



# The Thaddeus Davids Ink Company

By Ed & Lucy Faulkner

Thaddeus Davids and his ink company of the same name have a long and interesting history. Davids was a good businessman and built the ink company up to one of the largest of the time, only to lose it and have to start over three times because of his trust in his fellow man. The last time in 1883 not only cost him everything he owned, but his health as well. According to one source, the only thing he had left was his honor, because he sold everything he owned to pay off debts incurred in the company name by his son, George, the financial manager of the company.

The story begins in 1823 when his father moved the family to New York City when Thaddeus was thirteen years old. Here he entered the employ of an Englishman named Raven (no other name given) who was an ink manufacturer. When Raven died, he left the company to Thaddeus. Because he was still a minor, the business had to be listed in his father's name, William Davids. Some old ads show May 1824 as the manufacturing start-up, but bottle labels list 1825 as date of establishment. During this early period he failed to receive payment for a government contract and gave up the business, going to sea for a short time. Upon returning, he entered the business again and prospered with his manufacture of

quality ink. An 1829/30 New York Directory listing still had William Davids, Chemist, in the listing. Thaddeus would have become of legal age in 1831.

Davids' introduction of steel pen ink in 1827 was his best product at the time. It was guaranteed to write black and be of "record" quality. By 1833, he was making ink similar to English inks. He called it chemical writing fluid and added indigo for more color. Davids continued with more innovative and improved inks in the following years, always working to improve the quality. His inks were as good as, or better than, any on the market. In 1856, an experiment by a well known chemist listed his as the least fading ink on the market when compared with such names as Maynard & Noyes, Harrison's Columbian and Blackwood's. This was an important factor for businesses and government. These results were copied and used on bottle labels and trade cards handed out by the company at the 1876 Centennial in Philadelphia. Thaddeus Davids, as well as many other ink companies, had displays at this huge centennial celebration.

By the late 1830s, Davids was prosperous enough that he wanted to buy a country place in New Rochelle, a short distance from New York City. Leaving the business in the hands of his partner, he took some time negotiating for the New Rochelle property. When he returned to the city, he found out his partner had somehow managed to sell the business and ruin him. So instead of being wealthy, he was \$700 in debt. With hard work, he entered the business again for himself at 112 John Street in 1840.

From the early 1840s to early 1850s, available information is sketchy. But we believe during this period, he was the

Davids of Davids and Black Ink, having taken John Black on as a partner or buying out Black's previous partner. His labels from the mid-1850s are similar with the earlier Davids and Black labels except for the name. Also in his book, he pictures Davids and Black ink. The awards listed on both are for Thaddeus Davids ink. In 1852, an obituary was found for John Black, Jr., of the ink company. Sometime after this, Thaddeus was back in business for himself. An article in the *Scientific American* in 1856 referred to the Davids Company as the late Davids and Black. (Late was a term used frequently at the time for "formerly".) Addresses for the Thaddeus Davids company at this time included 222 William Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street, with offices on 26 Cliff Street. For a brief period in 1854, he intended to move the company to New Rochelle. This didn't work out because an old mill being renovated for the ink factory burned. This mill had been used for making sealing wax and wafers. An 1888 article in a N.Y. magazine said they still maintained two factories in New Rochelle. Mostly likely this was the John B. Davids Company and a factory for the production of wax, wafers and miscellaneous products.

After moving back to N.Y.C., manufacturing plants and offices were at 127 and 129 William Street. The warehouse was a spacious six-story building. At the William Street factory, they made thirty-three different inks as well as other products. The steel pen ink was still being made from the original formula at least through the early 1900s. In 1856 a son, George W. Davids, was admitted as a partner, and the company became known as Thaddeus Davids and Company. The company continued to grow and prosper under Thaddeus and his sons. But in 1883, he was ruined again,



Thaddeus Davids' picture as used on letterheads.

**COPYING Ink, and Indelible Ink,**  
 manufactured by Davids & Black—excellent  
 articles just received and for sale at the Book Store,  
**D. CAMPBELL & SON,**

1847 ad for Davids & Black copying ink and indelible ink.



this time by his son George, a senior partner and financial manager of the company. George, unbeknown to his father, had incurred debts far more than the assets of the company using the company as collateral. When these debts became known and due in early 1883, the company couldn't pay them. In April of that year, the *New York Times* reported the apparent suicide of George W. Davids in a New York City hotel from an overdose of laudanum.

Thaddeus, being the honorable man he was known to be, sold everything he owned, including his New Rochelle properties, to pay off creditors. The company went into a receivership with another son and junior partner, David, at the helm. It was reorganized as a stock company, and the business continued. Thaddeus suffered a stroke soon after this from which he never fully recovered. The last decade of his life was spent suffering from gout and the effects of the stroke.

Under David F. Davids the company again prospered. He and his brother Edwin, along with George Snyder as president, (relationship unknown) took the company into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With David's death in 1905, and Edwin's in 1907, other family members took over. In 1908 the company moved to Vandam Street. The Vandam factory made use of electricity and was completely up to date in the manufacturing process. Machines powered by electric motors did work previously done by hand.

At one point, there was a lawsuit over name infringement with C. I. Davids that was settled in favor the the Thaddeus Davids Company. C. I. Davids, a nephew of Thaddeus, according to records, continued his own company through the 1930s. Sometime during that period, it either merged or went out of business, as his obituary in 1945 listed him as president of Thaddeus Davids Ink Company. No ads or other information was found after this, which leaves us to assume the company either merged or went out of business in the next few years.

Thaddeus Davids married three times and had 12 children, with at least four sons in the ink business with him. John B. Davids bottled ink under his own name for a while.

Besides the ink business, Davids purchased a lot of real estate which enhanced his fortune. He bought several properties, which he divided up into house lots in New Rochelle where he eventually made his home. Perhaps his best known land purchase was an island just off the shoreline of New Rochelle with intentions of moving his ink factory there that became known as Davids Island. Instead he leased (and later sold) it to someone else, who leased it to and later sold it to the U.S. Government. During the Civil War, this island was used to hold Confederate prisoners. DeCamp Hospital was established to house wounded soldiers from both sides. A number of Davids women volunteered as helpers there.

**THADDEUS DAVIDS & CO.,**  
**MANUFACTURING STATIONERS,**  
**26 CLIFF STREET**

**Writing Inks, Limpid Fluid, Red and Blue Ruling Inks, Sealing Wax, Wafers, Mucilage, &c, in all their varieties for the trade only.**

Thaddeus Davids & Co. ad from 1857.

**BLACK, BLUE, CARMINE, JAPAN AND COPYING INKS.**

# DAVIDS' INKS.

**Thaddeus Davids Co.**

**WRITING FLUID, VIOLET, SCARLET AND MARKING INKS.**

127 & 129 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y.

Sun	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

**DAVIDS' Mucilage.**

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1826	1828	1831	*26	1838	1839	1839
1831	*32	1833	1833	1834	1835	*36
1836	1837	1838	1839	*40	1840	1841
1842	1843	*44	1844	1845	1846	1847
*48	1848	1849	1850	1851	*52	1852
1853	1854	1855	*56	1856	1857	1858
1859	*60	1860	1861	1862	1863	*64
1864	1865	1866	1867	*68	1868	1869

**DAVIDS' Sealing Wax.**

Perpetual calendar—popular advertising tool in late 1800s.

In 1967, exactly 100 years after the United States government purchased the island from a New Rochelle resident, the City of New Rochelle purchased the island back from the government.

On a personal note, we discovered Ed's great-great grandfather was a war prisoner there, having been captured at Gettysburg.

Thaddeus Davids was active in community affairs in New Rochelle, especially working to improve the schools. He was well liked and respected. To show respect at his death, the Odd Fellows Lodge, of which he was a member, was draped in black for a period of thirty days.

The last six years of his life, he was confined to his room, unable to walk, although his mind was unimpaired until the last.

His problems with gout were severe. He is quoted in many ads for the St. Jacobs Oil Company as saying this oil healed his gout. Apparently it didn't, as that was a major health problem until the end of his life, so most likely he was paid for this endorsement. As many old obituaries do, his last words were noted, his being "Home, Sweet Home." Thaddeus Davids: Born Nov. 16, 1810 - Died July 22, 1894. He is buried in Beechwood Cemetery in New Rochelle, New York.

Davids and Black ink bottles are known mostly in dark green and are rarely found



**Left:** John B. Davids amber pint - only one known at this writing. **Center:** Magic Ink label on bottle patented in 1886. **Right:** Half-gallon debossed T. Davids jug.



Trade card from 1876 with facsimile of fade test from 1856 on back.

with a label. The D & B amber and indelible ink bottles are considered very rare. Because the Thaddeus Davids company was in business for so long, there is a wide variety of different labels and bottles, both pontiled and smooth based. A lot of his bottles were patented, including a pottery bottle, which is said to be the first ink bottle patented. Most of the later master inks are label only. Shown in this article are just a few of the bottles and ads. The company did a lot of advertising beginning in the early years and throughout the 1920s and early 30s. T. Davids bottles can be found from very modest cost to very expensive—something for every ink collector. The John B. Davids amber bottle is the only one known as of this writing. Other J. B. Davids bottles are scarce, but occasionally found.

#### References:

- Forty Centuries of Ink* by David N. Carvalho, 1902, Reprinted 1971.  
*Historical Landmarks of New Rochelle* by Morgan H. Seacord and William S. Hadaway, 1938.  
*Edison Monthly Magazine*, April 1917. (Free On-Line Books by Google)  
 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers ads, 1847 and 1857.

On Thursday, Oct. 14, JOHN BLACK, Jr., of the firm of Davids & Black, aged 33 years.  
 His relatives, friends, and those of his brothers Wm and James Black, are invited to attend his funeral, at the residence of his father, N. 71 East 17th-st., on Sunday, the 17th inst., at 11 o'clock, without further invitation. His remains will be taken to Greenwood for interment.

Thaddeus Davids,  
 New York, July 23.—[Special]—Thaddeus Davids died at New Rochelle, N. Y., yesterday, aged 84 years. Early in life he established an ink business in New York and amassed a fortune. In 1853 reverses came to him through mistaken confidence and the business which he had fostered went into the hands of a receiver to satisfy creditors. He gave up all his property and had but his reputation left. The blow was crushing, and shortly after he was taken with a stroke of paralysis, rendering him helpless.

#### COURTLAND I. DAVIDS

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla., May 10—Courtland Irving Davids, president of the Thaddeus Davids Ink Company, New York, died in his home here today after an illness of sixteen months. The firm was founded by his grandfather more than a century ago. Mr. Davids was born in New York eighty-one years ago.

Obituaries for John Black, Jr. (1852), Thaddeus Davids (1894), and C. I. Davids (1945)

Obituaries of John Black, T. Davids & C.I. Davids.

#### Illustration captions from Page 28:

1. Rare Davids & Black indelible ink bottle and box.
2. Rare amber Davids & Black pint bottle.
3. Davids & Black with label.
4. Three sizes of early Thaddeus Davids bottles.
5. Umbrella bottle with label for Steel Pen Ink.
6. Cone ink with label.
7. Turtle ink, known in teal, amber, olive, aqua and shades in between.
8. Japan Ink for business use.
9. Amber bottle with pour spout and label.
10. Cobalt with label for Silk Filtered Ink. This ink was actually filtered through eight layers of silk to remove all traces of clogging matter.
11. This bottle, as well as the next one, was patented in 1886 and used with a wide variety of labels and known in amber, green and aqua with and without pour spouts in sizes from half-pint to a quart. The Electro Chemical Ink listed on this label was a waterproof ink perfected by the Davids Co. after moving to a factory with electricity.
12. Cutlery Ink label.

Newspaper obituaries from the *New York Times* and *New Rochelle Press*.

History of Davids Island from several internet sites.

Pictures courtesy of Dan Baldwin, John Hinkel, Frank Starczek and from our collection.