

DISCOVER THE ART OF FOUNTAIN PENS AT THE MORSE

Before the electronic stylus and tablet, before the laser printer, before fiber- and ceramic-tipped pens and even before the ballpoint, fountain pens were everyone's writing instrument. Developed in the late 19th century, fountain pens—the kind filled from a bottle of ink—were ingenious, often beautifully designed and handcrafted, and ubiquitous until the 1970s.

Today, though still used by a few, they are collected and cherished as little works of art. The Museum this winter opened *The Art of Fountain Pens*, an exhibit of American writing instruments manufactured between 1875 and 1975 and focused on almost a hundred fountain



The Art of Fountain Pens vignette at the Morse.

pens—more than 30 from the golden age of fountain pens, 1920 through 1940. The selection of pens on view illustrates many of the major technological and design innovations made through the years by the great names of the industry.

We are grateful to Dr. J. Peter Kincaid and Mrs. Poppy Deliyanni Kincaid for their generous gift of the pens shown in this exhibit, our first-ever devoted to writing instruments as art objects. Though the earliest record of a pen using ink from a reservoir dates to the 10th century, it was not until the mid-19th century that the technology in terms of nibs, hard rubber, and free-flowing ink had evolved to make the fountain pen viable to consider for broad consumer use. Mass production began in the 1880s.

The new Morse exhibit, on view through January 26, 2014, comprises representative examples including pens from L.E. Waterman, Parker, Wahl-Eversharp, W.A. Sheaffer, and others. The show includes dip pens, pens filled by eye droppers, and lever-, crescent- and piston-filled pens. There are fountain pens made of gold, hard rubber, Bakelite, celluloid,

plastic, and resin, as well as pens decorated with gold and silver filigree. The designs, influenced by Art Deco tastes in the golden age of fountain pens, include early flat-top barrels, the torpedo shapes that came into vogue in the 1930s, and a range of approaches to the pocket clip.

The pens are complemented by period advertisements; a Zodiac pattern desk set c. 1920, from Tiffany Studios; a late 19th-century travel desk; and other writing accessories. Taken together,

the Museum's display of these beautiful and functional objects provides a much-deserved reflection on a time and a craft in our culture when the art of writing was central to everyone's life.



Eye-dropper filled fountain pen, 1900.

Hard rubber, D.W. Beumel & Co., New York (2011-053). Through the turn of the 20th century, most fountain pens were filled manually with an eye dropper.



Crescent fill fountain pen, 1905.

Gold, Conklin Pen Company, Toledo, Ohio (2001-112:17). Roy Conklin's 1897 invention became the first commercially successful "self-filling" pen. Ink was stored in a rubber sac or bladder—the mechanism for other so-called self-filling pens to follow. When the crescent button on the barrel was pressed, it pushed air out of the sac creating a vacuum for ink to be sucked in.



Lever fill fountain pen, 1914.

Hard rubber, W.A. Sheaffer Pen Company, Fort Madison, Iowa (2011-017). Sheaffer patented his lever fill fountain pen in 1908. Yet another method for filling the fountain pen by squeezing an internal sac or bladder inside the pen barrel, it became an industry standard for many years to come.



Push-button fill fountain pen, 1925.

Hard rubber, Parker Pen Company, Janesville, Wisconsin (2011-051). Parker debuted its high-end Duofold pen in 1921, and it was a sensation. Nicknamed "Big Red" for its color and 5.5 inch size, it was filled by pressing a button hidden by a cap at the end of the barrel. As with the crescent- and lever-fill pens, this button squeezed air from an internal sac, creating a vacuum into which to draw ink through the pen's feeder system.



Snorkel fill fountain pen, 1955.

Plastic, chrome, gold-fill, W.A. Sheaffer Pen Company, Fort Madison, Iowa (2011-032). Sheaffer introduced the innovative snorkel pen, a version of the plunger-operated or piston fill pen, in 1952. The cylindrical plunger or snorkel is extended from the pen to pull up ink and to keep the nib clean.



L.E. Waterman patented his dual-channel feed for the fountain pen in 1884, which made the ink flow reliable and secured the fountain pen's future success. Fountain pens work on the principle of "capillary attraction"—that is, when liquids are confined to narrow channels, they overcome gravitational pull until pen point touches paper.