

Let's Talk About Ink

with Ed & Lucy Faulkner

Indelible Ink

For most of the 19th century and into the 20th, many different types of ink were produced. One of these was indelible ink, often called durable ink. Indelible ink was used to mark fabrics such as laundry or anything that needed a permanent marking that would not wash out or smear. Advertisements noted that it would take much less time to mark items with durable ink than by needlework. Another advantage of marking with ink, as opposed to needlework, was that it could not be picked out of the fabric.



Fig. 1



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

There were many recipes for indelible ink, all of which called for silver nitrate to be dissolved in a liquid. Early bottles of indelible ink recommended that the writing surface be stretched over a book or other object before writing, then (after writing) dried in the sun for a day, or pressed with a hot iron. By 1900, big companies such as Carter's and others sold kits with a pen and small hoop for stretching the cloth before



Fig. 6



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

writing. This was improved ink and only called for drying with no heat needed. Included in this article are pictures of some of the bottles and kits that are or have been in our collection.

An olive green pontiled umbrella, label only, by Thom. Hollis of Boston is shown in **Figure 1**. The olive and amber cylinders [**Figures 2 and 3**] are also pontiled and are from Holden and Winslow. These two are approximately five inches tall and label only.

A lot of the small bottles are often called sample bottles, but in reality, probably held indelible ink. Included here are the FK [**Figure 4**] (pontil), Hover [**Figure 5**] and Harrison (BIM) [**Figure 6**], and later Sanford's and Carter's which are marked indelible [**Figures 7, 8 and 9**]. The Carter's is also known in a cobalt color. These bottles are about 1.5" to 2" tall.

Francis Kidder, Wm. Kidder, James Kidder, and others listed in Covill's book used small rectangular shaped bottles and these were embossed with their name and indelible ink [**Figure 10**]. Most of these are pontiled although some smooth base are known. Perhaps the best known indelible ink maker is Payson's [**Figures 11 and 12**]. This was either their only product, or main product, as all advertising I have found is for this type of ink. Their trade card says the company has been known to the trade since 1835. A. L. Williston of



Fig. 9

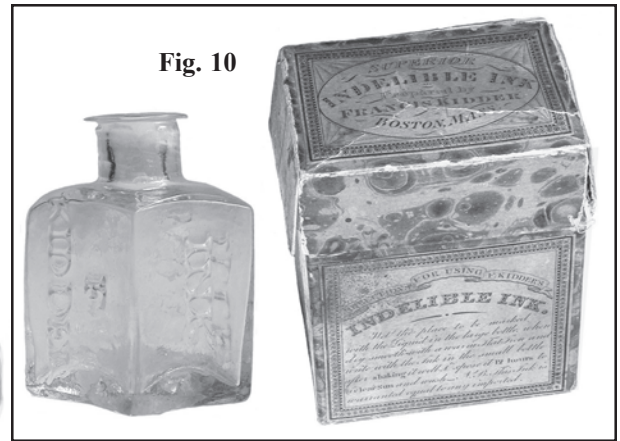


Fig. 10

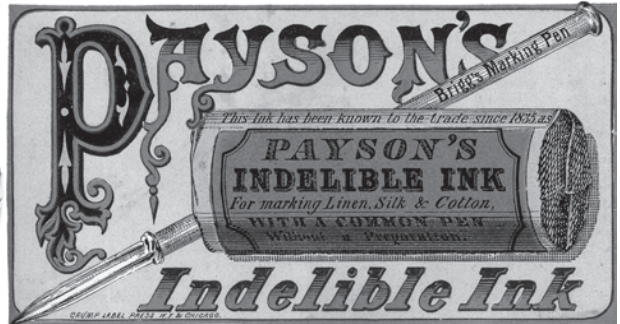


Fig. 11

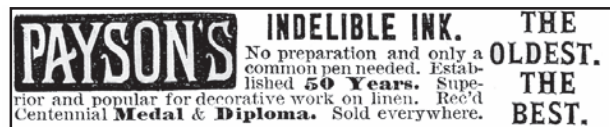


Fig. 12

Northampton, Massachusetts was the successor to J. Payson Williston who was the sole proprietor and manufacturer of Payson's ink. The ad is from 1888.

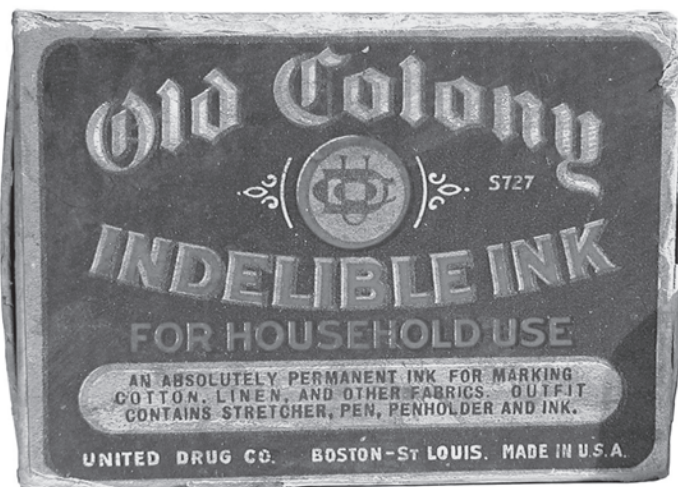
Figure 13 is a 20th century ink kit by Old Colony, later known by the Rexall name and **Figure 14** is a flyer with directions from Hermen's American Indelible Ink, a circa 1840's company.

There are a large number of these small bottles to be found. We have seen many with only a label so it would be impossible to know they contained ink if the label did not remain. Other tiny ones we had

included Swearingen's, Hoyt's, Whiting, and Stafford's. Probably everyone reading this can name some I have not listed. The 20th century ones such as the "kits" don't seem to be as collectible. Most collectors prefer the older ones. However, all of them add interest to an ink collection.

References:

Pen, Ink, & Evidence, Joe Nickell, 1990.
American Bottles & Flasks & Their Ancestry, McKearin & Wilson, 1978.



< Fig. 13

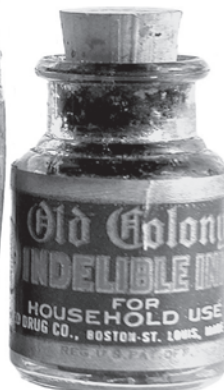


Fig. 14 >

