

Antique Inkwells

THE ANNA SAFLEY HOUSTON COLLECTION

From the days of ancient Egypt, inkwells were essential containers for ink and were used with quills or pens. Over time they evolved from simple, practical vessels to elaborate decorative objects. The Renaissance and Baroque eras saw an emergence of decorative inkwells crafted in silver and gold.



The Industrial Revolution and the advent of railroads spurred the development of portable inkwells, often housed in boxes with other writing materials. During the Victorian era, souvenir inkwells shaped like famous monuments or featuring pictorial representations of cities became fashionable.

Shown above: Iridescent art glass inkwell, Loetz or Kralik, copper hinged top, 20th century



Houston Museum
of Decorative Arts

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Anna Safley Houston, pioneering businesswoman and antiques collector, curated a remarkable collection of over 15,000 items, spanning glassware, pottery, textiles, furniture, and much more.

Ink wells were crafted from various materials like porcelain, glass, silver, brass, and even wood. At the turn of the 20th century Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles were made from clear and colored glass.



Mold-blown inkwell, satin blue, circa 1880



Imari porcelain inkwell, gilt brass lid

Ink wells gradually fell out of use in the early part of the 20th century as the reservoir fountain pen replaced the dip pen.

