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The Zaner-Bloser Penholder

The history and development of the Zaner-Bloser penholder began in 1891 when C.P. Zaner and E.W. Bloser joined forces and began their careers as professional penmen, authors, and educators. They founded the Zaner-Bloser Publishing Company, the E.W. Bloser Paper Company, and reorganized the Zanerian College of Penmanship which began in 1888. When they published the Zaner Method of Handwriting, there was no penholder on the market entirely satisfactory for doing careful pen work.

The two partners soon began to develop the shape of a penholder to meet their requirements. They tried many different shapes and sizes made out of rough wood. These were carefully worked down to the shape desired by filing, sanding, smoothing and scraping with Bliss. E.W. Bloser would finish working on a pen holder and, after trying it himself, would have Mr. Zaner try it. Finally, after many attempts and much filing and scraping, the holder was evolved that satisfied both. They made a few for their own use.

Messrs. Zaner and Bloser used these penholders in their own work where they came in contact with a great many students, teachers and workers in the field of penmanship. Because this created a growing demand for these holders, they decided to have a small quantity made up for sale. An expert carefully hand-turned them on a wood lathe in accordance with their instructions. The Zaner-Bloser penholder with its unique shape quickly gained widespread popularity throughout the country.

As the demand grew for fancier holders, some were made of rosewood and other high-priced woods. The Zanerian Fine Art Straight Penholder, eight inches in length, was made of redwood, boxwood, celluloid or ebony, all carefully joined and painstakingly finished. The Zanerian Fine Art Oblique Penholder had an oblique attachment, used for certain shaded letters, as did the Plain Oblique Penholder and the Expert Oblique Penholder. The new pens enjoyed a great popularity among discriminating penmen.

At various intervals the penholder was advertised in the Business Educator, a publication of Zaner-Bloser started shortly after the partnership was formed. A little later, the idea occurred to Zaner and Bloser that since a penholder of this particular shape met the requirements so well of the more particular pen users, professional penmen, and persons who write all day long for a living, why not make it even more available. They gave the public school pupils and others the benefit of it by manufacturing this penholder in large quantities to sell at a price that even elementary students could afford to pay, as low as 5 cents each.

The company purchased and installed saws, lathes, drills, drill presses, dipping equipment and lacquer tanks. Each penholder underwent twelve different operations and careful inspection to insure customers against any variation in the finished product. A

special rust proof plug was inserted in the end of the holder which held the pen in place and insured against corrosion or rusting. Many teachers gave colored penholders as awards for special accomplishments.

In 1926, Parker Zaner Bloser, after receiving his B.S. degree from Ohio State University, joined the Zaner-Bloser Company. In 1927 he worked out a new double penholder, having one end for red ink, the other for blue or black ink. This new penholder retained the shape, beauty and other good features of the original, plus the addition of another writing end. Lettering pens of different sizes could also be used in the same holder.

Although the Zaner-Bloser Company no longer offers rosewood Expert Oblique Penholders inlaid with ivory, the basic shape of that writing instrument is still very current. Thousands of students and teachers across the country still enjoy using pens and pencils with the same barrel design as the ones developed by the experts in 1891.

The penholders fit any hand, large or small, and made it easy for teachers to keep tiny fingers in position during the writing lesson.