

# Not in This Lifetime

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Is a longstanding, universal belief about the most famous guarantee in writing instrument history...wrong?

By Daniel Kirchheimer

“I want the latest and the greatest, with a lifetime guarantee”  
–Wite Lite, “All I Really Want is You”

If there is one fact about fountain pens that has gone unquestioned throughout the decades-long history of the field of writing instrument collecting and research, it could well be the following: Sheaffer’s “LIFETIME” pen had a lifetime guarantee. Indeed, to challenge this assertion seems absurd; the truth of it appears to be embedded right in the name. Would it make sense to question whether Sheaffer’s Snorkel pen had a snorkel? How ink was supplied in its Compact Cartridge pen? Who was buried in Grant’s Tomb?

Perhaps the lesson to be learned here is, question *everything*.

## A Brief History of (Life)Time

Sheaffer first used the name “Lifetime” in April, 1920, according to their U. S. trademark registration no. [173,423](#). According to the registration, granted on September 25, 1923 on an application filed December 27, 1921, “the trade mark is applied or affixed to the goods by cutting or engraving, or otherwise imprinting the trade mark thereon, or to the packages containing the same, by placing thereon a printed label on which the trade mark is shown.” The trademark is still in force, as it has been renewed several times over the last 90 years (the name was alternatively spelled “Life Time” or “Life-Time” in the first year or so, as shall be seen).

The first pens to be given the Lifetime title were black hard rubber oversize flat top pens with “manifold” nibs – extra-heavy, stiff points ideal for making multiple carbon copies. The pens first appear in a Sheaffer catalog in the 1921 edition, which likely was issued around August of that year, based on the timing of the release of the 1920 catalog as documented in the trade press (though some later catalogs, such as Catalog A1 from 1925, were printed somewhat later in the calendar year). Those early pens were available plain or traditionally chased, in full diameter or a subtly thinner girth (“T” prefix), and bandless with a nickel-plated clip (8C Lifetime), or with a ¼” gold filled (8½C Lifetime) or ½” 14K band (89C Lifetime), both with matching clip [note that this 1921 catalog has an error, and gives the width of the band on the 8½C as 1 ¼” rather than ¼”]. Though initially the Lifetime pens were all large and bore large points as indicated by the “8” in their model numbers, the Lifetime line was gradually broadened over time, and it eventually included instruments of all sizes in a variety of trim configurations.

It is notable that in that first catalog appearance, the plainest, larger-diameter Lifetime pen (the 8C Lifetime model) was priced at \$8.75. Sheaffer also offered a non-Lifetime pen that was identical in every way except for the nib – the otherwise-unnamed 8C, which had been in the line for several years according to earlier catalogs. That pen retailed for \$8.25, unless it was ordered with a manifold point, which cost an additional \$0.50 according to slightly later repair parts price lists, thus bringing the pen’s price up to the same \$8.75 as its Lifetime twin. Put another way, as of the 1921 catalog, the basic Lifetime pen was merely an existing model fitted with the optional manifold nib bearing a “LIFETIME PEN” imprint and carrying a lifetime guarantee on the point.

By 1924, Sheaffer created their famous White Dot insignia. The mark appears to have been introduced in concert with Sheaffer’s introduction of pens made from celluloid, and the Dot – itself made of celluloid– was inset into the top surface of those first green “Jadite” pens, as Sheaffer initially branded the new material before adding black to the celluloid color lineup shortly thereafter and changing the material’s name to “Radite.” Sheaffer pens made of the material that celluloid supplanted – hard rubber – are also found with the White Dot, because Sheaffer continued to use hard rubber for chased black pens for a couple of years after Radite appeared, per catalog listings.

Sheaffer offered a full line of pens (and pencils) under the Lifetime banner into the mid-1940s, when action by the Federal Trade Commission compelled Sheaffer to drop that designation for nearly all its products (though some solid gold items continued to bear it); however, the penmaker continued to mark its better instruments with the White Dot emblem, which no longer corresponded to the Lifetime policy. (The Dot’s scope eventually broadened further, as it went on to become Sheaffer’s company logo, and it is still in use in that capacity today.) The Lifetime designation was revived for a time in 1963 in honor of the company’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Registered Sept. 25, 1923.

Trade-Mark 173,423

Renewed, September 25, 1943 to W. A. Sheaffer Pen Company,  
Fort Madison, Iowa.

RENEWED

SEP 25 1943

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY, OF FORT MADISON, IOWA.

ACT OF FEBRUARY 20, 1905.

Application filed December 27, 1921. Serial No. 157,185.

LIFETIME

STATEMENT.

*To all whom it may concern:*

Be it known that W. A. Sheaffer Pen Company, a corporation duly organized under the laws of the State of Delaware, and located in the city of Fort Madison, county of Lee, and State of Iowa, and doing business in the city of Fort Madison, State of Iowa, has adopted and used the trade-mark shown in the accompanying drawing, for FOUNTAIN PENS, in Class 37, Paper and stationery.

The trade mark has been continuously used

in the business of said corporation since April, 1920.

The trade mark is applied or affixed to the goods by cutting or engraving, or otherwise imprinting the trade mark thereon, or to the packages containing the same, by placing thereon a printed label on which the trade mark is shown.

Dated December 14, 1921.

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY,  
By W. A. SHEAFFER,

*President.*

Figure 1: Trademark registration for LIFETIME mark

## That Famous Guarantee

Sheaffer's Lifetime guarantee is well-known (at least in broad terms) to those familiar with the history of fountain pens. It's safe to say that everyone in the field is aware that pens bearing this designation would be repaired or replaced for the original owner's lifetime if the pen failed or broke for nearly any reason short of willful damage, "even though a street car runs over it," as one 1931 ad proclaimed. Sheaffer wasn't bluffing; I had a Sheaffer Balance fountain pen from the 1930s – a D73WS "Lady Sheaffer" in the patented Ebonized Pearl material – and my father broke the nib attempting to straighten it shortly after I acquired it in the late-1970s. We sent it in to Sheaffer along with a copy of that "street car" advertisement just to see what their response would be to this absurd request for warranty service forty years after the pen was made, and we were astonished when the pen was returned to us just a few weeks later with a brand-new period-correct nib, replaced without charge. More amazing still, I later dropped that same pen, and its barrel cracked in two. I sent it back to Sheaffer, and they quickly returned it with an apologetic note: they regretted that they no longer had the plunger-filler barrel my pen required, so they replaced it with the lever-filling equivalent.

All Sheaffer pens are guaranteed for life and the Sheaffer Lifetime<sup>®</sup> pen is guaranteed unconditionally for the life of the owner — even though a street car runs over it and the pieces are returned to the factory, a new pen will be sent without question. Distinguish between the ordinary guarantee and that of the genuine Lifetime<sup>®</sup> pen which is guaranteed against everything except loss.

Figure 2: Detail from 1931 Sheaffer ad

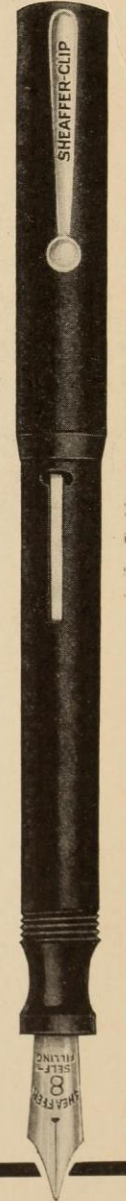
# SHEAFFER'S

## LIFE TIME PEN

*Painted by Coles Phillips expressly for W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co*



Life Time Pen  
illustrated, with  
clip, \$8.75



### *Adopted by Men Who Write in Big Figures*

THE "Life Time" SHEAFFER is the most important advancement in Fountain Pen manufacture since the original lever-filler, which was invented by W. A. SHEAFFER. It is larger than the ordinary fountain pen and holds a much greater supply of ink.

Its extra heavy gold nib with indestructible iridium point writes with perfect

smoothness and will stand the extra pressure necessary to make clear carbon copies—five, if necessary, just as easily as the hardest lead pencil.

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY  
301 Sheaffer Bldg., Fort Madison, Iowa

New York      Chicago      Kansas City  
Denver      San Francisco

AT THE BETTER DEALERS EVERYWHERE

PRESS OF JUDD & DETWEILER, INC.  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Figure 3: Early "Life Time Pen" ad from February, 1921 *National Geographic*

Also fairly well-known by now is that the terms of the guarantee varied somewhat over time. Experienced collectors are aware that, as Craig Sheaffer, son of company founder Walter A. Sheaffer, pointed out in the Katz Drug v. Sheaffer Pen lawsuit, early on only the nib was guaranteed, not the pen as a whole, but the coverage was later broadened to encompass the entire instrument likely at (or shortly after) the introduction of celluloid Sheaffers, because the new material was considered more durable than the hard rubber that preceded it.

Every Lifetime Pen has a special big No. 8 "Lifetime" gold nib. A doubly large amount of extra selected native Tasmanian iridium is welded with the gold, hardening the point excessively so that it resists injury and wear. With pressure the "Lifetime" point will make five carbon copies. This super-point cannot bend, spring, scratch or get out of order. It writes instantly at the lightest touch.

And best of all, every "Lifetime" pen point is guaranteed forever. It will last a lifetime.

Figure 4: Detail from 1921 Sheaffer catalog showing description of Lifetime nib guarantee



Figure 5: Detail from 1924 ad showing guarantee applying only to nib of hard rubber Lifetime Pen

LIFE is published weekly by Life Pub. Co., at 120 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. Subscription, \$3.00. Vol. 22, No. 4024, February 5, 1925. Entered as Second Class Matter, June 8, 1922, at the Post Office at New York, N.Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U.S.A. Registered as Second Class Matter at the Post Office at Toronto, Canada. Copy right, 1925, by Life Pub. Co., Second and Third Publications.

*Lifetime*

*A world-record demand takes root  
in this green pen achievement*

A pen-wise public once more sets the seal of its mighty buying power on Sheaffer's Lifetime pen. And for this new green creation, now comes a hungry demand far exceeding even our splendid facilities for production. An overwhelming, a colorful success, built on the basic merits of a truly great pen, pinnacled as an infallible writer, with flawless action, unconditionally guaranteed Lifetime nib, and a safe ink supply. And now with its new unbreakable barrel comes also the subtle allurements of lovely color—green—the color nature loves best—the most beautiful of all colors for the most beautiful of all pens. The better class dealers are glad to show this new triumph. See it today.

*Green "Lifetime" \$8.75—guaranteed for a lifetime Others, \$2.50 and up*

**SHEAFFER'S**  
PENS · PENCILS · SKRIP  
W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY  
FORT MADISON, IOWA

Figure 6: Jade Lifetime ad from February 5, 1925 LIFE

former, instantly ready for efficient service, capable of making three clear carbon copies, and guaranteed free of all repair charges for a lifetime. It quickly won the world's applause by its outstanding beauty.

Figure 7: 1928 Lifetime ad detail

Lifetimes, matched in line and color. Each has modern design, restful-writing Balance<sup>o</sup>, and Lifetime<sup>o</sup> pens are guaranteed against everything excepting loss for the owner's lifespan. See the beautiful Marine Green Lifetimes<sup>o</sup> and enjoy the paper feel of

Figure 8: 1930 Lifetime ad detail

In the early 1930s, a flat 35-cent charge was added to the terms of the Lifetime guarantee. This charge eventually got Sheaffer (and other penmakers who had a similar practice) into hot water with the Federal Trade Commission, which ruled that Sheaffer could not claim its guarantee was “unconditional” if it was only honored on condition that the customer paid \$0.35; the FTC charged that, in fact, it was not really a guarantee on the *pen*, but rather a promise of guaranteed *service* on the pen. Sheaffer responded by backing down the guarantee’s scope so that once again, it only applied to the point of the pen, and they carefully re-worded their marketing materials to refer to a guaranteed “service contract” in line with the FTC’s admonishment; shortly thereafter, they dropped the guarantee entirely for their White Dot items, excepting certain very expensive solid-gold models. The guarantee returned for select models in 1963, though its terms were considerably more restrictive; the streetcar scenario would no longer have been covered.

**THE NEW *Lifetime* \* "TRIUMPH"**  
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

**AND A NEW SERVICE CONTRACT**

Judged by all pre-war standards, Sheaffer's newest *Lifetime*, the "TRIUMPH," is the finest, most precise writing instrument ever manufactured by anyone.

Its streamlined beauty, inherent value, and dependable performance make it the pen you will want the moment you see it and try it.

It is *not* guaranteed "forever"—nor for 100 years—nor against everything. Its giant cylindrical 14-karat gold point **ONLY** has service guaranteed except against loss or willful mutilation for the **LIFE OF THE FIRST USER,\*** while former *Lifetimes* carried a guarantee on the whole pen. But the whole pen is guaranteed against defective workmanship and materials.

This new "TRIUMPH" is the sturdiest of all Sheaffer pens, but you'll want to give it the care befitting the finest—the same care you would give a fine watch—and if you do, your personal writing problems are solved!

\*Sheaffer's service contract on the *Lifetime* "TRIUMPH" pen (applicable to all *Lifetime* "TRIUMPHS" of the new type) — The giant cylindrical point is guaranteed against everything except loss or willful damage for the life of the first user; the complete pen against defective materials or workmanship. If repair is needed, return complete pen to Sheaffer or your dealer. No charge will be made for repairing the point other than a service charge of 35c to cover return postage, handling and insurance. (Slightly more if you ask the dealer to send it in for you.)

Figure 9: Detail from carefully-worded 1945 Sheaffer ad stating that nib has "service guaranteed" and referring to a "service contract" rather than an outright guarantee



We are observing our golden fiftieth anniversary by featuring a famous name in Sheaffer and writing instrument history—the Sheaffer “LIFETIME” fountain pen. Many will recall our first “LIFETIME” fountain pens, introduced in 1920. Now for today’s consumer, we proudly offer this ultimate achievement in fountain pen manufacturing. The 1963 Sheaffer “LIFETIME” fountain pens are more streamlined than their predecessors and offer a greater value to your customers. Quality—from our half century of experience—is part of every feature.

*W. A. Sheaffer II*  
PRESIDENT

Figure 10: Detail from 1963 catalog discussing re-introduction of Lifetime pens

Instant mail delivery? Yes, and you'll still be writing with your Sheaffer LIFETIME® Pen

Figure 11: Lifetime ad foretelling handwriting recognition and email, from 1964 "21st Century" campaign

## The Error

Lifetime pens are called Lifetime pens because they have some sort of lifetime guarantee, obviously – whether that’s an outright guarantee on the pen itself or a guarantee of flat-rate service. Countless ads and other published materials from throughout the history of that label testify to this.

Or do they?

Let’s take another, closer look at the earliest Lifetime ad shown above:

**SHEAFFER'S**  
**LIFE TIME PEN**

Painted by Cotes Phillips expressly for W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co

Life Time Pen illustrated, with clip, \$8.75

*Adopted by Men Who Write in Big Figures*

THE "Life Time" SHEAFFER is the most important advancement in Fountain Pen manufacture since the original lever-filler, which was invented by W. A. SHEAFFER. It is larger than the ordinary fountain pen and holds a much greater supply of ink.

Its extra heavy gold nib with indestructible iridium point writes with perfect smoothness and will stand the extra pressure necessary to make clear carbon copies—five, if necessary, just as easily as the hardest lead pencil.

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY  
301 Sheaffer Bldg., Fort Madison, Iowa

New York Chicago Kansas City  
Denver San Francisco

AT THE BETTER DEALERS EVERYWHERE

PRESS OF JUDD & DETWEILER, INC.  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Figure 12: February, 1921 Sheaffer ad showing detail of nib

Something that had always bothered me about this ad is that the pen's nib, shown in detail on the right, is marked "SHEAFFER'S 8 SELF-FILLING," rather than "SHEAFFER'S LIFETIME PEN," which I expected to see on an early Lifetime fountain pen. But upon scrutinizing this ad for perhaps the hundredth time, I was suddenly struck by something else far more interesting that I had never previously grasped. Here is the text of the ad:

The "Life Time" SHEAFFER is the most important advancement in Fountain Pen manufacture since the original lever-filler which was invented by W. A. Sheaffer. It is larger than the ordinary fountain pen and holds a much greater supply of ink.

Its extra heavy gold nib with indestructible iridium point writes with perfect smoothness and will stand the extra pressure necessary to make clear carbon copies—five, if necessary, just as easily as the hardest lead pencil.

What I realized is that there is *no mention whatsoever of any guarantee*, lifetime or otherwise. Yet, it is universally assumed that this "Life Time" pen had such a guarantee, by extension – one naturally extrapolates from the mountain of other ads over the ensuing decades that *do* discuss and describe the guarantee. But if those ads came later than this 1921 placement, is it logical to extend an association between a name ("Lifetime") and an attribute (a lifetime guarantee) *backwards* through time, just as we might do looking *forward* chronologically, when we reasonably assume such an association might persist even if not explicit? And if the pen being advertised had this unprecedented, extraordinary guarantee, *why wasn't it even mentioned in the ad?*

Perhaps Sheaffer didn't feel it necessary to beat their prospective customers over the head with every one of their pens' selling points in every single ad, and in this case, the guarantee was one of the features that simply didn't make the cut (though there certainly seems to be enough space in the full-page ad to have slipped it in somewhere). And the matter of the depiction of the nib, which does not say "LIFETIME" on it – well, pen history (and Sheaffer history in particular) is replete with examples of images being re-used or simply being inaccurate, though it is rather curious if the star feature of the Lifetime Pen was the guaranteed nib. And if the nib stamp shown *is* accurate, and the earliest Lifetime pens had the same nib imprint as the otherwise-identical non-Lifetime pens, how could they be differentiated by dealers or by Sheaffer when the items were presented for repair? But regardless, the overarching question about the existence of the warranty should be easily answerable: we simply need to find an *earlier* Sheaffer Lifetime ad that mentions the lifetime guarantee, and the matter can be definitively settled.

As far as I can determine, **no such ad exists.**

The February, 1921 advertisement shown above is the earliest national ad for the Sheaffer Lifetime pen that I have found. There is a surprising scarcity of Lifetime ads during this period; given the subsequent fame of this line, one might expect ads in every issue of several large-circulation national magazines. But as far as I know, the ad shown only ran once – in that February *National Geographic* – and no other Lifetime ad appeared *anywhere* until six months later, when *National Geographic* was again the venue for a placement in its August, 1921 issue. But in that later ad, there are two crucial differences – one in the pen, and one in the meaning of that word "Lifetime:"

"THE  
**Lifetime**"  
SHEAFFER'S *Greatest Achievement*

Every SHEAFFER has the quick lever-filler - the invention of W.A. SHEAFFER

Were you to travel the storied coasts of the world—and set your story down in volumes of ten; or follow the pursuits of business over the proverbial three score and ten—SHEAFFER'S "Lifetime" Pen would transmit your thoughts to the end of your writing days. For the gold point, tipped with iridium, the hardest metal known, is guaranteed FOREVER.

Guaranteed to respond for a lifetime to the heaviest finger pressure or the lightest touch—smoothly, without blurring or scratching. The "Lifetime" is larger in size—holds more ink—refills by SHEAFFER patented self-filling lever in less than a second. Positively leakproof.

*The finest pen for business men*  
Other SHEAFFER Pens \$2.50 to \$50

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY  
*Fort Madison, Iowa*  
Chicago New York Kansas City Denver San Francisco

The 8C "Lifetime"  
\$8.75

**SHEAFFER'S**  
PEN - PENCIL

AT THE BETTER DEALERS EVERYWHERE

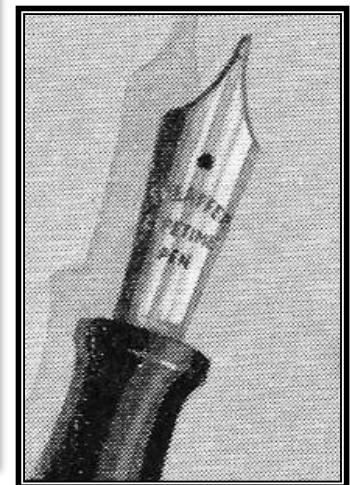


Figure 13: Sheaffer Lifetime Pen ad in August, 1921 *National Geographic*

This advertisement specifically states, "the gold point, tipped with iridium, is guaranteed FOREVER," and the pen shown bears a nib with the "SHEAFFER'S LIFETIME PEN" imprint rather than the "8 SELF-FILLING" stamp seen in the February, 1921 ad.

Recall that the standard Lifetime pen as listed in the 1921 Sheaffer catalog was identical to another model that had been in the line for some years, except that the manifold nib (the only style available in the Lifetime models) was stamped “SHEAFFER’S LIFETIME PEN” rather than “SHEAFFER 8 SELF-FILLING,” and the Lifetime pen (as of that catalog’s issuance) had a lifetime guarantee on the point. If, prior to mid-1921, there was no special guarantee associated with the Lifetime pen, *there would not have been a need to mark the nib in any special way* – “Lifetime” (or “Life Time”) would have been no more than a label for the existing 8C model when that pen was equipped with the manifold nib. That is, the 8C Lifetime, prior to the addition of the lifetime guarantee, wouldn’t have merely been identical to the non-Lifetime 8C with a manifold nib – it would have actually been *the very same pen*.

## The Evidence Is Discovered

Is it really possible that when first created, and for some time afterwards, the “Lifetime” designation actually did not mean *anything* in particular, any more than did any other hyperbolic product name that was intended to evoke some extraordinary quality? And can it be that the famous guarantee was quite literally an afterthought, added on to the pen about a year later – a brilliant marketing stroke, converting an ephemeral concept already embodied in a product name into a hard promise?

Have we simply been **wrong** all these years?

The February, 1921 ad raises the question, but does not convincingly answer it. As discussed, the lack of any mention of a lifetime guarantee doesn’t mean the guarantee didn’t exist, and the appearance of the pen’s nib, lacking the “LIFETIME” stamp, may be explained in a number of ways, none of which requires abandonment of the long-held (and more than reasonable) belief that Lifetime pens always had lifetime guarantees of some sort.

What, then, do *other* ads from the same period say and show? As stated earlier, the next ad I’ve found is a full half-year later, and it describes the guarantee and shows a Lifetime-marked nib. As for earlier ads, none exist, as far as I have been able to determine. If that were all we had to go on, the proposition that there were Lifetime pens without lifetime guarantees would not rise above the level of tantalizing speculation, as the case cannot be compellingly made based on one lone, puzzling ad from early 1921.

But ads aimed at consumers were not the only form of published promotion in which Sheaffer engaged. The company actively marketed its wares not just to users, but to dealers as well, as Sheaffer was aggressively expanding its network of retail outlets across the country during the period under examination. And, recall that Sheaffer’s trademark registration claimed that the company had been using “Lifetime” since April, 1920 – almost a year prior to the date the intriguing *National Geographic* ad ran. There must be some evidence of Sheaffer’s promotion of its Lifetime pen in the intervening period, and perhaps that evidence will definitively prove—or disprove—my speculation.

I am confident that I have found the evidence necessary to settle this question. In 1920 and ’21, Sheaffer ran a series of one- and two-page mini-newsletters in the monthly trade publications *Office Appliances*, *Modern Stationer*, and perhaps others. These items, entitled “**Profit Tips**: A Page of Ideas for Enterprising Fountain Pen Dealers,” which ran every month except December through February, were filled with news about Sheaffer products and promotional efforts as well as advice for retailers. As the *National Geographic* Lifetime ad under

examination ran in February, 1921, I started my examination of “Profit Tips” at that date, and worked my way backwards. As mentioned, there was no “Profit Tips” in December, January, or February, so the first edition prior to the 2/1921 *National Geographic* placement was in the November, 1920 *Office Appliances*, but it was devoid of any reference to the Lifetime Pen:

SHEAFFER'S

SELF-FILLING  
PENS**PROFIT TIPS**A Page of Ideas for Enterprising Fountain Pen Dealers  
Prepared by the W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY

SHEAFFER'S

SHARP POINT  
PENCIL

Merry Christmas

FORT MADISON, IOWA, NOVEMBER, 1920

Happy New Year

SHEAFFER'S

PEN

PENCIL



YOU come to me at Christmas out-  
rivaling in your sagacity the Wise  
Men of the East, for you know full  
well that in giving me this adorable SHEAFFER  
Fountain Pen you leave me no excuse for not  
writing to you often. As for its lovely mate  
in this cunning "Giftie Box"—the SHEAFFER

Sharp Point Pencil—I, like all women who  
detest sharpening a pencil, have wanted one  
of these ready companions. How did you  
know? And how did you guess that I have  
fairly coveted the SHEAFFER Pen and Pencil  
above all others because they are so mechan-  
ically perfect and so symmetrical and beautiful?"

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY, 268 SHEAFFER BUILDING, FORT MADISON, IOWA.  
NEW YORK CHICAGO KANSAS CITY DENVER SAN FRANCISCO

Giftie Set illustrated, No. 2R, Rolled Gold, \$16.00; No. 3R, Solid Gold, \$68.00

Other attractive styles on display at better stores everywhere

**THIS BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS ADVERTISEMENT**

will be reproduced in full colors in the December issue of American Magazine, Everybody's, McClure's and Popular Mechanics. It will also appear in the Christmas issue of Life, and December number of Metropolitan, National Geographic, Review of Reviews, Rock Island, Santa Fe, World's Work. Also, in full colors in January Photoplay, which is published about December 15th.

**Nebraska Jeweler Sees  
Unlimited Sales Possi-  
bilities in "Giftie Sets"**

Charles Fleming, Lincoln's Leading Jeweler, has been quick to grasp the unlimited sales possibilities in SHEAFFER Giftie Sets which were especially designed for Christmas Birthdays, Commencements, School Opening and other gift occasions.

"At first, I thought that Giftie Sets could be sold only during the holidays," writes Mr. Fleming, "but judging from my experience they're far from being a seasonal article. We have found that there is practically a year round demand for them. Just the other day for instance, I sold two sets to be presented to the bridesmaid and groomsman. This helps to illustrate the point that there are many unthought-of sales channels for Giftie Sets and we only look about and cultivate them."

The SHEAFFER Giftie Set consists of a full-mounted SHEAFFER Self-filling Pen and a SHEAFFER Sharp Point Pencil specially packed in a handsome plush and satin-lined Giftie Box. In addition to being prized for their everyday utility, they constitute gifts of unequalled charm and beauty. The Standard (Full Length) Sets are furnished in sterling silver, gold filled and 14k solid gold plain, chased and checkered designs retailing from \$13 to \$195 per set. The Midget Sets which are made with ring at top for Chatelaine or Waldemar chain, are similar in finish and design to the Standard sets and retail from \$11 to \$88. The liberal discount offered through the trade makes the Giftie Set a real profit-producing item for SHEAFFER dealers.

Owing to the unprecedented demand for SHEAFFER Giftie Sets during the closing months of last year, we were forced to disappoint many of our customers on account of our inability to fill late orders. This, in spite of the fact that our factory was operating full force, both night and day. The full page Christmas advertisement shown on this page should create even a greater demand for this popular number, which prompts us to urge all SHEAFFER dealers to place their orders now.

GET YOUR ORDER IN EARLY FOR  
**THE SHEAFFER  
LINE DE LUXE**

A Solid Gold Mounted Line  
at a price range of  
\$5 to \$52

Address communications to W. A. SHEAFFER PEN CO., 259 Sheaffer Bldg., Fort Madison, Iowa

Figure 14: November, 1920 "Profit Tips" with no mention of Lifetime Pen

The previous month, October, at least yielded a mention of the Lifetime model, but, frustratingly, it was the barest reference possible – just the words “Life Time Pen” in the masthead on the second page:



Figure 15: Masthead of October, 1920 "Profit Tips" showing mention of "Life Time Pen"

Going back another month turned up nothing; though there was an edition of "Profit Tips" in the September issue of *Office Appliances*, it contained nary a mention of the elusive quarry. However August, 1920 yielded the jackpot:



**SHEAFFER'S**  
SHARP POINT  
PENCIL

# PROFIT TIPS

**SHEAFFER'S**  
SELF-FILLING  
PENS

A Page of Ideas for Enterprising Fountain Pen Dealers  
Prepared by the W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY

8000 Dealers

FORT MADISON, IOWA, AUGUST, 1920

6,000,000 Users

## How a Western Retailer Tripled "Life Time Pen" Sales in Less than Month

Nine out of ten men who step into Robert W. Combe's store at Kansas City, intent on buying an ordinary medium-priced pen, walk out with a "Life Time" Sheaffer—plus a broad smile of satisfaction. The customer is happy over having found the pen he'd always longed for, and Mr. Combe is even more elated, for he has just finished ringing up \$8.75 in his cash register, netting him a very handsome profit.

Cashing in on human curiosity and clearly explaining the merits of the pen to the prospective purchaser are responsible for Mr. Combe's success. The first is easily accomplished by displaying the sign and window cut-out which is furnished free of charge and illustrated in the second column.

The 6 main talking points are briefly as follows:


1. Extra large reservoir for ink—busy man not bothered with refilling pen.
2. Extra heavy No. 8 nib with selected native iridium point, made by our master nib maker.
3. Writes at any angle. Every surface smooth as velvet. Positively will not scratch.
4. Withstands hardest usage, hence the name "Life Time Pen."
5. Unusual pressure can be put on pen point, as in making carbon copies.
6. Popular Chased Finish, \$8.75. With gold band and clip, \$10.

The best evidence of Mr. Combe's success in selling Sheaffer "Life Time Pens" is contained in a recent letter which reads:

"About 4 weeks ago we ordered 18 doz. Life Time Pens for shipment first of next month. Kindly change shipping instructions to read 'at once,' as we are entirely out.

"At the time of placing the order we had about 18 doz. in stock and felt confident they would carry us over, but the sale on this number has exceeded our expectations to the extent that we have none on hand.

"We have found the 'Life Time Pen' the most popular one in the whole Sheaffer Line."



**COMBE'S**  
Kansas City, Mo.

(Extract from Letter)

*About 4 weeks ago we ordered 18 dozen Life Time Pens for shipment first of next month. Kindly change shipping instructions to read "at once," as we are entirely out.*

*R.W. Combe*

COME IN AND TRY  
**THE LIFETIME PEN**  
A NEW SHEAFFER FOUNTAIN PEN



The window sign above got the public to stop, look and enter, and Mr. Combe says that most people want to satisfy their curiosity.

This large, attractive cut-out of the gold banded Life Time Pen has proved to be a real trade drawing magnet in the windows of Sheaffer dealers.

This window sign and cut-out of gold banded Life Time Pen furnished free of charge to Sheaffer Dealers.

## Prudential Engrosser Praises Flexibility of Sheaffer Pen

When Mr. B. A. Dolan, Engrosser for the Prudential Insurance Company of America, speaks of pen performance it's time to sit up and take notice, for he is acknowledged to be one of the few "super penmen" in America today, as the reproduction of his letter below clearly proves.

In his work at the home office in Newark, New Jersey, Mr. Dolan searched for years to get hold of a pen that



Engrosser Dolan and His Sheaffer Companion

would best answer his requirements. Not until he thoroughly tested the Sheaffer did he find an instrument that he could conscientiously pronounce "perfect" when judged from the two main requisites of extreme flexibility and enduring satisfactory performance.

Mr. Dolan says: "I wish to thank you most heartily for your painstaking efforts in furnishing me with the pen of my requirements. It is indeed a 'Perfect Writing Instrument,' and I cannot speak too highly of this pen."

Newark, N.J. Feb. 24, 1920.

W.A. Sheaffer Pen Company  
Fort Madison, Iowa

Dear Sirs—

I wish to thank you most heartily for your pains-taking efforts in my behalf in furnishing me with the pen of my requirements. This individual "Perfect Writing Instrument" and cannot speak too highly of this pen!

Again thanking you and with best wishes believe me to be,

Yours very truly,  
B.A. Dolan  
Engrosser

The Prudential  
761 Broadway

*He also writes with the Life Time Pen*

The above letter was written by Mr. Dolan with a Sheaffer Self Filling Fountain Pen

Address communications to W. A. SHEAFFER PEN CO., 256 Sheaffer Bldg., Fort Madison, Iowa

Figure 16: August, 1920 "Profit Tips" describing Lifetime Pen and explaining name

The August, 1920 edition of Sheaffer's "Profit Tips" dealer newsletter leads with a story about a retailer who was selling the new Life Time Pen faster than he could keep it in stock. Most interestingly, the story lists six "main talking points" that should be used when a customer expresses interest in the new item. It is talking point number 4 that holds the key to this quest:

#### 4. Withstands hardest usage, hence the name "Life Time Pen."

There is absolutely no mention of any special guarantee policy associated with the new pen, nor of any other distinguishing characteristic identified by the "Life Time" designation aside from the overall configuration of the pen – a large pen with a durable nib. Surely if that nib carried a lifetime guarantee, that would headline the list of selling points – but there is nothing whatsoever. There can be no doubt: the Sheaffer Lifetime did not have a lifetime guarantee.

### If Not Now, When?

Having established that for some period of time after its debut, Sheaffer's Lifetime Pen did not have a lifetime guarantee, an obvious question now arises: when was that famous policy added to the product? We've already seen that following the February, 1921 ad that has no reference to such a guarantee and that depicts a pen with an "8 SELF-FILLING" nib stamp, the next national retail ad for the Lifetime, in August 1921, touts the guarantee and shows the "LIFETIME PEN" nib imprint. That gives us a starting point – a six-month window during which, it seems, Sheaffer added the guarantee and changed the point marking to match. But we can do better – and it's those informative dealer-targeted "Profit Tips" that allow us to tighten up that timeframe considerably.

The "Profit Tips" sheet published in March, 1921 shows the same "Big Figures" ad for the Life Time Pen featuring the Coles Phillips artwork as had been run in the February, 1921 issue of National Geographic previously discussed herein, though with an interesting alteration: the nib of the pen shown, rather than being an 8-sized item, is marked "SHEAFFER'S SELF-FILLING 5." This is likely an error; perhaps a hastily hand-written "8" was mistaken for a "5" when the specifications for the piece were drafted. However, we cannot completely exclude the possibility that Sheaffer was flirting with the idea of expanding the scope of its Life Time designation to somewhat smaller pens than the hand-filling 8-sized numbers, and it's not just the nib of the pen that is different; the entire pen is somewhat more slender, and the shape of the gripping section is different as well.



Figure 17: Detail of Life Time Pen nib from March, 1921 "Profit Tips," showing curious nib number

The May, 1921 edition of "Profit Tips" mentions the Life Time Pen, but there is no image of the pen and no discussion of any guarantee coverage. That would seem to close the window to about three months, albeit with somewhat weak evidence. But the following month's newsletter is solid on this matter: it devotes an entire page to the Lifetime Pen (now spelled both "Lifetime" and "Life-Time"). There is nothing about a long-term warranty on the pen, and the nib is shown in detail with an "8 SELF-FILLING" imprint:

66
OFFICE APPLIANCES
June, 1921.

# Profit Tips

*A Page of Ideas for Enterprising Fountain Pen Dealers*

PREPARED BY THE W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY

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Dealer Co-operation
FORT MADISON, IOWA, JUNE, 1921
Dealer Protection

---

*Try the "LIFE-TIME PEN"*

A NEW SHEAFFER PRODUCT

*Two of these Handsome Eight Color Posters Furnished FREE with each Order*

**Order for 1 dozen "LIFETIMES" brings you all this—**

An order for 1 dozen "Lifetimes" assorted as follows:

1— 89c	@ \$15.00	\$15.00
3— 8½c	@ 10.00	30.00
8— 8c	@ 8.75	70.00
	(List) .....	\$115.00
	Less 40% .....	69.00
Brings You PROFIT.....		\$ 46.00

**Handsome Sample Case**

This beautiful velvet-lined sample case comes with the above order. Enables you to carry a dozen handily, and, opened up,

makes an impressive display. You can't overestimate the value of this case—par-

ticularly when you want to turn dull store moments to profit by visiting a few business offices.

*Plenty of Advertising*

In addition to profit and sample case, you are supplied with two of these striking eight color window posters. They are proving their effectiveness in attracting buying power everywhere.

This is supplementary to our big advertising campaign in national periodicals—those handsome color advertisements from originals of Coles Phillips, done specially for the W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co.

*This Instructive Booklet, Too*

Of importance to you, and included with the above, is our booklet "How to Double Fountain Pen Sales." Points out many new methods unknown to the average dealer—full of helpful, profitable hints. This, together with the features cited, makes concentration on "Lifetime" Pens the most profitable move you can make.

*By pressing a little firmer on the pen point, SHEAFFER'S "Life-time" will make five clear carbons as easily as a hard pencil.*

*Almost double the amount of ink—more words from a filling—less bother—more satisfaction.*

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**Address communications to Sales Department W. A. SHEAFFER PEN CO., Fort Madison, Iowa**

Figure 18: June, 1921 "Profit Tips" lacking mention of lifetime guarantee and showing 8 SELF-FILLING nib

The July, 1921 edition of "Profit Tips" does not show or discuss the Lifetime Pen, and as seen, in August of that year a national ad ran showing a Lifetime with the "LIFETIME PEN" nib and trumpeting the fact that the point was guaranteed "forever." Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the Lifetime fountain pen had no special guarantee policy from its inception until between June and August of 1921, when a lifetime warranty was bestowed on the pen's nib. Within this narrowed window, it is a simple matter to peruse newspaper ads to see when the first mention of the guarantee appears; this appears to be on June 22, when several papers ran a new Sheaffer ad that explicitly mentioned the lifetime guarantee.



Figure 19: Earliest Sheaffer ad stating that Lifetime pens have a lifetime guarantee, from June 22, 1921 *Oakland Tribune*

If Sheaffer's claim that the first use of "Lifetime" was in April, 1920 is accurate, that would mean that for over a year, the Lifetime pen had no lifetime guarantee, nor any marking indicating that it had been given the name "Lifetime." During that time, a Lifetime Pen was simply Sheaffer's largest model fitted with a manifold nib having no special imprint.

## When We Assume...

The truth about Sheaffer's lifetime guarantee provides an excellent example of a type of error often made in our field, and likely in a much broader range of subjects, too. It is founded on an assumption of stasis, and specifically that if something meant or indicated something at one time, it therefore meant that before and continued to mean it afterwards. But the reality is that penmakers had no such slavish adherence to the meanings of the terms they used – or to the attributes of their model names, or to any other labels. Parker, at a certain point, referred to the second major filling mechanism of its "51" model as "Aerometric," so it is widely assumed that was its name from the time it first appeared. But it wasn't. The filler was first called the "Foto-Fill" filler. Not only that – originally, the adjective "Aerometric" (or, at first, "Aero-metric") didn't refer to the filler at all, but rather the entire pen's feature of **metering** ink under conditions encountered during **air** travel. But, for some reason, "Aerometric" came to refer instead to the filler type, which was the primary distinguishing characteristic of that generation of "51", and even Parker eventually employed the term in that way.

Around the start of World War II, Sheaffer bestowed the name "Triumph" on a new pen model; it was the latest writing instrument to bear a model name that had been used by a long succession of manufacturers stretching back over half a century, including the Triumph Pen Co. in the '30s, John Holland in the teens, Mabie Todd at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the Yale Fountain Pen Company in 1887. The Sheaffer "Triumph" pen had a brand-new cylindrical nib design that Sheaffer called by the rather clunky name of the "Sheath-Point." It was only several years later that Sheaffer began applying the "Triumph" name to the innovative point itself, which it by then was fitting to a wide range of pen models. But strictly speaking, the "Triumph" pen of WWII did not have a Triumph nib, even though this is another widely-held belief among collectors.

The present case of the Lifetime Pen is in another class, as it does not merely pertain to naming, but it shares a core phenomenon with the examples above – the practice of assuming that because something was a certain way at a certain time, it must have been that way always. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the perils of that sort of reasoning than the discovery of the guarantee-less Lifetime Pen revealed herein.

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