



### The Carter Ink Company

Beginning in the mid 19th century many new ink companies were formed. One of these was the Carter's Company. Carter's was in business over a hundred years starting in 1858, and surviving until the last quarter of the 20th century when it was acquired by the Dennison Company. During that time it was probably one of the largest, if not the largest, ink producer selling millions of bottles a year.

The company began when William Carter rented a store from his uncle on Water Street in the heart of Boston. He opened the doors in 1858 as a paper wholesaler and called his company The William Carter Company. To supplement his sales, he added and sold glass inkwells. Later he started buying ink in bulk and bottling and selling it as Carter's Ink. In 1860 his brother Edward joined him and the company became William Carter and Bro.

In 1861, with the beginning of the Civil War, a major opportunity opened up for Carter. He had been buying his ink from the firm of Tuttle and Moore. Tuttle joined the army and Moore stopped making ink. Carter then took over the formulas for inks and mucilage on a royalty basis. To have the needed manufacturing space, he moved to a larger building a short distance away,

still on Water Street. With this change, another brother, John H. Carter, joined the firm and it became William Carter & Bros. [Fig. 1]

To continue to grow and compete in a tight market, Carter's began to aggressively market their "Combined Writing and Copying Ink" from one of the Tuttle and Moore formulas. This made the difference in their sales success. In pre-typewriter days, to make a copy of something, the original was written in viscous ink. Copies were made by pressing paper against the original. Up to six copies could be made. Although special paper had to be used, the biggest problem was the ink. Because copy ink had to be thick, every office had to have two inks. Combined ink was the answer because it was thick enough for copies, yet flowed well enough to be used with pens. Carter's Combined Ink found favor with businesses and gave them the competitive edge they needed. Many ink bottles can be found today from both the Carter's Company and others with labels stating that it is combined ink. [Fig. 2]

The company continued to grow and in 1867 another Carter was invited to join the company. This was John W. Carter, a cousin. The name was now changed to Carter Bros. &

Company. John W. was most interested in the ink division and worked toward its growth. With increased sales, in 1868, the company split into a paper division and an ink division, the ink group moving to larger quarters on Broad Street.

Since 1862, Carter's had been reaping the benefits of the sales skills of James P. Dinsmore. He started selling Carter's products mainly in New England, but began to branch out and sell not only in New York (where he was headquartered), but in cities all across the country. Because of his sales skills and much advertising, Carter's "Raven Black" and "Combined" inks became two of the most popular inks in the country. [Figs. 3]

However, all was not to be well. In 1872, a fire broke out in the heart of Boston and burned a great portion of the business district, including both Carter's locations. Nothing remained of the buildings or equipment. Because they had a good reputation, good will with the business community, and ink formulas, they were able to start over.

As stated earlier, John W. Carter was the mainstay of the ink division. After the fire, he joined with Dinsmore and bought out the ink and adhesives division, forming a new venture known as Carter, Dinsmore, and Company in 1872. They took temporary space in Boston until a new building site was found on Batterymarch Street in Boston. Old

[Fig 2]



Qt. Carter-Dinsmore Combined Ink

[Fig. 1]



Wm. Carter & Bros.  
pontiled umbrella

[Figs. 3]



Carter's Raven Black Ink bottle and order form for a gross of the popular Raven Black Cones.  
Cost - only \$3.00!





notes state that they had 3600 square feet on two floors. They had six mixing and storage tanks, no laboratories, a half dozen employees and an office clerk. All mixing, stirring, and bottling was done by hand and John was known to put on rubber boots and clean out tanks. Dinsmore would continue to concentrate on sales and advertising. [Fig. 4]

John W. Carter was convinced that research was necessary to come up with new and improved products if they wanted to continue as a major company. He hired a skilled chemist to help him in the manufacturing of the best products modern science could offer. His ink production grew from 100,000 bottles in 1873 to almost 5 million in 1884 making him the largest ink producer in the world at the time. During this time, they produced "Extra Copying Ink" which eliminated the need for special paper for making copies. French Railroad Ink was also added for special uses. His product line was as complete as any ink manufacturer in the country.

Once again he had to find a larger building to accommodate his expanding sales. In 1884 he built a plant 10 times the size of the present plant. This was located on Columbus Avenue in Boston. This plant was staffed with fifteen men and nineteen women all under the direction of a foreman.

[Fig. 5]

Carter's turtle  
with doors and windows.

With this modern factory, the best available equipment, and more employees, they had the means to handle increased sales. More ink was now being sold in glass bottles, such as Fig. 5. Previously the commercial ink line had been sold mostly in stoneware bottles, such as Fig. 6. With this modern factory and quality products, their inks and mucilage were winning prizes for excellence all over the world. New products continued to be introduced. These included bluing (for making clothes whiter and brighter), photo library paste, drawing, indelible, and stamping inks, gold, silver, and white inks, show card colors (tempera), and CICO liquid paste and ink eradicator. When typewriter use became common, they manufactured usable carbon paper and typewriter ribbons. The company kept in touch with the modern era and adapted and added to its product line accordingly.

In 1888, Mr. Dinsmore retired, but his contribution to the company had made it what it was in terms of sales. In 1895, John W. Carter died in an accidental drowning. Even with new management, Carter's was a large and respected enough company due to the expert growth under Carter and Dinsmore that it continued without problem into the twentieth century. It now was now known as the Carter's Ink Company and had branches in several cities across the country, as well as a few European markets and a Canadian plant.

As new products continued to be introduced, more space was needed, and in 1910 a new factory to handle growth was built in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This new factory had the latest in automated equipment, making it easier to fill, cap, and label bottles. The work force and sales staff increased and the company began expanding more into international markets. In 1910 thirteen million bottles of inks and mucilage were produced.

The Carter's Company was known as a good place to work and by 1912 they were offering fringe benefits unheard of in most companies

at that time. Employees got a week's paid vacation, half day on Saturday (most companies worked 6 full days), shorter work hours in winter, \$10 Christmas bonus, free medical advice, full coverage for work injuries, and legal aid if necessary.

Throughout the early part of the 20th century, the company managed to stay afloat during the war years when overseas supply sources were cut off and international shipping next to impossible. However, times were tough and in 1921 with the recession and tough competition, especially from the Russian Cement Company, (Signet), Carter's posted the first major loss in company history.

Even with increased competition, the Depression, and World War II, Carter's managed to survive. In the late forties, early fifties, more branches were added in major American cities. Every time things got rough they came up with new products to keep the business going.

However, by the seventies, things were tough again. In 1976, Carter's was purchased by the Dennison Company, which was bought by Avery Manufacturing Company in 1990. Many of the old product lines are still made under the Avery name. The Carter's Ink Company was a success story for more than a hundred years. It enjoyed

prosperity, sustained adversity, and continued meeting new product demands when sales were slow. Carter's stayed a modern company keeping in touch with the home and business needs. [Fig. 7]

Carter's bottles are found in many colors. Masters can be found in aqua, clear, all shades of amber and green, teal, and

[Fig. 6]

Gallon stoneware  
Carter's jug

[Fig. 7]



Carter's produced a variety of products



[Fig. 8]



Carter's India Ink

[Fig. 9]

Cone ink with pen ledge  
Pat. 1879

[Fig. 10]

Business listed as Booksellers  
and Stationers

light to cobalt blue, as well as pottery. Known master sizes range from one quarter pint to quart size. Pottery bottles are most often seen in the pint, quart, and gallon jugs. Small bottles are also in all colors in round, square, turtle [Fig. 5], odd-shaped [Fig. 8], flat with pen ledges, umbrellas (rare) and perhaps most common of all, the cone shape [Figs. 9 and 10].

A favorite of collectors is the 1897 patent cone in all the many decorative colors. The umbrella is only known to me in the labeled version while most all others are embossed in some way. Most Carter's cones are embossed on the bottom, but one of the older ones has shoulder embossing. Even though a lot of Carter's bottles are very common, some are quite hard to find, such as the turtle and umbrella.

The Ma and Pa Carter porcelain bottles marketed as advertising gimmicks around 1914-16 are highly sought after [See article heading]. Probably the most collectible of the 20th century bottles by Carter are the cobalt cathedral bottles made in the late 20's to early 1930's. These come in four sizes (if you count the small "clover type") and are very pretty bottles. When first sold, instructions for making these into lamps came with them.

Carter's was noted for its extensive advertising and there are a lot of go-withs to add to your collection of bottles. These include thermometers, signs, pictures [Fig. 11], clocks, trade cards [Fig. 12] and blotters, calendars [Fig. 13], inkwells, and even small items such as cork screws and matchbook covers. For someone just getting started in inks, Carter's would make a good collection by trying to get

some of all types and colors and, if possible, buy with the original label as this increases the value.

But most of all, have fun in your hunt.

### References:

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*Communications Written in Ink* (from) *Antique Bottle World*, Nov. 1979.

[Fig. 11] Self framed tin lithograph -  
The Old Bookkeeper

[Fig. 12] Trade cards were often humorous.

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Pictures are from  
the Faulkner collection

[Fig. 13] Carter-Dinsmore  
advertising calendar