Fastener History

(Fact, Fiction, and Folklore)

By Curtis A. Scaglione

If you look to the internet for the history of the stapler, you undoubtedly will find several sites that would have you believe that the first stapler was made for King Louis XV of France.

For me, this information can be traced to documents that originated from information received from the Swingline Company in 1997.

Even though I had been collecting office equipment for years, it wasn't until 1997, that I decided to focus my attention on paper fasteners. As an investigator by profession, I went to work immediately to uncover everything there was on line concerning the history of paper fasteners, including staplers. 20 minutes later I was done. There was no information on line, no web sites dedicated to staplers or paper fasteners, nothing.

My next action was to start writing to the major stapler companies for any information. Swingline was the only company to respond. They gave me the first clues as to the history and provided information that I could search for even more information.

The first paragraph of their letter to me is where it all starts, "The earliest stapling machine we know of was one built during the 18th Century for King Louis XV of France. The individual staples were handmade and inscribed with the insignia of the Royal Court." Of course, I added this to my web site. In 1997 the Stapler Exchange was the new source for collectors and I wanted to share everything I found with my fellow collectors.

It wasn't for several years before I started questioning some of the information that I myself published. Of course, by then, several others had already starting published their own web sites with this same information on it. Soon, the simple paragraph about King Louis XV's stapler was everywhere.

The truth is, there is no evidence to support or validate this stapler ever existed at all. This story has been embellished upon several times with new details added here and there. One writer adding that "King Louis, not recognizing the value of the stapler and keeping it to himself was the reason it wasn't produced", and another adding that "some accounts claim that the staples were made of gold and encrusted with precious stones".

During my research, it was discovered that King Louis did not care for his administrative responsibilities and disliked the pomp and ceremony of royalty. He delegated most of his duties to his secretary and was reported to have granted his secretary permission to sign many documents on his behalf. It seems unlikely he would invest any finances or effort to a device that would fasten documents together when he had no concern for those duties.

It is important to understand that at that time handmade paper was expensive, rare and not easily obtained. Writers and scribes wrote on every inch of the sheet, front

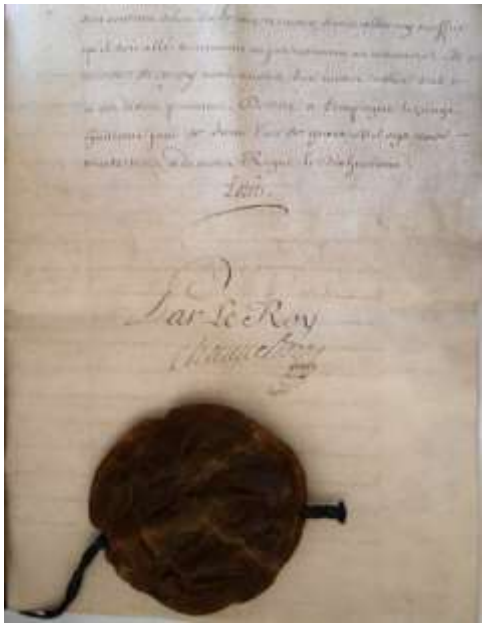
and back. The letter, document or decree was then folded and a wax seal was sometimes impressed. During the 18th century it was common not to use envelopes, which is the case concerning documents observed with King Louis XV's seal. It was also noted that at no time were any documents observed where more than one page was present. Nor were any of the wax seals attached by staples or fasteners.

Personal fob seals were fashionable during the time of Louis XV. It is written that often these seals were ornate and would have gems in gold settings. New laws and proclamations required the authoritative stamp of a seal. In many observed cases, it would be a red in color bee's wax with the Kings insignia.

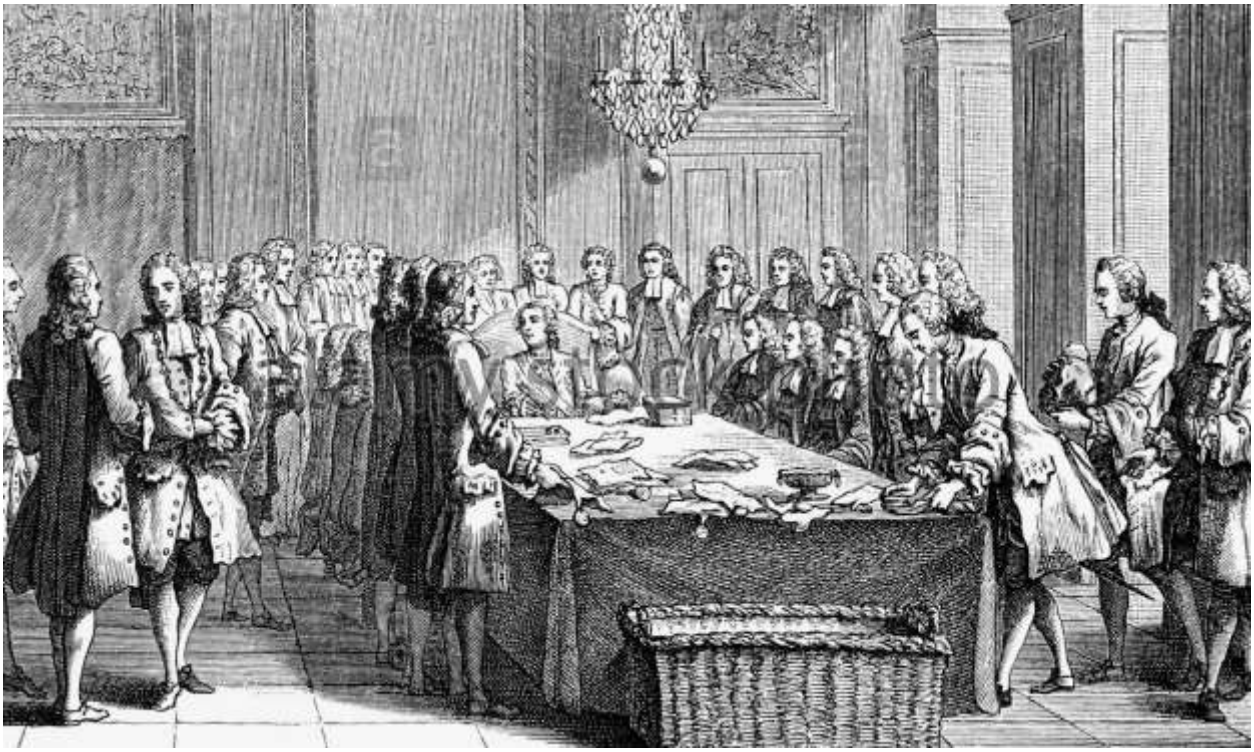
Dozens of documents signed by King Louis were found on line. Each one was thoroughly reviewed for signs of puncture holes or cuts in the paper. Not one document had any indication that it had been fastened in any way. All corners were carefully examined and nothing was observed to indicate any form of fastening. What were seen though, were red wax seals baring the insignia of his court.

Had a stapler, or any other form of paper fastener, been invented in the 18th century, it would have been improved upon and made available to the public and there would be some trace of it today.

The final truth is what was seen repeatedly were red wax seals placed upon single sheets of paper with the insignia of the King embedded into the wax signed by Louis XV. More often than not, no wax seal were used as those documents were not official in nature. In conclusion, there is no evidence to support such a devise ever existed.



(*King Louis XV's wax seal*)



(King Louis XV using his seal for the first time)

Samuel Slocum

(Born 4 Mar 1792; Died 26 Jan 1861)

Samuel Slocum was an inventor and manufacturer of pins and a convenient little devise that stuck his pins into paper for the purpose of selling them. This fact cannot be made any simpler, yet countless blogs and simple misrepresentations continue to plague the internet with the wrong credit being giving to an already historical figure who provided this nation with a great service. As a result of his contributions, American was no longer dependent on England for pins.

Slocum dedicated his life to the manufacture and improvement of pins. If you look at history, you will learn that in the early 1800's pins were as valuable as gold. They were only manufactured in one place, England. If the Americans wanted pins, they would have to pay dearly for them.

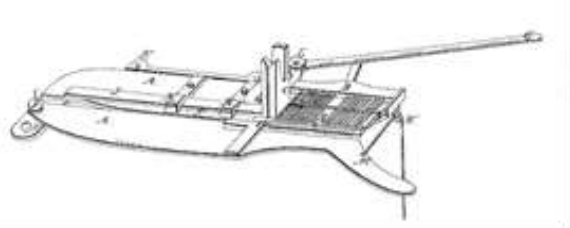
This is where Samuel Slocum's true contribution came to be. In the 1835 he devised and patented a machine for making pins with solid heads. Shortly thereafter, he returned to the U.S. and sought a partner.

In 1838 he had previously invented, but not patented, a machine to manufacture pins with a solid head. He formed a company to make what became known as "Poughkeepsie Pins" (1839).

One man tending two such machines could produce 100,000 pins in 11 hours. Slocum's pin was the first with a solid head to be made in the U.S.

By 1840, the pin-making firm of Slocum and Jillson was manufacturing at Poughkeepsie, N. Y. All the while, the question of packaging pins held Slocum's attention, and

on 30 Sept 1841, he obtained patent No. 2,275 for a machine for sticking pins in paper.



A sliding hopper deposited a number of pins in grooves in a plate, from where a row of wires pushed them into a folded paper. The operation was activated by a foot treadle.

A thorough examination of Slocum's patent drawing and description would indicate that this machine was not a paper fastener at all, but a machine that stuck a number of pins to paper for the purpose of packaging them in quantity. Historically, Samuel Slocum's life's work was the development and sale of pins. His invention was solely for the purpose of marketing the pins that he manufactured.

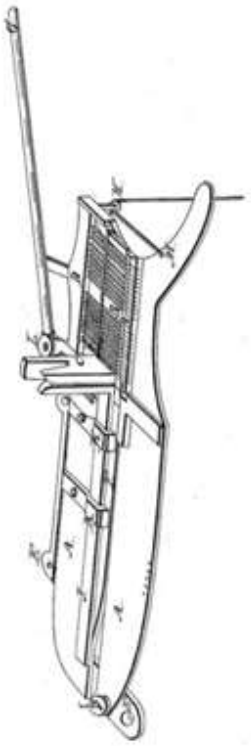
One of the sources found was out of the Stanford Library. The book titled One Hundred Years of American Commerce (1795 – 1895) edited by Chauncey M. Depew, LL,D clearly demonstrates Samuel Slocum's dedication to pin making/ The book goes on to confirm that Samuel invented a pin-sticking machine which was in use by 1841.

Until he retired, Slocum continued in the pin manufacturing business and improved his pin sticking machine.

(Scroll down to see the patent Slocum was awarded for his machine)

Papering Pins.

№ 2,275. *Patented Sept. 30, 1841.*



UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

SAMUEL SLOCUM, OF POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK.

MACHINE FOR STICKING PINS INTO PAPERS.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 2,275, dated September 30, 1841; Reissued December 4, 1855, No. 332.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, SAMUEL SLOCUM, of Poughkeepsie, in the county of Dutchess and State of New York, have invented a new and useful Machine for Sticking Pins into Papers, which machine has not been hitherto used or known, and that the following is a full and exact description of the construction and operation thereof.

A pair of clamps A, A, made of iron and connected by a hinge-rivet I, are placed in a horizontal position, and one of them is firmly secured to a bench, platform or table by screws, vertically inserted at E, E. In the upper side of the stationary clamp at B, B, are as many grooves as the number of pins intended to be inserted in one row. Each of these grooves is of sufficient length and depth to receive one of the pins, and one only. A sliding hopper C, is so constructed as to hold fifty or more pins, one directly over another in a horizontal position. This hopper is made to slide directly over the grooves, by which process one of the pins is deposited in each groove. The motion and direction of the hopper, are governed by a horizontal branch J, which passes through the guides K, K. A sliding plate D is placed beyond, but parallel to the system of grooves, B, B, which it is occasionally made to approach, being driven forward by the lever G, which is connected to the stationary clamp by a pivot L. From the front edge of this sliding plate, project a system of points or wires, corresponding with the grooves; so that when the plate D is driven forward, the wires enter the grooves, and drive forward the pins, which are thus made to perforate the previously adjusted folds of a folded paper, which is held between the clamps at B. These clamps, when not restrained, are separated by a spring F; but they are occasionally held firmly together by means of a rope, which being attached to the moving clamp at M, passes over the pulley H, and thence down to a treaddle or stirrup which is controlled by the foot.

What I claim as my invention and desire to secure by Letters Patent, is—

1. The plate with grooves for receiving the pins.

2. The sliding hopper which deposits the pins in the grooves as described.

3. The sliding plate or follower with the wires attached thereto, in combination with the groove-plate as described; and also these in combination with the hopper as described.

August the 25 A. D. 1841.

SAMUEL SLOCUM.

Witnesses:

CORYDON S. SPERRY,

E. F. BACON.

[FIRST PRINTED 1913.]