

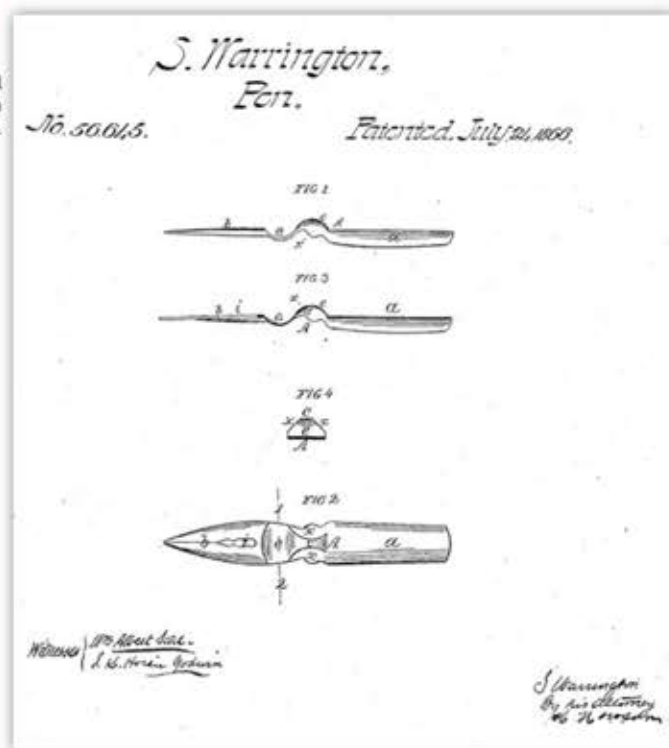
JOHN TURNER IN AMERICA

WARRINGTON & Co. 1865-1885

BY ANDREW MIDKIFF

IN THE THIRD PART OF HIS ESTERBROOK SAGA, ANDREW MIDKIFF
FOCUSES ON A MAN AND A COMPANY THAT WOULD BECOME
ESTERBROOK'S CHIEF RIVALS.

Map of Philadelphia,
1864, by Samuel Augustus
Mitchell. Public domain,
via Wikimedia Commons.
Author has added the
locations of the Warrington
and Esterbrook factories.



When Richard Esterbrook opened his factory in Camden, New Jersey, in 1861, the story is that he brought several tool makers to Camden to set up the factory. These tool makers had been trained by—and were working for—Birmingham steel pen manufacturers (“Esterbrook: The Beginnings, Part II,” *Pennant*, Summer 2023).

I have been able to confirm only two of them. One was the partner James Bromsgrove who had worked in the steel pen factories of Birmingham before becoming a pen maker himself. The other was John Turner, a skilled tool maker whose personal role in the development of the steel pen industry in the United States is only rivaled by Richard Esterbrook.

John Turner was born around 1823 and began his apprenticeship at Joseph Gillott’s pen works in Birmingham about 1836. After serving his apprenticeship, he became a journeyman. It was at this time he traveled to France and the continent to see how pens were made in the new factories there. After some time abroad, he returned to Birmingham where some evidence indicates he may have been working for John Mitchell’s pen works when recruited by Richard

Esterbrook to come to the United States and help build his factory.

Turner arrived in New York in 1860, soon followed by his wife, Eliza, and their adopted daughter (and Eliza’s niece), Rosina. They lived in Camden for a few years while the Esterbrook factory got up and running, but in 1865 they moved across the Delaware River to Philadelphia when John Turner was offered the presidency of a new steel pen company, Warrington & Company.

Philadelphia in 1864 was an industrial town. Steel, chemicals and dyes, tools, and other products were made in abundance. Skilled mechanics and especially those who could make precision machine tools and complex presses and dies were fairly common, because of the various industries and also because of the presence of the US Mint in Philadelphia, which struck many of the coins in circulation at that time. The role of the coin press in the development of the steel pen manufacturing process is a story yet to be told.

One of the other big industries in Philly was umbrella and parasol

Advertisement from the
American Stationer, v. 2,
July 8, 1874.

Warrington Steel Pen Co.

MANUFACTURERS OF

Steel and Indestructible Metallic Pens & Pen Holders.

Our Numbers, 704-705-709-730-732-741-744, are the Most Popular Pens in the market.

FACTORY & PRINCIPAL WAREHOUSE,

Cor. of Twelfth and Buttonwood Sts.,
PHILADELPHIA.

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Warrington & Co.'s loss, \$3500. Insured as follows (list furnished by Prevost & Herring, Insurance Agents):—	
Imperial.....	\$4000
Home, N. H.....	2000
Reliance.....	2000
Anthracite.....	2000
Total.....	\$10,000

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TURNER & HARRISON'S
HIGHLY FINISHED



STANDARD STEEL PENS.
Manufactured and Warehouse, Twelfth and Chestnut Sts., Philadelphia.

DEAR READING SYSTEMS:

No. 10. — Fobes	No. 17. — Swan	No. 22. — Legal Writing
No. 11. — Chamberlain	No. 18. — Ink Fobes	No. 23. — Broad Hook
No. 12. — Hawk	No. 19. — Hammer	No. 24. — Fine
No. 13. —	No. 20. —	No. 25. —

Wholesale and Retail Dealers of the Series of Manuscript Pens. Samples and Prices free on application.
New York Agents, H. BAINBRIDGE & CO., 101 William Street.

3. Amount of insurance Warrington carried at the time of the 1869 fire, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 17, 1869, p. 8.

4. Ad for Turner & Harrison, *American Stationer*, v. 13, no. 5 (Feb. 1, 1883): p. 157.

5. Ad for Pedrick & Warrington, *Commercial Advertiser* (Chicago), Sept. 12, 1878.

WARRINGTON STEEL PEN CO.'S

First-Class **PENS** Quality Unsurpassed.

Standard Prices Satisfactory.

All Stationers and Booksellers Can Supply Them.

FEDRICK & WARRINGTON, Manufacturers,
Philadelphia, Pa.

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maker John Turner, from across the river in Camden, New Jersey, to head up this pen-making enterprise.

Warrington was presumably able to lure him over to Philadelphia with the promise of leading the new company and being able to set it up as he saw fit. Rather than being a senior tool maker at Esterbrook, he became the head of the brand-new Continental Steel Pen Works of Warrington & Company. The factory was located in a large building on the northwest corner of 12th and Buttonwood streets in Philadelphia (fig. 2).

During the decade Turner ran Warrington & Co., from 1865 until 1875, the company found both success as well as setbacks, including two fires and the death of the owner.

In 1869, a fire started in a warehouse across the street (southwest corner of the intersection), but it burned so hot that the firemen could focus only on keeping it from spreading. This involved dousing the adjacent buildings in water. The water was good for neither the steel used for the pens nor the precision machines. Fortunately, losses were estimated at only \$3,500 and they were insured up to \$10,000 (fig. 3). In the second fire, in 1873, the fire started in the same building and the damage was more extensive. This time the company's losses were estimated at \$20,000 and their insurance covered only \$11,000.

In addition to the fires, in 1872, Samuel Warrington died. In 1873, after Warrington's death and the second fire, the company changed its name to the Warrington Steel Pen Company. In that year as well, the nation was plunged

manufacturing—Philadelphia was surpassed only by Paris in the number produced every year. One of the reasons for this was the presence of a firm called George W. Carr & Co. The company run by Carr and his partner and brother-in-law, Samuel Warrington, was the largest US manufacturer of whalebone and rattan (used in the ribs of the umbrella).

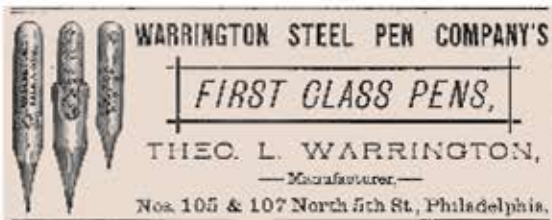
In the 1857 publication *Philadelphia and its Manufacturers*, the company is described thus:

There is also an extensive establishment in the city for the manufacture of Whalebone and Rattan, and is said to be the only factory in the country where Whalebone is prepared for all purposes to which it is adapted, viz.: Umbrellas, Parasols, Whips, Canes, Dresses, Hoops, Bonnets, Hats, Hair Pins, &c. This manufactory, of which the proprietors are George W. Carr and Samuel Warrington, trading under the firm-style of George W. Carr & Co., was established in 1842. The machinery and fixtures are principally original, and said to be unknown to other manufacturers. Steam, supplied by a twelve-horse engine, is used in all the various processes of Boiling, Dyeing, Drying, and Heating.

By 1863, Carr had expanded into making the new-style steel frames for umbrellas and parasols but continued to manufacture whalebone and rattan. The company also began to manufacture small, metallic mountings, primarily used for umbrellas. These were made in the same location as the whalebone and rattan factory. Samuel was put in charge of the metallic mountings business. These mountings were mostly made by stamping sheet steel or brass into the various shapes needed. This process is very similar to how pens are made, and the same kinds of screw presses can be used for both.

Around 1864, this same Samuel Warrington designed a new style of steel pen, and he received a design patent for it in 1866 (fig. 1).

In addition to filing for a patent, Warrington wanted to manufacture his pen, so in 1865 he founded Warrington & Co. and hired the experienced pen



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6. Ad for the Warrington company showing only Theo's name, *American Stationer*, v. 10, no. 1 (1881): p.4.

7 and 8: From top, Warrington stub nib and Colorado nib, both from the author's collection.

into a depression by the Panic of 1873, which sent the company into deeper financial troubles. In 1875, John Turner purchased the factory, the machinery, and all. He then joined with a new partner, another experienced Birmingham pen maker brought to the United States, George Harrison of Washington Medallion and then Harrison & Bradford (see "The Washington Medallion Pen Company: Part II," *Pennant*, Fall 2022). Together they started up the new company of Turner & Harrison in the very same location at 12th and Buttonwood (fig. 4).

Turner & Harrison would go on to become one of the top pen manufacturers in the United States and would continue making steel pens in Philadelphia until the company closed its doors in 1952, but that's a story for another time.

POSTSCRIPT: THE OTHER WARRINGTON

After Turner purchased the factory and formed Turner & Harrison, the Warrington Steel Pen Company name was picked up by a nephew of Samuel Warrington's, Theodore Lippincott Warrington.

Theo L. Warrington, as he was listed in the advertisements, was born in Camden, New Jersey, and as a young man, he worked for his father, James Franklin "King of the Commission Merchants" Warrington. James owned a produce market buying and selling exotic produce, like peanuts and tropical fruits off the ships coming

into Camden's ports from places like Cuba and Florida. Theodore began by working for his father, but then tried his hand at teaching for a short time before joining another Camden native, William H. Ryno, to open their own produce market. The market, called Ryno & Warrington, operated from around 1874 to 1875. In 1875, Theo acquired the Warrington Steel Pen Co. name and became partners with William Pedrick, forming Pedrick and Warrington (fig. 5).

William Pedrick had owned his own stationery store before joining with Warrington: Pedrick & Williamson, a modest stationery store located at 1218 Buttonwood, just a half-block from the Warrington & Co. factory at the corner of Buttonwood and 12th. By 1874, Pedrick was running the store by himself and lived at the shop in the new location of 107 N. 5th Street. Pedrick & Warrington was formed both to make pens under the Warrington name and also to sell stationery from their expanded shop and manufactory at 105 and 107 N. 5th Street.

By 1881, Pedrick was out of the picture and only Theo's name was associated with the Warrington Steel Pen Co. (fig. 6).

Theo Warrington made pens through 1885, when he seems to have gotten out of the pen and stationery business. By 1901, he had become an electrician working out of his long-time home in Camden.



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9. Ad referencing "Steel and Indestructible Metallic Pens," from *Gopsill's Philadelphia City and Business Directory*, 1868, between pages 1,576 and 1,577.

10. Esterbrook nib marked as Colorado no. 1 from a salesman's sample book c. 1872. From the collection of David Nishimura.

SAMUEL WARRINGTON, &
JOHN TURNER.

EDWARD SMITH,
JOSEPH THUMAN.

CONTINENTAL Steel Pen Works.

WARRINGTON & CO.,

INVENTORS AND SOLE MANUFACTURERS OF THE CELEBRATED

Patent Treaty and Platina Pens.

MANUFACTURERS OF EVERY VARIETY OF

STEEL AND INDESTRUCTIBLE METALLIC PENS, PEN HOLDERS, &C.,

N. W. COR. TWELFTH AND BUTTOWOOD STREETS,
PHILADELPHIA.

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Theodore passed away in 1920 at the age of 69 and is buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Camden.

POST-POSTSCRIPT: THE COLORADO PEN

Only three examples of Warrington & Co. nibs are known—and none is from Samuel Warrington's original patent. One is a broad stub nib in the author's personal collection, often called an engrossing pen (fig. 7); one is a Mordan-style oblique pen (no photograph, currently in the collection of David Berlin); and one is a pen in my personal collection marked "Warrington & Co's Colorado" (fig. 8).

The interesting thing about this last nib is that it is pretty much exactly like the Colorado nibs produced by Warrington's neighbor across the river, the Esterbrook Steel Pen Company.

These pens are often advertised as "indestructible" because they don't corrode in ink, and, supposedly, you can bend them back into shape should you accidentally drop one (fig. 9). Esterbrook even produced a version with the name "Indestructible."

Esterbrook also produced a whole series of similar brass pens. Most of them were in the Colorado pen series, including the Colorado nos. 1, 2, 3,

304, and several others using the same shape but with different names, like the Indestructible, and a larger version of the Indestructible, called the Arlington. But the most common was the Colorado no. 2.

All of the Colorado pens, whether Esterbrook or Warrington, are made of a brass alloy and imitate gold pens in their shape and looks. The name may come from the gold deposits first discovered in Colorado in 1859, which continued to pump large amounts of gold eastward for years after (fig. 10).

The question is, which came first, the Warrington Colorado or the Esterbrook Colorado series? Did John Turner lift the design from his time at Esterbrook, or did Esterbrook take the design from Warrington? I have found one reference to Esterbrook

making Colorado pens during the time Warrington was in business. And we know that Warrington shared the building at 12th and Buttonwood with the Dearborn & Co. Brass Foundry. Unfortunately, the earliest official list of pens made by Esterbrook is from a salesman's sample card c. 1872, and a Colorado pen is included in that list. However, we have no record of Warrington pens other than advertisements. Right now, there is no clear evidence for who made what first.

What is clear is that John Turner's next endeavor after Warrington would change the steel pen landscape in the United States and cement Philadelphia as a major center for steel pen production.



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