

The Copy Press Process in the United States: Developments in Copy Papers and Media From 1780 to 1940

ABSTRACT

The copy press process was used from 1780 to approximately 1940 for the reproduction of drawn and textual documents in the United States. This method typically entails the offsetting of a medium from the original document to a thin, unsized tissue. Because the copy is a mirror image of the original, the forward-reading copy is read from the back of the thin copy tissue.

The main focus of the paper is an overview of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mordant chemistry and its application to copy paper impregnation. Examples are set forth of various copy paper impregnation processes that appeared gradually through commercial innovations. Examples of iron-gall based copy ink formulations (presented at the AIC Annual Meeting, 1994, by the author in collaboration with Karen Garlick, Assistant Director for Collection Management Services, Smithsonian Institution) are reviewed and expanded. The paper also reviews various other copy inks, copy pencils, typewriter copy inks, and printing copy inks developed for this technique.

The impermanence of various copy ink formulations is examined. The attempt to remedy ink impermanence through the introduction of various mordants into copy papers is described. Greater ink permanence is sometimes achieved through the chemical interaction of components in copy inks with components in the copy papers. Some copy papers, impregnated with mordants, may form insoluble colorants on the copy papers. Other copy papers, impregnated with hygroscopic agents, may affect the solubility parameters of copy inks.

An expanded list of various copy ink formulations available in the United States from 1780 through 1940 is set forth. In addition, examples are offered of various paper impregnation formulations available in the United States, primarily from United States patents and American-published compendiums.

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