A History of the Paperclip

4. Across the ocean in the United States, a patent for the document clip was awarded to Cornelius J. Brosnan of Springfield, Massachusetts in 1900. It was called the Konaclip. Gem Manufacturing Ltd. of England followed with the first double-oval shaped standard clip. This familiar shape is still known as the Gem clip.

2. In 1835 a New York physician named John Ireland Howe designed and built the first truly practical machine for mass-producing solid head straight pins. In a relatively short time, straight pins were being sold by the half pound for the explicit purpose of temporarily fastening documents together.

6. There have been many unusual applications of the paper clip. During World War II, Norwegians were prohibited from wearing buttons imprinted with the Norwegian king's initials. Hence they fastened paper clips to show patriotism and irritate the Germans. Wearing a paper clip was often reason enough for arrest. Why were paper clips used this way? They were a Norwegian invention whose original function was to bind together. They symbolized solidarity and opposition against the occupation of their land by the Germans.

1. It is generally believed that the first known fastening of documents started in the 13th century when a short length of ribbon was placed through parallel incisions in the upper left hand corner of pages. This was followed by a seal-method, the act of connecting documents with wax and textile ribbons. Almost 600 years passed before any serious attempt was made to improve the ribbon fastener.

3. On March 15, 1866 Johan Vaaler was born in Aurskog, Norway north of Oslo. Even as a young man he was known as an innovator and inventor, and he graduated with a degree in electronics, science, and mathematics. He was employed by the owner of a local invention office where he invented the paper clip in 1899. Because Norway had no patent law at that time, it had to be approved in Germany to secure patent rights.

5. Several designs have followed these originals. Most failed to last, but some have remained. Those still manufactured today, beside the Gem, include the Non-Skid, which has small incisions cut along the length of the parallels, the Ideal pattern for holding a thick bundle of paper, and the Owl, named for its two eye-shaped circles. Owl clips did not get tangled with other clips, nor did they snatch at stray documents that didn't belong with the clipped stack.