.

Pen shows this quarter include Philadelphia and Los Angeles. I missed LA again this year and I am bound and determined to get there next year. Nicholas Ayo is back with his essay, **Correspondence Without Burden**, and Yours Truly winds up this issue with another way to preserve fountain pens in **Why Don't We Have Our Own Museum?** I hope you enjoy this issue and I'm always interested in hearing from you.

Yours Truly,
Paul Erano



Pelikan

Demonstrator

Ballpoint Pen

LET'S NOT WRITE OFF NEW PENS (cont'd)

America's interest in fountain pens. This is a fact we must acknowledge even though we may stew at the new pen collector's indifference towards vintage pens. My own personal view leads me to believe that they are making a big mistake. But it is wrong for me to take out my frustration at not being able to win them over to vintage on new pens. Better to write articles to try to close the divide and persuade the two sides to meet in the middle.

But biases are not always easy to do away with. For years, I battled against new pens thinking vintage pens were somehow better. I could not understand why new collectors failed to see the value of vintage pens. Now, feeling a bit alienated and aware that I am responsible for where I stand, I wish that I had taken more constructive measures to pass the word about vintage pens along. It took time for new pens to evolve. It took longer for me to accept that our hobby changed and that I needed to change with it and soften my feelings towards new pens. Eventually I realized how a pen is built is more important than when it is made. There is little point in caring about vintage pens if I ignore new developments right under my nose. Why wear blinders? Thank heavens they came along when they did! New collectors and their interests are what keep fountain pens alive. Fountain pens would be like a dead language without them!

By now it is probable that contemporary pens have a bigger following than vintage fountain pens- a good thing because in the finite and fragile world of vintage fountain pens, many perils threaten their continued existence: botched restoration attempts by inexperienced collectors; degradation to pen casings caused by heat and sunlight and the passage of time; even overzealous house cleaners who to this day throw many unknown treasures into waste baskets. Many clinging to life are worn or so degraded that they are no longer attractive or useful. So it is lucky indeed that today's pens are tomorrow's classics. Who would deny the value of new, longer lasting materials, new manufacturing methods, and the imaginative minds that develop new pens?

That new pens are more popular than vintage pens is verifiable and we can make comparisons from various sources right in front of our eyes. I conducted a simple fountain pen search on eBay using the words 'new' and 'vintage' and found that of the twenty thousand pens listed at the time I looked, more than 1,000 came up with the word 'new' and just under a 1,000 with the word 'vintage'. I expanded the search for 'new' to include ball points and roller balls, and the number skyrocketed to more than 4,000 entries. What's happening on eBay corresponds to the attention new pens get at pen shows, and in catalogues and magazines. Some retailers are successful selling vintage pens, but sales of new pens far outweigh vintage. Even internet chat boards back up the preference for new pens, and I'm sure more data is available.

Modern fountain pens are popular because they suit the tastes and purposes of writers and collectors. The newest and most noticeable category is the previously nonexistent, instantly 'collectable' modern fountain pen — a retro/collectable object that succeeds by eye appeal, perceived status, and nostalgia more than its ability to function as a writing instrument. This object was inspired by other instant collectables including watches, pocket knives, and



even automobiles to which the concept was applied before fountain pens.

Some contemporary 'collectable' fountain pens have hit their mark. Others do not. Some have grown into monstrously ornate, fanciful objects that forsake the qualities that make a fountain pen perform well.

***This Visconti
Manhattan came
home with me many
years ago. It has design
elements of a Parker
Vacumatic and Waterman
No. 7 (stepped ends).***

Another interesting group are today's inexpensive fountain pens that equate in cost to the inexpensive vintage pens we find with missing parts, warped barrels and corroded metal nibs. Except for cost, new inexpensive pens have little else in common with inexpensive vintage pens. Excellent design and engineering, precise tooling, and durable materials have created a far superior breed of inexpensive fountain pens. Their stainless steel nibs and polished points are a pleasure to write with, and their pen casings made of steel, anodized metal, or plastic are durable, functional, and pleasing to look at. Parts fit so precisely that the quality they offer would have been unimaginable, except for the most expensive fountain pens, just a generation or two ago.

LET'S NOT WRITE OFF NEW PENS (cont'd)

Then there are the upscale and mainstream new pens that are the new pen collector's bread and butter — solid, functional writing instruments that compare well to any past fountain pen. Waterman's Edson and the LeMans series are pens I have mentioned in the past. Lamy's 2000 is a purpose built Bauhaus styled pen that works like a pack mule and is another pen that I've mentioned in EQPR on several occasions. You can also pick just about any Parker, Pelikan, Pilot, Platinum, or Omas and add them to the group. Other quality manufacturers that specialize in decorative finishes— like the Japanese using Maki-e and urushi lacquer and S.T. Dupont with its Chinese lacquer pens, or Conway Stewart's silver overlay pens — also give future generations of collectors something to look forward to.

And there is yet another group of contemporary pen makers. Bexley Pens, for example, is a well known American manufacturer that did not exist prior to the resurgence of today's modern fountain pen. This company (and there are others I can mention) often make pens that feel custom crafted instead of feeling like a standard production pen made by large manufacturers. Then there are the individuals who truly do make custom crafted pens. Joe Cali, Henry Simpole, (responsible for Conway Stewart's overlay work in their Centenary and Exhibition pens), and Mauricio Faivich of Argentina are individuals I have mentioned many times in this quarterly. Each has a large and appreciative following of collectors who delight in owning examples of their work.

Modern pens have matured to take their place alongside vintage pens. They are successful because they fill a void caused by time and the deterioration of vintage pens. The world has moved on and so have fountain pens. They no longer hold the status they once did, but they certainly are relevant to the world around us. To turn our backs on contemporary fountain pens would be like admitting that writing, like the vintage fountain pen itself, is a thing of the past.

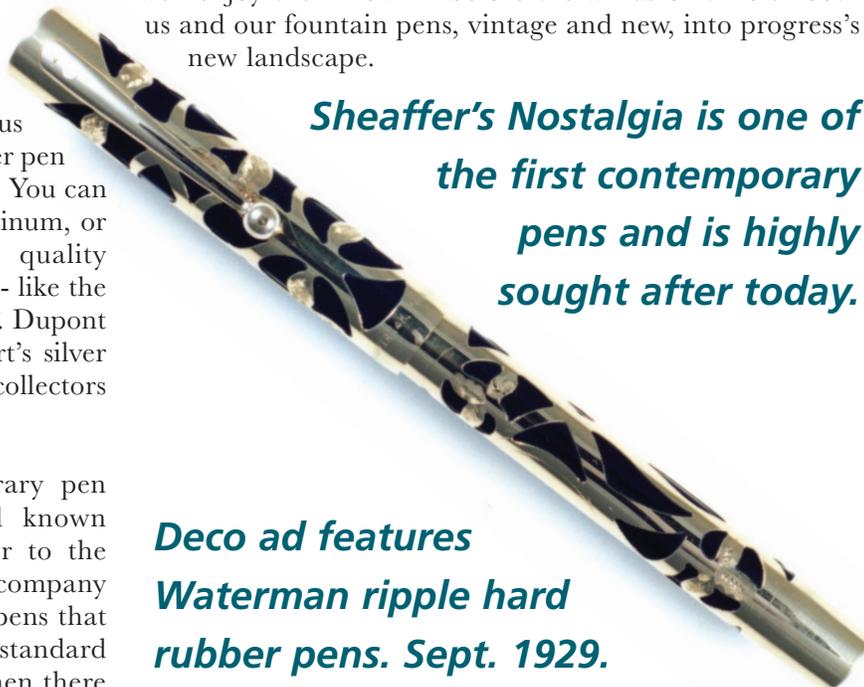
Why pit old against new when technology makes comparisons irrelevant? The written word, apart from the little bits and jabs we write with a gel pen, a roller ball, or ball point, is more often typed than written. We have trouble teaching grade school children who are more adept at using keyboards how to hold a pencil properly between their fingers. Yet, a thread of literacy persists. There are those of us who continue to write in complete sentences and in longhand. And we prefer to write each sentence with a fountain pen instead of a ball point or on a keyboard, knowing that a fountain pen is a bridge to past generations as much as it is a writing instrument whose ability to do the job remains unsurpassed.

4 We are lucky to live when vintage and

contemporary pens are both available to us. We might as well enjoy them now — before the winds of time smooth us and our fountain pens, vintage and new, into progress's new landscape.

Sheaffer's Nostalgia is one of the first contemporary pens and is highly sought after today.

Deco ad features Waterman ripple hard rubber pens. Sept. 1929.



Everyman's Pen

The critical stage when purchasing a fountain pen is the selection of the right pen point. Waterman's No. 7 makes this selection easy. No. 7 may be had in seven different pen points known by test and scientific experiment to include the seven universal preferences of writers. The precise point you like best is shown infallibly by a color band on the cap, enabling you to make an errorless selection. This is why Waterman's No. 7, selling at \$7, is Everyman's pen.

Ask any dealer to show you all seven styles, then make your selection confidently, knowing you will have pen satisfaction for your entire life.

Scholastic Styles

For the younger generation there are Waterman's Two-Tone fountain pens in ripple-blue-green, ripple-olive or ripple-rose, the larger size at \$5, the smaller at \$4. Or one of the Two-Tone pens with a Two-Tone pencil to match, may be had in a treasure chest for \$7 or \$5.50. For use by young folks of scholastic age it is impossible to find anything better than these beautiful Two-Tone writing tools.

All Waterman's pens are guaranteed forever against all defects.

Two-Tone pens made in two sizes — large size \$5, small size \$4.

Use Waterman's Ink in Waterman's Pens

Waterman's

Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan for September 1929

PART II: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDY BELIVEAU

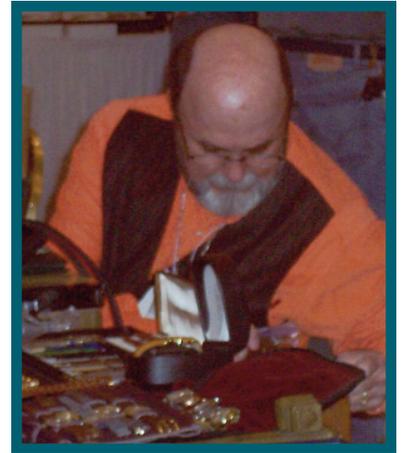
By their very nature, the supply of vintage pens is predetermined. The materials from which they are made can become brittle and fragile over time to threaten their chances for survival. They are vulnerable to temperature extremes, sunlight, and inexperienced collectors who apply improper methods as they attempt to repair or refurbish them.

In the last issue of EQPR, we discussed the nature of celluloid with Andy Beliveau who, in addition to being a noted pen collector, is a research scientist with much experience working with plastics and hard rubber. In Part II we continue our interview to discuss hard rubber pens. It is a topic that has generated heated debates among collectors for as long as our hobby has existed. And we all know how bad heat is for hard rubber. It takes someone like Andy to extract sound advice from techniques we hear about that make our palms sweat at the thought of applying them to hard rubber. The following should go a long way to help you keep your hard rubber pens in the best condition possible.

EQPR: What is hard rubber? What properties make it suitable for fountain pens? I notice that especially on

early fountain pens, some hard rubber can be porous. Is there varying quality in hard rubber to be aware of?

ANDY: Hard rubber is a mixture of natural rubber or synthetic rubber, carbon black, clay fillers, petrolatum, sulfad/zincate curative, and other ingredients depending on the final use of the rubber. The rubber elastomer is mixed with carbon black (or other pigments depending on color desired) clay fillers, petrolatum (a petroleum derivative like Vasolene), and UV absorbing agents or other materials depending on final use of the rubber. These ingredients are mixed hot without the curatives added and the final mix is extruded into a flat sheet form. The material is stable until the curative is added. When the rubber is to be made into some form, the curatives and more petrolatum are added on a hot roller mill, and the mix is either made into a preform for molding or chopped up to be placed into an extruder. During the hot extrusion or molding process the heat causes the rubber to vulcanize (polymerize/cure) into a hard rod or other form desired. Depending on the ratio of rubber and carbon black, clay fillers, other ingredients (petrolatum/ curatives) the rubber can be very hard or made more flexible. The type of rubber elastomer used and the amounts of petrolatum and curative usually control how hard the rubber will be. Because the extruded rubber rod is hard it can be turned on a lathe or molded with heat. The amount of carbon black and clay fillers will determine how porous the rubber will be. The degree of vulcanization also controls the quality of the rubber. The more rubber elastomer used in the mix, the more the final rubber product can be polished to a shiny surface.



ANDY BELIVEAU

An advertisement for American Hard Rubber Company. The top part features the text "HARD RUBBER" in large, bold, outlined letters, followed by "AN ESSENTIAL INDUSTRIAL RAW MATERIAL" in smaller, bold letters. Below this, there is a photograph of several fountain pens of various designs and colors. To the right of the pens, there is a text box with the following text: "ALL the famous makers of Fountain Pens—CONKLIN, MOORE, PARKER and others always use HARD RUBBER for their barrels and caps. There is a very good reason why. The chemical action of ink would corrode or destroy almost any other material which might be used. The Fountain Pen is one of hundreds of articles for which the use of HARD RUBBER is essential." At the bottom of the advertisement, the text "American Hard Rubber Company" and "11 Mercer St., New York" is displayed in a stylized font.

EQPR: How are hard rubber pen casings formed? How are they made to resemble wood grain or given another appearance as in Waterman's ripple pens?

ANDY: The rubber for pens was made into a rod form using an extruder that heated the rubber under pressure to form very flexible spaghetti like rod. When the hot rod was laid down in a straight channel and cooled it hardened into a straight rod. Wood grain pens and ripple pens were made by feeding the black hard rubber and a red rubber (probably pigmented with iron oxide pigment or other colored pigment)

Hard Rubber Advertisement

Continued on page 6

into the extruder in a special way. The un-vulcanized rubber preform for both colors was fed into the extruder that had a very slow screw motion or only a straight plunger pressure motion and depending on the design of the extruder head design, the rubber was mixed and either created the streaked wood grain pattern, ripple pattern or a mottled pattern. The ripple design must have been a special way of mixing the two rubbers together at the extruder head.

After the rods were made and cooled in straightening troughs, they were cut to specific lengths and they were machined on a lathe to get a basic pen shape. The pen blank was threaded and slotted depending on the design and was either polished to a smooth surface or chased. Chasing was performed using a roller wheel having a raised pattern design. The roller wheel was pressed against the rubber as it turned in the lathe and the design was pressed into the rubber. In some case the embossing wheel was heated depending on how deep the design need to be embossed. This operation is similar to how a machinist engine turns metal parts. The embossing of the entire length usually was performed using a moving bed that draws the embossing tool very slowly and horizontally across the surface while the rod is turning. The use of an embossing wheel allowed the machinist to place a never ending design onto the rubber surface. Chased pens were preferred over smooth pens because they had a better feel/grip in the hand. Chased pens also may have been easier to make because the chasing could hide any imperfections in the turned surface where as polished pens had to have a perfect surface.

EQPR: How well do hard rubber pens hold up over time, and how do they compare to plastic?

Adding pigment to hard rubber has made many a poor pen, like this John Holland, brittle. The barrel and cap are both cracked.

6



ANDY: Hard rubber holds up over time because:

- It is hard, less flexible and thermally stable over a wide temperature range,
- Contains ingredients that can absorb UV light and atmospheric ozone,
- Contains petrolatum that does not evaporate or migrate like other plasticizers in pens made from cellulose acetate,
- Rubber has less internal stress than other thermally molded plastics.

EQPR: Why does black hard rubber turn color, or haze? Why do other color hard rubber pens seem to be less vulnerable to hazing, and why are they more brittle?

ANDY: Because hard rubber contains petrolatum and sulfad/ zinate curatives, the unlinked curative can come to the surface of the rubber through the petrolatum and form a yellow/white haze on the surface. This haze is called bloom. Bloom happens when the outer surface becomes hot and the excess curatives can move through the more fluid petrolatum to the surface. The bloom can be wiped off if it were found early. Black hard rubber pens have lots of carbon black and clay that is porous and absorbent where as orange hard rubber or mixed color material have pigments that are not as porous or absorbent and are mechanically harder. The pigments take the place of the carbon black and filler making the rubber more brittle. The colored hard rubber pens appear to crack easier probably due to the ratio of rubber to pigment to petrolatum. The carbon black in black hard rubber pens will absorb the rubber elastomer and the petrolatum components and result in a more uniform mix. The pigments used in colored rubber materials do not absorb the rubber and petrolatum as well. Black hard rubber has the ability to absorb UV light and withstand atmospheric ozone where as the pigmented material does not absorb the light and the rubber elastomer can break down over time.

Discoloration and oxidation in black hard rubber pens is due to the petrolatum material at the surface eroding away due to heat and constant use. The erosion leaves a surface that is only the rubber and the clay filler. As stated earlier the excess curative materials also come to the surface and form a haze that is not easily removed. If we were able to re-impart the petrolatum into the surface the rubber would look new again. Unfortunately this is very difficult to do.

EQPR: Black hard rubber pens can really look ugly when they become worn and faded. Polishing, sanding, dying pens, even the use of bleach, are all methods I've tried in the past with varying degrees of success. Are there any safe methods of restoring their color and condition?

PEN SHOWS: PHILADELPHIA & L.A.

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles — As I mentioned, I did not attend this year's Los Angeles Pen Show as I had hoped to, but word about the show got back to me during and after the show ended. The show was held the weekend of February 23-25, 2007 at the Manhattan Beach Marriott Hotel. Organizers Chris Odgers, Stan Pfeiffer, and Boris Rice were again reported to have done an excellent job managing what is among the largest and most anticipated international shows of the year. Approximately one-hundred and seventy-five exhibitor/vendor tables were set up this year. There probably could have been more, but the show was sold out due to lack of additional space. With a show this size, there is always a great deal to see and do. The show is open to the public on Sunday, but several people reported that it was very busy with lots of trading, especially earlier in the week. Seminars were put on by Greg Minushkin, Stan Pfeiffer, Ward Dunham, Susan Wirth, and Joel Hamilton and Sherrell Tyree. Nearby restaurants are reported to be excellent. This is a show that I've threatened to attend for the past several years. Next year, I intend to make reservations well in advance.

Schedule of Upcoming Events: New England (Boston) Pen Show, April 14-15; Chicago Pen Show, May 3-6; Triangle Pen Show (Raleigh, NC) June 7-10; and the Miami Pen and Watch Show, July 13-16, 2007.

PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia — This year's Philadelphia Pen Show was held January 19-21, 2007 at the Sheraton Philadelphia City Center Hotel, formerly the Wyndham Franklin Plaza. This is the third year for the show organizer Bertram's Inkwell who is also responsible for the Miami Watch and Pen Show at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables in July. The Sheraton is a large hotel with large rooms and exhibition spaces, friendly and efficient staff, and reasonable pen show rates of \$109 per night and underground parking (for an additional fee of about \$50 for the weekend). By now, Jim Rouse and Bert Oser of Bertrams are old hands at putting on a top quality show, and ninety-three exhibitors and vendors filled two large rooms to entice the seven-hundred and fifty people who came through the doors over the weekend. The show has a well deserved reputation for being a friendly, intimate show, and there are plenty of restaurants within walking distance or a short cab ride away despite the threat of bad weather in January. Access to the hotel is easy and is only a few minutes away from the Ben Franklin Bridge.



**Examples of hard rubber pens:
Waterman's ripple pattern,
Sheaffers in red hard rubber,
and Relief in mottled hard
rubber (English).**

CORRESPONDENCE WITHOUT BURDEN

Most of us have trouble with correspondence. In responding to our paper-mail we mean well, but do poorly. One of the reasons stems from the hassle often enough to determine a current return address and to find an appropriate paper and envelope along with correct postage. Here is a suggestion tried and proven over many years to work for me. When a letter arrives and one intends to reply, address an envelope immediately from the return address given and put on standard postage. The original correspondence can be attached to the envelope in case one needs to refer to it later on. One can insert a matching card or paper as well, or one can decide on the paper or card later on when the time to write comes. No need to decide how long the reply should be at this time. One will accumulate a small stack of stamped and addressed envelopes. It becomes clear how far behind or how caught up one might be with correspondence. When one finds time to write a letter or a number of letters, a quick rifling of the envelopes will allow the more urgent or important responses to surface.

I often write my reply with a medium italic nib or a broad pointed nib when I want to fill a page with a few words. Arranged with some artistic care in margins and spacing, a very attractive response to even a long letter can be concluded quickly. A few carefully chosen words can mean as much or more than a long and thoughtless letter.

What about news — the goings and comings, the triumphs and the laments? Correspondents often write what is happening in their life and expect you to do the same. Every so often I craft an obvious newsletter that is either hand written or sometimes typed and clearly intended as an insert. Multiple copies allow for a single insert in any reply letter or card that is hand-written with but a few well-chosen words and more personal thoughts.

The stack of stamped and hand-addressed envelopes need never grow high or leave one confused about to whom I owe a letter and where is their address. Without confusion and distress, answering correspondence becomes more of a joy, all the more intense if the fountain-pen handwriting gives great pleasure even for its own sake. In fact, when such joy in penmanship obtains, I find that I write notes often enough to folks I care about for no particular reason except to surprise them. And as for the pile of envelopes ready to go, if one took on but a few envelopes a day

for some days in a row, most of us would be in good shape with out personal correspondence. Christmas cards that deserve a few chosen words in response, I treat the same way as letters that arrive by post. I like to think that a hand-written envelope carefully spaced, a hand-written note carefully thought out with feeling, no matter how few the words, is opened with happy anticipation and received by another as my personal gift. In the end, I enjoy my correspondence when I enjoy my fountain pens, and I delight in sending correspondence with few but well-chosen words hand-written to persons with whom I would stay in touch.

Nicholas Ayo
December 19, 2006

*With a few strokes
of a pen
RICHELIEU
demonstrated that "the
pen is mightier
than the sword"*

SINCE Richelieu's day, Waterman's has added even more to the power of the pen, and men as great as he have selected it because of the exceptional service it always renders.

Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen
satisfies every pen-need perfectly

Made with different sized holders to fit different sized hands, pen points that suit every style of writing, and an ink capacity that is unequaled in pens of the same size.

... The LIP-GUARD, the CLIP-CAP, the SPECIAL FILLING DEVICE and the SPOON-FEED are four outstanding features.

Ask any one of 50,000 merchants to show you the style illustrated; with cardinal, black or mottled holder. Make your selection at \$4.00 or in larger sizes at \$5.50 or \$6.50.

W. & F. Waterman Company
191 Broadway, New York
Chicago, San Francisco, Boston
Montreal

Illustration is exact size of the \$4.00 model. Made with cardinal, black or mottled holder.



ABRASIVE COMMENTS: A PRIMER

by Anthony J. Izzo

If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, then this may well be the most dangerous article to ever appear in these pages. I figure it's going to lead to the total destruction of at least a few nice old pens. I also think it's likely to stop a lot of vintage pen owners from making huge mistakes and maybe prevent the loss of a lot more choice stuff. I don't know. Draw your own conclusions.

When I began to learn about old pens and the people who love them, I found out that a substantial number of collectors are strongly opposed to the restoration and refurbishing of vintage pens. At first, this annoyed me. Attitudes on restoration vary from hobby to hobby. For most mechanical and electronic collectibles (cars, watches, radios), a well-restored example is admired ("Looks like it just came off the showroom floor!"). Some other collectibles are prized as found, with the signs of honest wear and natural aging actually considered as something to be preserved ("If only it could talk!"). I guess my reaction came from the fact that a fountain pen is, to me, a mechanical device with interchangeable parts, and such things are frequently restored without furor. Still.

I've been told that some pen fans will fly into fits of rage at the mere suggestion of restoration. Despite their most spectacular conniptions, plenty of restoration still goes

on, and plenty of good stuff gets wrecked.

To put it plainly, abrasive polishing compounds thoughtfully and carefully applied with a power buffing wheel are nothing less than a fountain of youth for old pens. Few would contend that a badly scratched, dingy, beaten and neglected old example should be better left as is and admired for its lovely patina (*pat' -e- ne/ n., pl. patinas, patinae, fr. L. patina, patena, GK patane: rust with a good press agent*). Power buffing can make a sorry-looking pen quite attractive, but there's a risk that goes with it, and it's a biggie. Buffing wheels spin at hundreds of revolutions per minute. They come in three basic forms: solid felt, sewn layers of cloth, and loose layers of cloth sewn in the center. The fibers in the wheel eventually unravel and can catch on projections like clips, levers, bands, etc. Want to see that nice LeBoeuf of yours wrenched out of your hands and smashed into a couple of dozen pieces in less than a second? No sledgehammer could do a better job. Just remember: your pen, your risk.

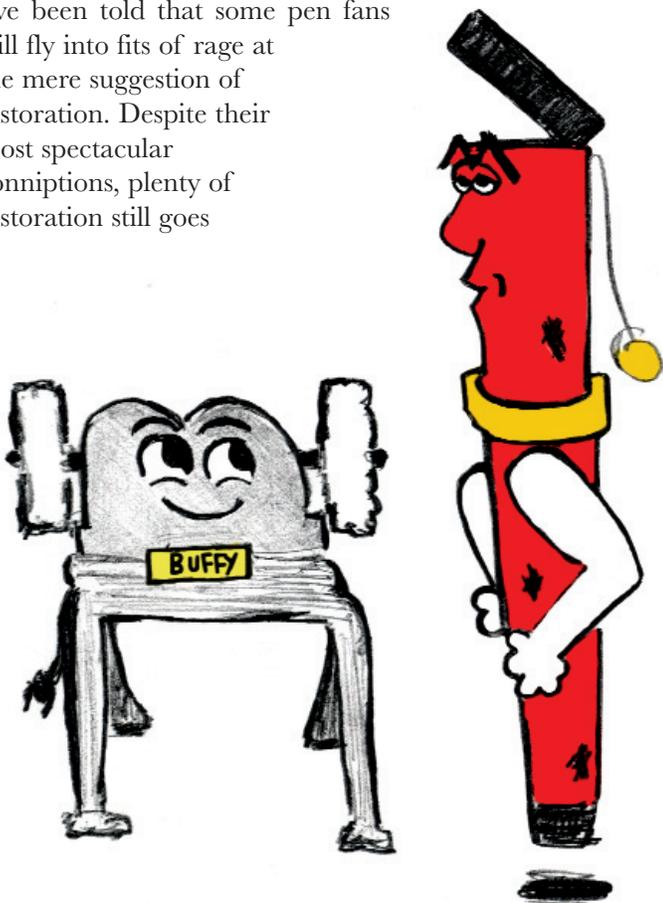
It gets worse. Don't think of using a buffing wheel without eye protection. Safety glasses or face shield on at all times. No exceptions. You'll also need a dust mask or respirator. Not for you? Just blow your nose after a polishing session and see what you've been inhaling. Also, be sure to remove anything really sharp from the pen before you start polishing. It is entirely possible to drive a nib right into your hand. Don't ask me how I know that. I'm serious. Don't even.

Now for the good news. Anyone who is willing to learn and practice buffing pens can turn out acceptable results. Even better; once you learn first-hand what abrasives can do, you greatly reduce the possibility that you might buy a badly buffed pen. Let's start with a few basic truths:

1. The use of any abrasive on a buffing wheel generates heat and removes material.
2. When you buff out a scratch, you're buffing out the surface that the scratch was part of.
3. The material you remove will *not* grow back.

After all that, you'd think that if you keep that sage advice in mind at all times all you have to do is casually pass the pen back and forth across that spinning, abrasive-packed wheel until what looked awful looks great. Wrong. Good buffing requires thinking *all* the time about where that wheel is relative to inside curves, outside curves, edges, gaps, holes, protrusions, imprints, etc. You'll also have to pay close attention to how long the wheel stays in one spot.

You'll develop your own technique, but here's some ground rules:



Sometimes you really rub me the wrong way!!!

Continued on page 10

ABRASIVE COMMENTS: A PRIMER (cont'd)

Get A Wheel With True Grit. Commercial buffing and polishing compounds come in a bewildering array of names and colors. Brown Tripoli, White Diamond Tripoli, White Rouge, Red Rouge, Green Rouge, Yellow Rouge, Chartreuse Rouge, Ecru Rouge, Paisley Rouge. Pick the wrong color and you'll instantly remove more material than you ever dreamed possible. The good industrial compounds have a "grit" number on the package. Higher grit number equals finer abrasive particles. A lot of the hardware and hobby store compounds don't have a grit number but are identified with worthless oversimplifications like "for plastics", "for precious metals", etc. They also don't get into what the abrasive particles are made of (aluminum oxide?) or what the medium is (glue? grease? wax?). Never use any compound to buff a pen until you've tested it yourself on identical scrap. Use the wrong grit to buff the massive bumper of your '55 Packard Clipper and you can usually correct your mistake. Try that with your Vacumatic and you'll have a nice piece of pearlized charcoal. Always test first.

Keep It Moving. Never hold any part of a pen still on a moving wheel, not even for a fraction of a second. You'll end up with a scoop buffed out of the surface that will feel like the Grand Canyon when you run your fingers over it. No great pressure against the wheel is necessary to cause the problem. Actually, its good practice to run your fingers up and down the barrel after every pass across the wheel to see if you're getting close to trouble.

Watch Those Imprints! More than any other single factor, the treatment of imprints during polishing is what really separates the Pros from the Joes (I like that expression. It's so much better than the old "men from the boys", especially since "Jo" can also be a woman's name. Finally an expression that lets us all sound equally incompetent). Slipshod work here usually results in a "pulled" imprint. The letters will look stretched across the surface from top to bottom, and the horizontal parts of each letter will look blurred and weaker than the vertical parts. Here's what's happening: the abrasive-filled fibers in the wheel are acting on the letters like a wave of water acts on letters drawn in beach sand. The parallel "wave" of the abrasive takes material from the horizontal parts and pushes them up and away. I can't think of any reason why imprints ever require wheel polishing. Far better to buff around them and hand polish later with abrasive on a flat stick, one careful stroke at a time. Note to potential buyers: a pulled imprint just isn't going to be caused by fingers rubbing on a barrel over time. If you are offered a nice shiny pen with such an imprint, you might want to consider paying considerably less than top price. If the seller insists otherwise, you might want to let somebody else pay him. Just something to think about.

Edges Come Last. Sharp corners and edges are not to be shoved directly into the abrasive wheel. Contact the wheel first with an area well away from the edge and lift the work off at the edge when you come to the end of the pass. This greatly reduces the chances of losing sharpness and squareness that can't be put back without extensive reconstruction. Hand polish to the edge and re-examine the work after each stroke. (Way-too-obvious point: Do not wheel polish a many-faceted pen, like a Doric).

They're Holes, Not Craters. When the abrasive-laden fibers of a buffing wheel get down inside a hole, they start carrying away material from the hole's edges. This results in a "dished" hole. Once you've seen one, you'll pay more attention to lever boxes and vent holes in caps. Take your time and polish these by hand. By the way, I am the proud owner of a 1915 vintage Savage lever action rifle that has every one of the 10 screw holes in its graceful steel receiver looking like little funnels. A nice old collectible trashed by someone in a hurry. Don't do it.

You'll also find a few products along the way that you'll consider indispensable. Here's a few I won't do without:

Variable-Speed Controls. At this writing, a bench grinder suitable for 6 inch polishing wheels and equipped with a rotary speed control and attached work light is available from the Lowe's home improvement chain for less than eighty dollars. I'm sure other concerns stock similar products. Wish I'd had one 20 years earlier. The ability to buff slowly, carefully, with frequent examinations of the work under bright light, can avoid a lot of wrecks. I often fabricate excuses to buy new tools. This one doesn't need any excuses.

Watch Crystal Abrasives. Search "watch crystals" on the net and you'll find several cake-type polishes especially designed to buff scratches and dings out of plastic wristwatch crystals. It is wonderful stuff for its intended purpose, and it's just as good on old pens. I used one brand, "Crystal-Kleer", for many years and never once smelled burned polymer. Taking everything into account, and assuming the existence of a top quality soft buffing wheel and a practiced operator, I can think of nothing better for high-speed use on plastic, hard rubber, or celluloid. Nothing. If that's not versatile enough for you, try it on those scratched-up CDs, DVDs, and CD-ROMs that won't play right anymore.

Five-F Rubbing Compound. A product of the Brownell's company of Montezuma, IA, designed as a finer than fine compound to put a super high gloss finish on custom wood gunstocks. I've found it to be the closest stuff to the aforementioned watch crystal abrasive in thick liquid form. Brush it on cloth-covered flat sticks to reach those problem

WHY DON'T WE HAVE OUR OWN MUSEUM?

Saratoga Springs, the town close to where I live, is unusual for a town of its size. It is a famous resort town no doubt in part because it is home to one of the most famous race tracks in the country. It is also home to the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, known as SPAC, and summer residence for the New York City Ballet and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Because of this, Saratoga Springs has several very nice museums. Driving along Union Street, I noticed the large stature of Seabiscuit as I passed by the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame located across from the historic race track. Taking a left onto Broadway I drove by the Museum of Dance and the new Saratoga Automobile Museum that is located in an old mineral water bottling plant just off the Avenue of the Pines in Saratoga Spa State Park, also home to the Gideon Putman Hotel and two golf courses.

I took another left onto Route 50 and drove by the Bottle Museum in the next town, Ballston Spa, just down the road from Saratoga Springs, a museum frequented by perhaps our hobby's most senior collector, Jerry Gerard. Continuing just a few more miles on Route 50 into Schenectady County is the Empire State Aerosciences Museum on the grounds of the Stratton Air National Guard Base, home to the 109th Airlift Wing whose C130s routinely service installations in the Antarctic.

Though I am fortunate to have so many museums where I live, I am not alone. Everywhere I go, I pass by museums of one sort or another. There are museums for golf, baseball, basketball, soccer, and rock and roll. There is the National Women's Rights Museum, in Seneca Falls, New York, the New York State Museum in Albany and the Museum of Natural History in New York City. There is the Smithsonian Museum, and- I'm sure I'm not the first one to ask this question- but why don't we have a museum, too? If there are at least three museums in a small town like Saratoga Springs, NY, why can't we muster enough enthusiasm to put together a museum that chronicles the history of writing?

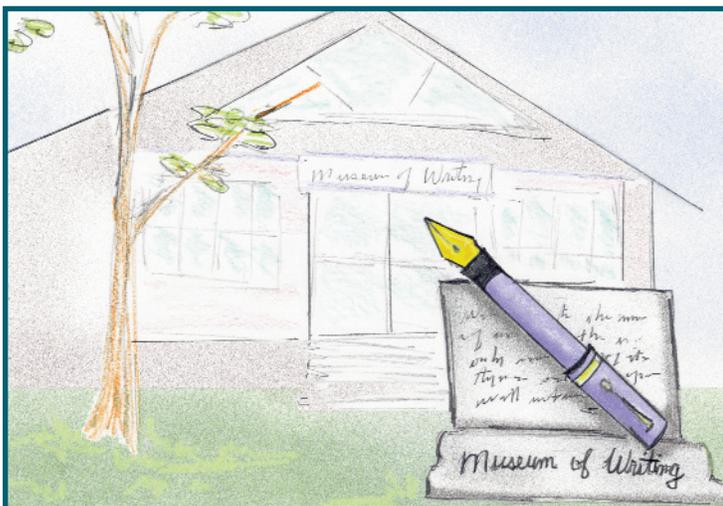
Of course, it goes without saying that this is a job for the Pen Collectors of America, the PCA being our national

organization much as the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors (NAWCC) is to watch and clock enthusiasts. By the way, they have their own national museum located in Columbia, Pennsylvania! Is it any wonder that their ranks are so strong when our hobby has difficulty maintaining membership in the PCA? What better way is there to share our knowledge and pass on our love for writing instruments and the written word? Think about the exhibits a museum can offer to keep both literacy and the fountain pen alive.

If I could make a few suggestions, there would be several things I'd like to see in our museum of writing. For starters, there would be exhibits of pens and manufacturers including those that we currently know little about. There would be an exhibit of all the materials and manufacturing techniques used to make pens over the decades (centuries). I would include an exhibit of Pens around the World that explains how various countries apply their own art, methods, and ideas to fountain pens. There would be an exhibit of important documents and fountain pens that belonged to famous individuals- writers, poets, statesmen, philosophers, scientists, explorers- with explanations of what their pens helped them accomplish. There would be an exhibit of the largest and smallest working pens; an exhibit of prototype pens by important manufacturers, and pens with unusual filling mechanisms and devices that never saw the light of day. There would also be an exhibit of pens of the future.

There would be hands on exhibits and seminars to teach people about inks and nibs, pen repair, conservation methods, calligraphy, hand writing analysis, even how to make pens, ink, and paper. Beginning at the front door and ending with the future of writing at the exit, the walls of the new museum would chronicle the history of writing. There would be a vast library of easily accessible information. Staff would be on hand to carry out their mission of promoting literacy, preserving our heritage, and carrying on academic study and research. They would teach by example, each one wielding a pen or pencil properly between his or her fingers. Endowments would pour in. Exhibition rooms and fancy plaques would hold the names of pen collectors who contribute enough pens, ephemera, and money to help the museum prosper.

It's only a dream, I know. But dreams lead to reality. One day soon, I see myself driving along Union Street in Saratoga on a beautiful spring morning, and I notice new construction down the road from the stature of Seabiscuit in front of the National Museum of Racing. A new statue is being erected. Is it another horse, perhaps? As I approach the new object I see that it is bronze and that it is shaped like a large fountain pen. The front of the pen has a large, open nib that has been freshly gold leafed and shines brightly in the sunlight. On its granite base, inscribed in a very legible cursive text, are the words National Museum of Writing.



PART II: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDY BELIVEAU (cont'd from page 6)

ANDY: If you take a faded hard rubber pen and put it to a polishing wheel with very fine abrasive such as red rouge you can remove the hazed surface down to a black surface. This is not an acceptable restoration method as you are removing rubber and most likely the chasing and the embossed manufacturer's name and logo. Because petrolatum is a petroleum product like Vaseline you can rap the pen in a soft cloth that has been saturated with Vaseline and leave the pen rapped tightly for several weeks. Some types of hard rubber will respond to this treatment but other manufacturers do not. In some cases the pen may come out perfect in other cases the pen will come out blotchy with black patches between oxidized patches. This may be the only safe method to restore the surface.

If you use a black dye or pigmented dispersion in solvent such as shoe polish the solvent cannot penetrate the surface rubber enough to permanently imbibe the black pigment so that it will stay during use. The treatment usually wears off rapidly when used. Solvent based blackeners can soften the rubber to a point where the rubber is no longer hard.

There is no surefire method for restoring black hard rubber pens to their original state that is permanent.

EQPR: What can collectors do to preserve and take care of their hard rubber pens? What should they not do? Is it safe to put hard rubber pens on a buffing wheel?

ANDY: Collectors can very lightly buff a smooth hard rubber pen to bring out the black. Pens that are already hazed yellow or white would need extreme buffing and this is not recommended. It is best to leave them with the patina. The use of the soft cloth Vaseline wrap may help but it is not

always successful. Black hard rubber and colored hard rubber pens need to be stored in a room temperature environment out of direct sunlight and lamp light. The temperature should never go below 50° F or above 80°F during storage. Rubber kept cold all the time can crack when the temperature rises. Rubber held at elevated temperatures can distort and warp.

Never put hard rubber pens into water/soap solutions for more than a minute as the water will also haze the surface and even when dry the surface no longer appears polished.

EQPR: I notice that hard rubber is still occasionally used to make contemporary fountain pens. Is there any difference in the composition of the hard rubber?

ANDY: Contemporary hard rubber that is used to make pens is probably made from synthetically engineered materials that are cured with modern curatives. This makes for pens that are more thermally stable elastomers and very little excess curative is left after vulcanization. The petrolatum may also be replaced by a synthetic plasticizer that is also more stable over a wide range of environmental conditions. The rubber industry has learned a great deal about making very sophisticated rubber polymers for use in automobile tires, bumpers, and gaskets and sealants that are tougher, longer lasting, and stable under all conditions. These new technologies have been applied to formulating new hard rubber that is crack resistant and can be polished to a fine shine and does not haze over time. Hard rubbers are still used in many products in the medical and scientific applications due to the rubber's resilience and stability.

New hard rubber pens usually are more lustrous than the most preserved old hard rubber pens. In my opinion the older hard rubber pens still have a great look and feel better in the hand.

ABRASIVE COMMENTS: A PRIMER (cont'd from page 10)

areas you wouldn't dare put on a wheel. Chuck two or three cotton swabs in an electric drill and dunk them in Five-F to polish the grungy *insides* of clear pen barrels.

Well, that's about as far as I can take you here. You'll have to decide if it's worth it to you to gain the skills necessary to polish well. I'm sure you don't need to be reminded that your practice-lots of it-should be on total junk. If you decide to try it, I sincerely hope that your first serious effort results in a

beautifully restored pen, one with razor-sharp edges and all imprints clear, a pen that will delight you with a color, brilliance and glow that you never dreamed existed outside of 30-year collections. Best of all, you will have found such enjoyment not by outrageous spending or sheer dumb luck, but by the use of your own thought and talent. Such rewards are certainly worth pursuing in any hobby.

Good Luck.



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