



## A GEM of a bent and twisted idea.

**John A. Veverka**  
*Director*

*The Heritage Interpretation  
Training Center.*

Years ago working on my PhD in interpretation at Michigan State University and teaching the introductory and advanced interpretation courses there, one of my textbooks (besides Tilden) was Paul Harvey's *Rest of the Stories*. You can still buy these books today – check out Paul Harvey *Rest of the Stories* on Yahoo or Amazon.

Having been bitten by the “rest of the story” bug as the most interpretive communication strategy I could use in developing interpretive text for exhibits or panels, or doing live interpretive programs or tours, I stressed and taught this format in my courses. I reminded students that of all of Tilden's *Principles* (provoke, relate, reveal), the “reveal” the rest of the story was often the best part of any interpretive experience for visitors.

I tried to illustrate to my students that every object, artifact, landscape or site will have a “rest of the story” to tell if we take the time to find it, shape it, and tell it in creative writing and inspirational ways. So as often happens in college courses, one student – who loved to challenge new ideas, pulled an object from his notebook and asked “does this have a rest of the story to tell”? Can you guess what he handed me? That's also a “rest of the story”. OK – so here we go...

## A GEM of a bent and twisted idea.

Offices and factories in the mid 1800's had a problem. A paper problem. It wasn't so much the paper itself, but how unruly paper could be. In stacks, documents, letters or other arrangements they could easily come “un-ordered” and un-arranged. A good breeze or wind could also be an enemy of the documents. Someone had to do something about this paper problem!

**Ah – the invention of the humble paper clip.** The first paper clip was invented in 1867 by Samuel Fay in April 23, 1867 for a *Ticket Fastener*. Fay specified in the description that in addition to attaching tickets to garments it could be used to hold papers together.

But the modern paper clip existed on paper as early as April 27, 1899. It appears on a patent issued November 9, 1899 to William D. Middlebrook of Waterbury, Connecticut. Middlebrook invented not just the paper clip but he also invented a machine to produce the paper clip. The patent drawings clearly show the final product, **the common paper clip**. In his description he makes reference that both the machine and the paper clip design are to be covered by the patent.

**The *GEM* of the idea.** The most common type of wire paper clip still in use, the **Gem paper clip**, was never patented, but it was most likely in production in Britain in the early 1870s by "The Gem Manufacturing Company", according to the American expert on technological innovations, Professor Henry J. Petroski. He refers to an 1883 article about "Gem Paper-Fasteners", praising them for being "better than ordinary pins" for "binding together papers on the same subject, a bundle of letters, or pages of a manuscript".

**The paper clip goes to war.** Did you know that during the German occupation of Norway during WWII Patriots wore paper clips on their lapels as a symbol of resistance to the German occupiers and local Nazi authorities when other signs of resistance, such as flag pins or pins showing the cipher of the exiled King Haakon VII of Norway were forbidden? The clips were meant to denote solidarity and unity ("**we are bound together**"). The wearing of paper clips was soon prohibited too, and people wearing them could risk severe punishment.

Today, the traditional paper clip is the essence of form follows function and after a century, it still works.

According to the **Early Office Museum**, there are over **50 different designs for "paper fasteners" and paper clips.**

**So now you know the rest of the story about a *GEM* of a bent and twisted idea.**



Today that student who handed me a paper clip from his notebook is an excellent professional interpreter and interpretive trainer... teaching others how to tell "the rest of the stories" hidden in objects, artifacts, landscapes and sites. I guess the rest of the story has a rest of the story. ☺

---

**A little extra "rest of the story" – just for fun or if someone asks during your program:**

**Why were paper clips sold in so many different designs?** Many designs were initially protected by patents. As a result, other manufacturers had to come up with different designs. Also, no single paper clip design is optimal for all purposes. In marketing paper clips, suppliers emphasized the superiority of their designs on one or two of the following characteristics:

1. Does not catch, mutilate, or tear papers
2. Does not get tangled with other clips in the box
3. Holds a thick set of papers
4. Grips firmly, holds papers securely
5. Is flat or thin and takes less space in files
6. Is easily inserted
7. Is light weight and requires less postage
8. Is non-deforming
9. Is cheap (e.g., because it uses less wire)

[http://www.officemuseum.com/paper\\_clips.htm](http://www.officemuseum.com/paper_clips.htm)