

Carter Ink Company

Taken from Pen, Ink and Evidence

By Joe Nickell

Much ink was made by apothecaries who found they could easily prepare the fluid in quantity and pour it into standard bottles, which they sold with their own labels affixed. According to William E. Covill, Jr., in his *Ink Bottles and Inkwells*: "There were literally hundreds of these shops that made and sold ink on a local basis. Later these shops died out due to the formation of large ink manufacturing firms, such as Carter's, etc. Ink was sold in many bookstores and carried only the label of the bookseller. The ink was no doubt made by the local apothecary shop or chemist." 26 An advertisement for one of the small ink manufacturers is shown in figure 5.8.

With the large firms came automation (fig. 5.9). A 1919 publication by the Carter Ink Company (established 1858) described "A Trip through Inkland" - that is, through "Carter Inx" main factory in Boston. It explained how bottles were taken from a storehouse to automatic washing machines, then on conveyors to the bottling floor "to await the ink":

On the top floor the pure nut-gall solution is mixed with the iron salt and other ingredients in great tanks holding 3,600 gallons each. This nut-gall solution is the very purest obtainable, a super-U.S.P. Standard, so to speak, actually more refined than the grade of Tannin used in medicine. Of course, the purer the Tannin (Gall Solution) the better the ink. From here gravity takes the product to the big storage vats on the third floor, which have a total capacity of about 60,000 gallons. One of these vats alone contains enough ink to give each man in the regular army of the United States two desk bottles of Carter's Writing Fluid.

The account continued:

After the ink has remained here long enough to settle out all sediment, the finished product is transferred by gravity to the automatic filling machines. It is also really fascinating to watch the labeling machines reach up with their mechanical hands, take down and gum the labels and fasten them to the bottles, in a marvellously smooth and secure manner. One of these machines alone labels 100 gross of bottles in a day, and the whole battery about 100,000 bottles.

Finally:

After the ink bottles are filled, corked and labeled they are ready to be packed in boxes. The final act on this floor is nailing the cover on the boxes with automatic nailing machines. Placing the cover on the box by hand, a man slides it under the nailing machine, presses a lever, and the cover is nailed down securely with two blows. It is then slid on to another conveyor which lets the box down to the stock and shipping floor below. By means of trucks these boxes are then loaded on the freight cars which are left on a siding directly in front of the shipping platform.

From the shipping platform the ink went "to all quarters of the globe from Spain to China, and from Iceland to the Fiji Islands," Carter's at that time being "the largest manufacturers in our lines in the world."