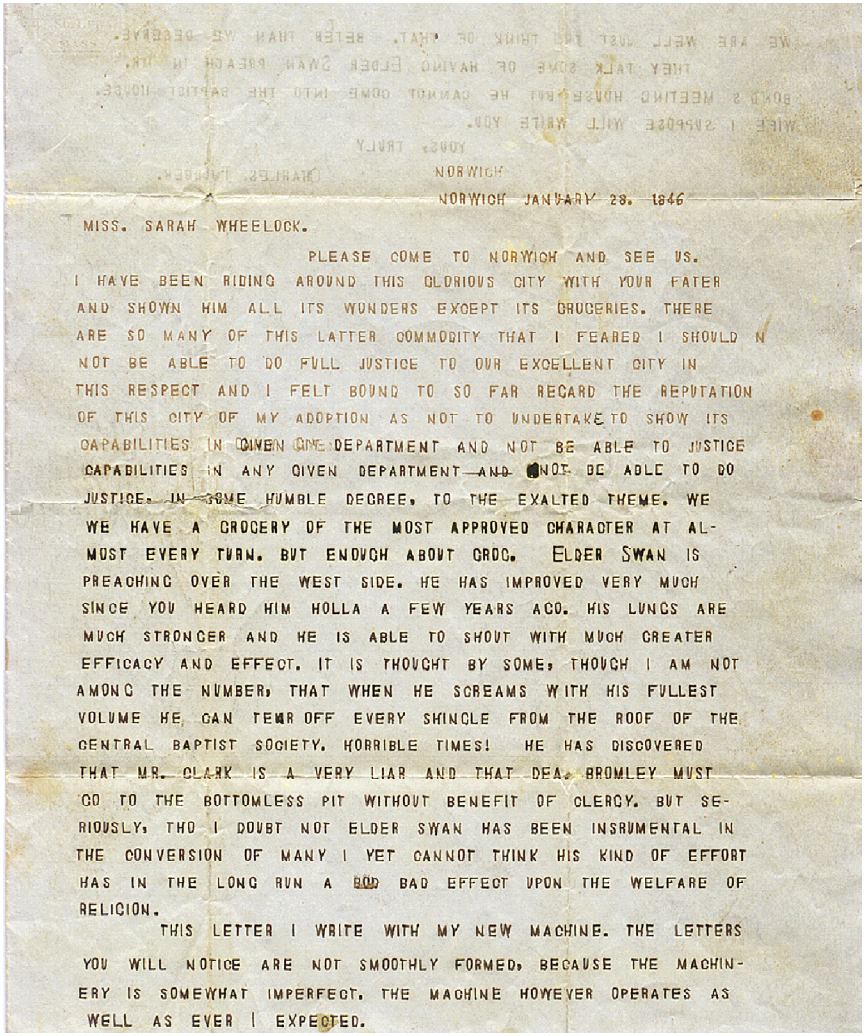


NORWICH JANUARY 28. 1846

MISS. SARAH WHEELOCK.

PLEASE COME TO NORWICH AND SEE US. I HAVE BEEN RIDING AROUND THIS GLORIOUS CITY WITH YOUR FATER AND SHOWN HIM ALL ITS WONDERS EXCEPT ITS GROCERIES. THERE ARE SO MANY OF THIS LATTER COMMODITY THAT I FEARED I SHOULD N NOT BE ABLE TO DO FULL JUSTICE TO OUR EXCELLENT CITY IN THIS RESPECT AND I FELT BOUND TO SO FAR REGARD THE REPUTATION OF THIS CITY OF MY ADOPTION AS NOT TO UNDERTAKE TO SHOW ITS CAPABILITIES IN GIVEN ONE DEPARTMENT AND NOT BE ABLE TO JUSTICE CAPABILITIES IN ANY GIVEN DEPARTMENT AND NOT BE ABLE TO DO JUSTICE. IN SOME HUMBLE DEGREE, TO THE EXALTED THEME. WE WE HAVE A GROCERY OF THE MOST APPROVED CHARACTER AT ALMOST EVERY TURN. BUT ENOUGH ABOUT GROC. ELDER SWAN IS PREACHING OVER THE WEST SIDE. HE HAS IMPROVED VERY MUCH SINCE YOU HEARD HIM HOLLA A FEW YEARS AGO. HIS LUNGS ARE MUCH STRONGER AND HE IS ABLE TO SHOUT WITH MUCH GREATER EFFICACY AND EFFECT. IT IS THOUGHT BY SOME, THOUGH I AM NOT AMONG THE NUMBER, THAT WHEN HE SCREAMS WITH HIS FULLEST VOLUME HE CAN TEAR OFF EVERY SHINGLE FROM THE ROOF OF THE CENTRAL BAPTIST SOCIETY. HORRIBLE TIMES! HE HAS DISCOVERED THAT MR. CLARK IS A VERY LIAR AND THAT DEA. BROMLEY MUST GO TO THE BOTTOMLESS PIT WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CLERGY. BUT SERIOUSLY, THO I DOUBT NOT ELDER SWAN HAS BEEN INSRUMENTAL IN THE CONVERSION OF MANY I YET CANNOT THINK HIS KIND OF EFFORT HAS IN THE LONG RUN A BAD BAD EFFECT UPON THE WELFARE OF RELIGION.

THIS LETTER I WRITE WITH MY NEW MACHINE. THE LETTERS YOU WILL NOTICE ARE NOT SMOOTHLY FORMED, BECAUSE THE MACHINERY IS SOMEWHAT IMPERFECT. THE MACHINE HOWEVER OPERATES AS WELL AS EVER I EXPECTED.

Letter written from Charles Thurber to Sarah Wheelock, dated Jan. 28, 1846. The original size was 8 inches wide. Thurber wrote to Miss Wheelock using his "Mechanical Chirographer," one of two writing machines he invented in the 1840's.

CONTENTS

ETCetera

No. 42 Mar. 1998

Magazine of the Early Typewriter Collectors Association

The Typewriter Turns 125

1873 **1998**

ETCetera

Magazine of the Early Typewriter Collectors Association

March 1998 --No. 42

Editor, Darryl Rehr
2591 Military Ave., L.A., CA 90064
(310)477-5229, (310)268-8420 fax

E-mail dcrehr@earthlink.net

ETC Home Page
http://home.earthlink.net/~dcrehr/etc.html

ISSN 1062-9645

Published four times per year in March, June, Sept. & Dec.
$20/yr. North America
$25/yr. overseas

EDITOR'S NOTES

As ETCetera moves into its second decade I'm happy to introduce several significant changes, which should improve the quality of our magazine.

First is the addition of Paul Block as ETCetera's "official" proofreader. Paul is a professional writer, copy editor and proofreader, who does this sort of thing for a living, and has generously volunteered to take on the task.

The next improvement is the acquisition of a 1200 dpi (dots per inch) computer printer, which makes a dramatic difference in the black and white photos appearing in ETCetera. The sharpness and detail are further enhanced by the fact that these pages come directly from the laser printer, without going through the process of offset printing. For this reason, the smaller bifold format was chosen.

Finally, the color in ETCetera is now being printed directly on the inkjet printer at 720 dpi, without having to go *down* a generation by being copied on the color copier. This offers us sharper color and more detail.

The principle new problem that may crop up in our new publication system is *collating.* I expect more pages out of order than before, so if you get an issue with pages all awry, just send in a card, and you'll get a new one.

LETTERS

Letters from readers have been accumulating for several issues now. Here's a collection of comments other members would like to share with you.

Just wanted to congratulate you on your terrific latest issue of ETCetera [#40] "Fun" is the word that summarizes it all. I enjoyed your "Conundrums" piece. Altogether, "Standard Automatic" to "Typing Tips," a fine issue. Thank you for the time, effort and result.

Peter Weil, Newark, DE

Thanks for the fascinating article on today's alternative keyboards. And I had thought that, outside of court reporting, the chording concept had gone out with the Dactygam!

Richard Polt, Walla Walla, WA

I'm enjoying the newsletters very much, and I'm sure I join other subscribers in saying that I know how much time and effort you put into maintaining this newsletter and this service to the other collectors. A hearty Thank-you for all your efforts!

Jim Freiburger, Cedar Glen, CA

When I was filing the latest issue of ETCetera, I was struck by how much new material had been published over the years. Congratulations again for a great job.

Don Hoke, Ph.D., Dallas, TX
(former typewriter curator, Milwaukee Public Museum)

ETCetera (#38) is fascinating as usual, and I enjoyed every single word.

Isaac Bashevis Singer's writings were my father's favorite reading. Dorothy and I had a course in Yiddish writers at an Elderhostel in Baltimore once, and, of course, Singer was the main attraction, through his stories.

Marco Thorne, San Diego, CA

I received both the back and latest issues of ETCetera and just wanted to take a quick moment to say great job! The essays were fun to read and informative.The overall format is visually pleasing as well (and its not just because of color photos, though these are great too). I've seen only a VERY few privately produced mags that ever turn out a comprehensive index.

My renewal is in the mail. Good work!

Patrick Sheary, Washington, D.C.

ADVERTISEMENTS

FOR SALE: Set of four black rubber repro feet (stem bumpers) are now available for all models of Oliver. $8.00 postpaid in US, $10.00 for foreign delivery. Bob Aubert, 614 New Jersey Ave., Riverside, NJ 08075.

FOR SALE: fresh long-fiber cotton ribbons for old machines, inked with traditional black record ink. 1/2" width $1/yd. (10 yd. minimum). 1-3/8" width for Remington, Densmore & other upstrikes $2/yd (5 yd. minimum). Darryl Rehr, PO Box 641824, L.A., CA 90064.

WANTED: More listings for the Directory of Publicly Displayed Early Typewriters and Business Machine Collections. Now on Richard Polt's website *(http://xavier.xu.edu/~polt/twdisplays.html)*. Includes 25 sites in three countries. Hard-copy edition possible when listings increase. Please include location, address, phone and fax numbers, contact name, and a brief description of the size and contents of the display. Listings may be e-mailed to *polt@xavier.xu.edu* or by regular mail to Marco Thorne, 4325 West Overlook Drive, San Diego, CA 92115-6116.

ATLANTIQUE CITY - 1600-dealer show. March 28-29 in Atlantic City, NJ. For info: 1-800-526-2724.

TIPS:

Practical Typewriter No. 1 (Simplex) in orig. box. Nan Bailey, 2733 Stiegler Rd., Valley City, OH 44280-9585

WANTED: a nice Crandall. Hermann Kerz, Lechenicherstr. 22, 50937 Köln , GERMANY

The Typewriter at 125

by Darryl Rehr

March 1, 1998, the publication date of this issue of ETCetera, is also the 125th anniversary of the birth of the worldwide Typewriter Industry. Although there are many "anniversaries" in typewriter history (just as there are many "inventors" of *the* typewriter), this one marks a turning point at which ideas became reality and inventions became products.

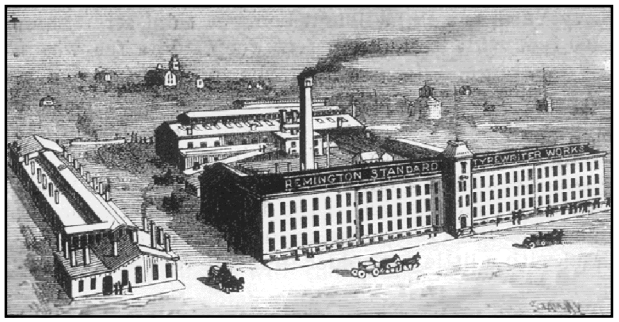
The invention was the "Type Writer," developed by Christopher Latham Sholes in Milwaukee during the previous five years. The product was the Sholes & Glidden Type Writer manufactured by E. Remington & Sons of Ilion, NY. March 1, 1873, was the date on which the agreement was signed to officially begin production. Since all mainstream typewriters that followed can trace their lineage to the Sholes & Glidden, we can confidently mark this date as the beginning of the Typewriter Industry.

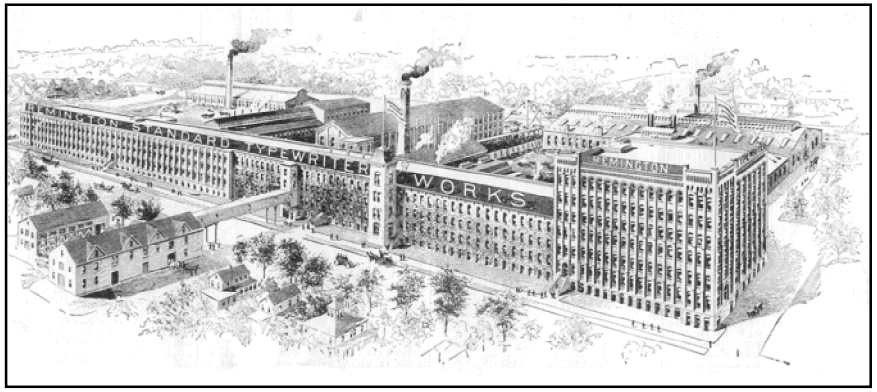
The contract was drawn up as the result of presentations made to the Remingtons and their executives by James Densmore and George Washington Newton Yost, the entrepreneurial team behind C. L. Sholes. Remington man Henry Harper Benedict later described the presentation (Yost did most of the talking) and his own reaction to it:

> "As we left the room, Mr. [Philo] Remington said to me, 'What do you think of it?' I replied, 'That machine is very crude, but there is an idea there that will revolutionize business.' Mr. Remington asked, 'Do you think we ought to take it up?' I said, 'We must on no account let it get away. It isn't necessary to tell these people that we are crazy over the invention, but I'm afraid I am pretty nearly so.'"

As we now know, Benedict was one of the *true believers*. As the early typewriter enterprise struggled, he eventually became one of the famous Wyckoff, Seamans & Benedict triumvirate that would make a success of marketing the machine. Benedict and his partners later bought the typewriter business from the Remington family, making it entirely independent of the Arms Company.

What was this industry like in its early days? To be sure, we can glean only a vague picture of the true beginnings from bits and pieces of writings handed down to us here and there. More detailed documentation, however, comes to us from a period, not so far after the beginning, when the industry was just starting to flourish.





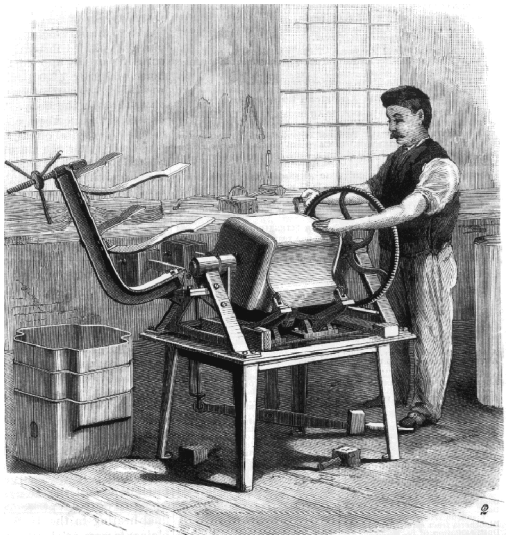
TOP: Remington Factory in 1888 (Scientific American article 12/15/88). ABOVE: Remington Factory in 1904 (fromScientific American advertisement, 12/17/04).

Scientific American ran its first piece on the manufacture of the Remington Typewriter in its issue of December 15, 1888, just fifteen years after the signing of the fateful contract. At that time, the Ilion typewriter works was turning out 1,500 typewriters monthly, although *Scientific American* said, "This looks like a large number, but we venture to say that it will soon be doubled and perhaps trebled."

Fortunately for the history students among us, *Scientific American* once again visited the Remington Typewriter plant 17 years later, at which time the factory was spitting out typewriters "a machine a minute." Details are sketchy, but with illustrations and photos, we can at least get an impression of how the typewriter industry grew from its adolescence to vigorous early adulthood.

Generally speaking, the 1888 Remington factory appears to have been set up to efficiently produce typewriters in quantity but without the large-scale mechanization seen in 1905. The 1888 machines may have been mass-produced, but much of the work was done by hand, with just the "assistance" of power.

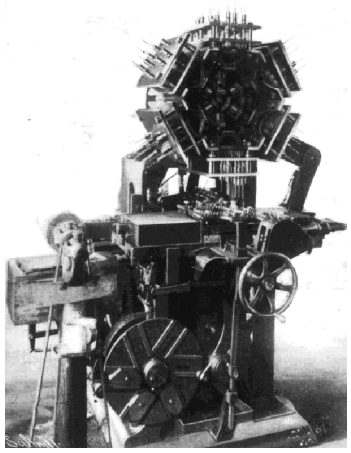
Take, for instance, the fellow making sheet-metal covers in 1888. He's shown on the front page of *Scientific American*. He has a nice jig for forming the case, but



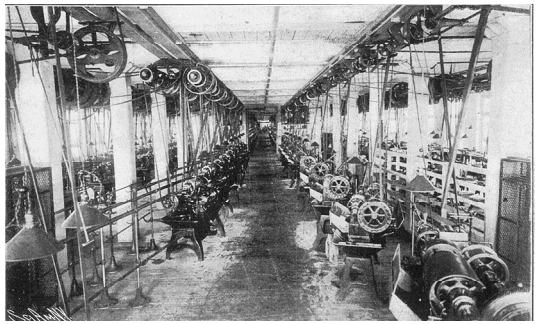
Case-making, 1888

it obviously involves pushing the pedal, screwing down the top-forming frame, and rolling the edge-seam crank. You can be sure that in 1905, analogous operations were done completely by machine.

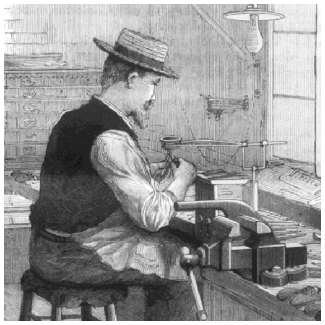
The 1905 article does not show us a case-forming machine, but it does show us other devices designed to perform tasks automatically, quickly, and in huge quantities. An Automatic Multiple Drill is shown set up to drill holes in the top frame of a typewriter. The caption informs us that 100 holes are drilled in three minutes. In 1888, it's likely these holes were drilled one-by-one on a single drill press operated by a single operator. Another example showing the scale of Remington's mass-production is the photo of a seemingly endless corridor of Automatic Screw Machines, each connected by belt to an overhead power source and running (at least in the photo) with no apparent human intervention.



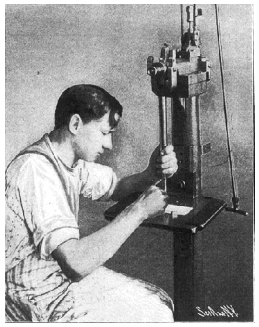
Automatic Drill Machine
1905



Automatic Screw Machines, 1905.

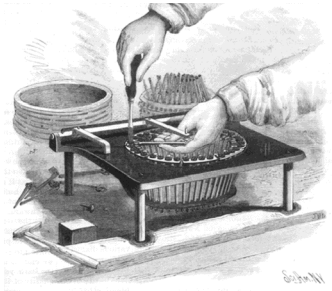


1888



1905

LEFT: Type-making.
BELOW: Assembly.



Another clear contrast is in the one process for which *Scientific American* does give us comparable illustrations in each article. In 1888, the die-maker who creates the type is seen seated at his workbench, carefully producing his work by hand, viewing it through a magnifying glass. These master dies were used to create negative molds that were then used to form the type, though that particular process is not described. Now, we jump forward to 1905, when a worker (appearing less skilled than the gentleman of 1888) traces a preformed template on a reducing pantograph to automatically create the necessary dies for mega-massproduction. The pantograph technique remained in continuous use at least through the middle of the 20th century.

One thing that apparently did not change all that much from 1888 to 1905 was the assembly process. Typewriters never traveled on moving conveyor belts but seem to have been assembled singly by individual workers. Subassemblies (such as the carriage) may have been done separately, but each machine was put together by someone working at a bench with all of the appropriate parts around him. It was a process for which automation did not then apply.

At 125, of course, the typewriter industry has become one of electronics manufacturing, complete with its clean rooms, robot assembly machines, and production venues *outside* the United States. Still, there remains a connection to the early days in the back rooms of typewriter service shops, where there are yet a few skilled people working on wood tables, using tools that might look familiar to the old Remington employees, trying to keep those old machines alive.

The Model A Comptometer A Rare and Interesting Machine

by Bob Otnes

I have been collecting information on the wood-case Comptometers for some time and have located somewhat more than twenty machines. Many of these are in museums or established private collections. They do not come onto the market every day, to say the least, and when one does, it has a serious price tag on it.

Most calculator collectors are aware of the wood-case models, and they tend to disdain the more common metal-case versions, which are thought too modern. The purpose of this article is to call to the reader's attention a machine that transitions the Comptometer between the wood-case version and the ubiquitous copper (or bronze) version that became a standard for decades and is still found in quantity on the market.

I am speaking of the Model A Comptometer, a machine which, according to James H. McCarthy [*The American Digest Of Business Machines*, James H. McCarthy, Chicago, 1924, page 548] had the following characteristics:

> *Model A, placed on the market 1903.*
> *Serials 15,000 to 25,000.*
> *Glass slab cover, duplex. . . .*

McCarthy states that the Model B came on the market in 1906, presumably replacing the Model A, whose production time would seem to be only three years.

Going back to the wood-case models, it should be noted that they went through a progression of changes from 1884 to 1903. They did, however, all have the following in common:

- Obviously, the wood case.

- They are simplex. That is, they are meant to be operated by pressing one key at a time. Yes, if you were careful, more than one key could be pressed, but it is an error-prone thing to try.

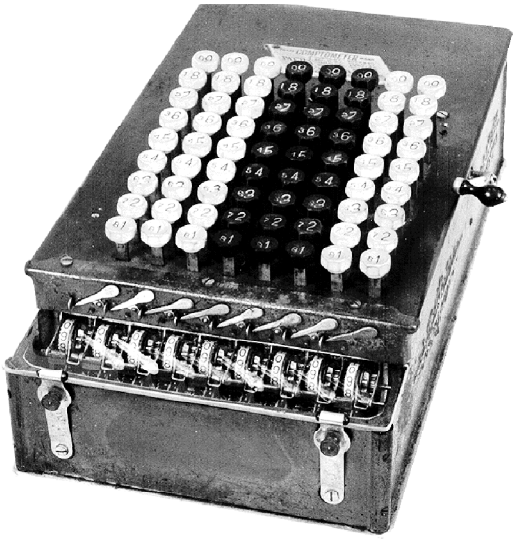
On the other hand, the Model A has a number of differences:

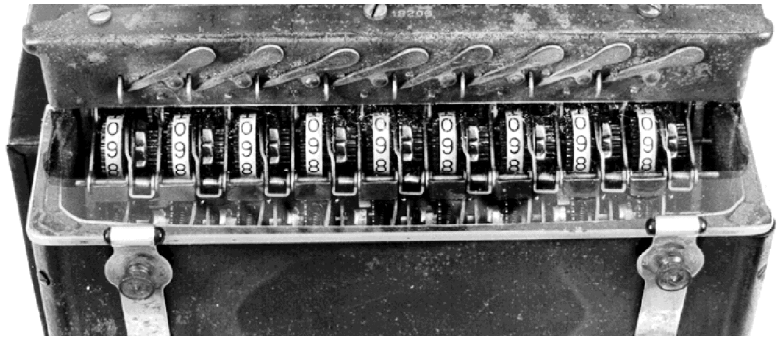
- Obviously, the case is metal.

- The clearing control changed from a combination of a small lever (a release) and knob to a single large lever. This simplifies and speeds up the clearing operation.

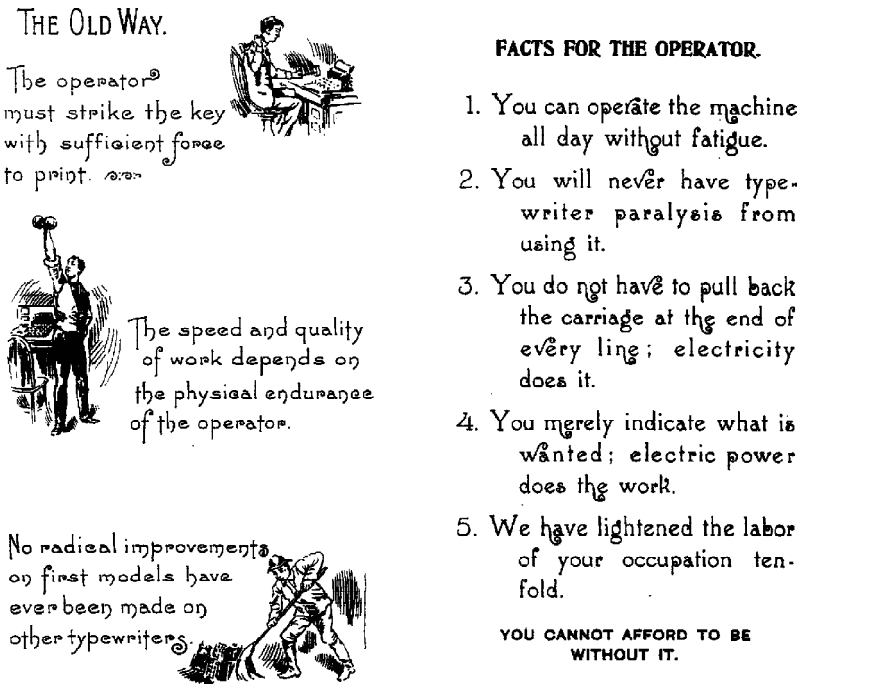
- It is duplex, which was the fundamental change in the machine and its operation. The operator could now depress one key in all columns simultaneously. It was this feature that led to the speed of operation for which the Comptometer is famous.

- Finally, there is a peculiarity of design found only on this model: The cover over the result wheels, rather than being made of metal with slots (as it was previously and would be again) is a thick slab of glass. This can be seen in the figure.





This is a very interesting transitional machine. It is also quite a bit more rare than the serial number range would indicate. In fact, I know of only two of them, as compared to the more than twenty for the wood-case type. Are there more around? If you have one, please let me know. I am collecting information on both the wood-case model and the Model A and would greatly appreciate your help.



ELECTRIC EPHEMERA

Fans of the Blickensderfer Electric typewriter are treated to a delightful find in this issue of ETCetera. Illustrated here and in the Color Gallery is a booklet published by Blickensderfer to advertise the merits of the machine, which would prove to be quite far ahead of its time.

The booklet is in the archives of the Stamford Historical Society of Stamford, Connecticut, where Blickensderfer was headquartered. It was discovered there by Bob Aubert (see article on page 14) as he was conducting research into Blickensderfer history. Peter Weil was then able to persuade the SHS to provide color copies for reproduction, which is the source for the material here.

Unfortunately, we have nothing to date this piece of *electric ephemera*. The machine's original introduction has been pegged at 1902. The booklet, however, exhibits the excitement that the development of electric power had in its infancy.

The brochure panels shown here and in the Color Gallery are reprinted from original documents in the collection of The Stamford Historical Society, Stamford, CT, USA.

Gallery Notes

1) Columbia index ink cannister - from Ron Wild's collection; Carmel, Indiana.

2) Caligraph No. 1 - from Mike Brooks; Oakland, California. Note the unusual base ornamentation and the scalloped space bar (one is missing).

3) Banker's Check Protector - from the editor. Nearly identical to another device called the "Page," but this one has blue keys.

4) Safety Check Protector - from the editor. A better-made piece than most of these circular pocket check protectors. Each key holds an ink pad, which lets this piece print as well as punch.

5) SEE Adder - from Robert Wolfe; Rio Grande, Ohio. See-through version of the common wheel adder. Made in 1968 by Selective Educational Equipment, Inc.

Australian Ribbon containers. Four tins from Hermann Kerz of Germany, two cardboards from the editor.

6) Hall Mark - Mfg. by Ramsay and Hall of Hawthorn, Victoria

7) Regal - from G.B. Frye of Melbourne. Note similarity to American "Old Town" tins.

8) Royal Charter - from Chartres Business Service. Chartres is a name we frequently see on Australian pieces.

9) Chartres - "CPL" for *clear, pleasing, lasting.*

10) Indian Head - from Remington Rand-Chartres, hinting at a Remington buyout of the Australian firm?

11) Super Imperitype - Imperitype is a British brand. This one has a sticker from dealer E.C. Stott of Perth.

13) Blickensderfer Electric leaflet - see article on page 10.

ET Cetera Color Gallery

1

2

3

4

5

6

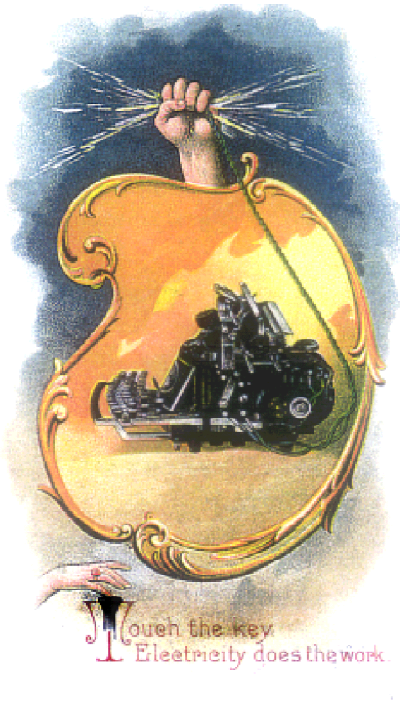
7

8

9

10

11



You cannot afford to do your writing in the old way.

But you need an Electric Blickensderfer with writing in sight.

The old standard of efficiency.
Work! Work! Work!

The new standard of efficiency.
Touch the key, Electricity does the work.

12

Crazy George and his Typewriters

by P. Robert Aubert

George C. Blickensderfer

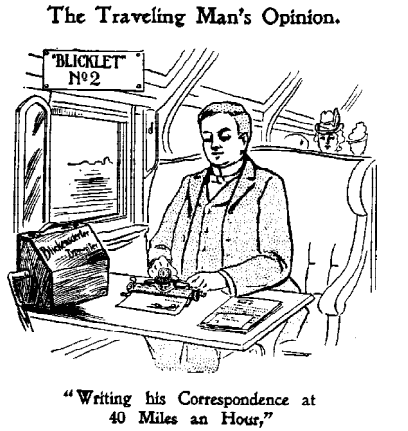
Every typewriter has a story to tell. When looking at one of mine, I often wonder who designed it, how he ever came up with such an idea, who owned it first, and what sort of work was done on the machine. Of course, the answers to most of these questions are lost forever, but finding out what you can is an enjoyable part of collecting.

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM COLL.

Recently I added a Blick Bar to my collection, and this stoked some renewed interest in the Blickensderfer Manufacturing Company. So I spent a couple of days in Stamford, Connecticut, rummaging through old newspapers and such, trying to find out something about it. Unfortunately I was not successful in this, but I did uncover some new information that may be of interest to you.

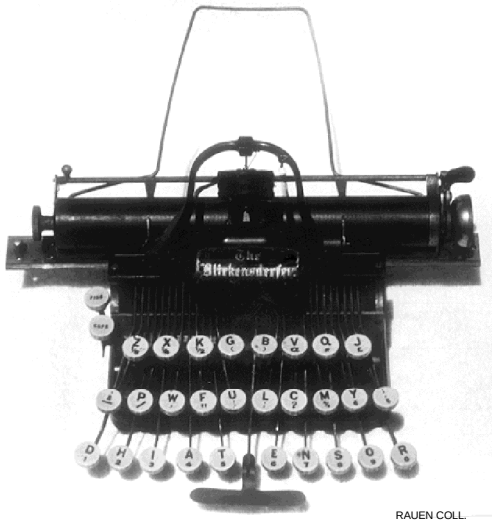
George C. Blickensderfer is the inventor of the famous typewheel machine that bears his name. Born in 1850, he grew up and attended public school in Erie, Pennsylvania, then studied engineering at Allegheny College. His father was a successful attorney and farmer in the area. It isn't clear when and how George met his first wife, Nelli Smith of Stamford, but she likely was the reason he settled there. Apparently he had a business relationship with her father, Hervey Smith, who had invented an overhead conveyer used in stores and mail-order houses. The package delivery system was moderately successful, and the business was sold under very favorable terms. I estimate the time period this all took place was from 1872 to about 1889.

While promoting the conveyer system, George spent a lot of time traveling by rail from city to city. It was on one of his many trips that he realized there was a dire need for a small portable writing machine that would be useful in preparing proposals, letters, and invoices on a train. The sale of the business provided the necessary time and money to pursue the idea. George set up a small machine shop behind his house on Bedford Street in Stamford and worked on several different ideas, eventually finalizing a typewheel design that had possibilities as a product in 1891.



"Writing his Correspondence at 40 Miles an Hour,"

Realizing his limitations, George approached several of his former business contacts and some well-established manufacturing firms in Stamford hoping to get one interested in backing his typewriter. It was during this period that people began questioning his sanity. After all, here was a guy who had absolutely no experience or knowledge about the typewriter business running around town asking everybody to "invest" hard cash in making a writing machine of dubious value. Well, apparently George managed to talk Henry Towne (Yale & Towne Mfg. Co.) into providing some limited support. I suspect the firm built, essentially by hand, a small number of the early models for use as "demonstrators" to establish a dealership network. It's doubtful that any of the machines in this series have survived. It seems that there were some significant manufacturing and functional problems with the first models, resulting in a complete redesign, which became the No. 5, patented in 1892.



RAUEN COLL.

TOP LEFT: The Stamford, Connecticut residence of George C. Blickensderfer. TOP RIGHT: illustration from a Blickensderfer brochure. RIGHT: Blickensderfer No. 5, serial No. 371. Perhaps the earliest specimen known. Notice the painted logo and the keys, which are not round but 16-sided polygons.

LEFT: The Blickensderfer factory building in Stamford, Connecticut as it looks today. Photograph by the author showing colleague Peter Weil standing in front. OPPOSITE: Blickensderfer magazine ad from Harper's Magazine, Jan. 1899.

The Blickensderfer typewriter really wasn't going anywhere as a product until this particular model was introduced at the Columbian Exposition the following year. [See *Blickensderfer At The Fair,* ETCetera No. 24, Sept. 1993.] The No. 5 was received so warmly by the public that orders poured in. However, no production facilities were in place at this point, and substantial deliveries of the new machine didn't really start until completion of their factory on Atlantic Street in the spring of 1896. In the meantime, I'm sure some prospective customers were a bit annoyed by the delays. So "crazy" George was off to a bad start already!

The new typewriter was indeed unique for the period. It was small, lightweight, and came in an oak carrying case. In addition, it had a scientifically designed keyboard touted as being faster and less fatiguing than the arrangement prevalent at the time. According to their literature, the characters on the bottom row of keys are used 70% of the time, with the middle row being used 24% and top row 6%. Letters commonly used together are frequently found side by side. Furthermore, the bottom keys require less effort to operate because they provide the most leverage and move the typewheel the least. There was only one problem with the Blickensderfer Scientific Keyboard: The QWERTY arrangement was already well established and taught in business schools of the day. Eventually, the Universal Keyboard was offered as an option to satisfy customer demand.

It was soon realized that the Model 5 had other limitations. The ability to set the left margin was inadequate, and the bell could not be adjusted to ring if a shorter line was required. The No. 7 was introduced to remedy these shortcomings. In addition, it featured a "line lock" that prevented typing past the right margin. The wrap-around space bar also made the machine more attractive. Finally, the case was formed oak veneer and much more refined than the No. 5 box. So the new Blick became the "top of the line" at $50, $15 more than its predecessor. Both the 5 and 7 were made simultaneously for many years but did evolve as time passed. In fact George couldn't resist messing around with the design. Most collectors don't realize that the early 5's used a font that was not interchangeable with later machines. Also the print-head castings on both models became substantially

heavier as production continued. How much of this was really necessary is hard to say.

By the turn of the century, George realized that his typewheel machine was inherently slow and couldn't compete when a serious volume of typed material had to be done. The visible typebar machines were on the way, and it was just a matter of time before they would dominate the market. So George turned his attention to developing an electric machine. [See *The Last Service Call,* ETCetera No. 33, December 1995.] In 1902 the Electric Blickensderfer was introduced, but it was not warmly received, despite heavy advertising. My experience with the machine indicates that it was a technically viable product at the time. However, it probably was too revolutionary for most people, and the hefty price tag might have deterred others. There also were service considerations.

At some point George's younger brother, William, joined the company. I got the impression from talking with his nephew that he was more or less an errand boy and not especially talented, even though he was listed as the firm's treasurer and secretary. Strange as it may seem, he became a pauper, and the family had to buy his house so that he could pay his living expenses until his death in 1934.

As time moved on, George continued to improve his manual typewheel machines. The new Model 8 (1907) provided "a more modern appearance" with a straight conventional space bar and cast keyboard guard. It also featured a backspacer and improved tabulator. The No. 9 (1917) was similar to the 8 but lacked the tabulation feature. It also offered a fold-down inker arm for "better visibility of work." The aluminum models were hyped as "providing a substantial reduction in weight." The most common are the No. 6 (1906), with no backspace key, followed by the Blickensderfer Featherweight, which had one. A later version, called the Blick Featherweight (1919), also had the fold-down inker arm.

In 1910 the Noco-Blick came out. It allowed musicians to produce scored sheet music, complete with lyrics. It didn't sell well, and only a few have survived. The drawer in the illustrated example contains a lot of musical notes that are like rubber stamps. As far as I can tell, they were inserted as needed into a special

Noco-Blick, a music-writing typewriter

holder, then inked and applied to the scored paper. This particular machine has "scoring" wheels mounted on another holder that were inked to do the "blanks" before "composing" started. The earlier machines (circa 1910) needed preprinted scored paper. Notice the brass calibrated attachment on the left. This allowed the operator to move the platen to repeatable positions for correct placement of the notes. Of course, the line spacer was disengaged while doing this. The typewriter was also used to add the lyrics. It is interesting to note that the Noco shown here is built around a Model 9, which places it near the end of the decade.

Two other special Blickensderfers were introduced along the way. A low-cost index machine was marketed as the Niagara in 1902. Late in the decade, the Oriental Blick appeared. It had a reversing lever that would permit typing from right to left as required in some foreign languages.

By 1916, it was apparent the typewheel machine was on its way out and that something had to be done. Blickensderfer obtained a license to manufacture a conventional office typewriter, designed by Emmett Latta, that was being manufactured under the name of Moyer in Syracuse, New York. It's funny to read some of the early Blick ads debunking the concept of a typebar machine with "its poor alignment" and a tendency of type slugs to "fly off into parts unknown." And now George was forced to embrace such a machine just to stay in the ballgame. It must have been a bitter pill to swallow. Well, I doubt any were actually built in Stamford. The ones that were made probably came from the Syracuse factory and simply carried the Blickensderfer name. Several sources indicated "delivery problems," and for some reason there are no serial numbers on the two Blick Bar

Blickensderfer Oriental

machines that I know exist. All other Stamford machines had serial numbers.

Typewriter production ceased during World War I, and the Blickensderfer facilities were used to support the war effort. In 1917 George passed away, and the direction of the company changed under the leadership of Stephen Mapes. Another reason I don't think the Blick Bar was made in Stamford is that it would have been put into production if they had the tooling when hostilities ceased. After all, it was a state-of-the-art front-stoke office typewriter that was quite competitive. I suspect the license expired and could not be renewed for some reason. So in 1919 a new typebar machine was manufactured under license granted by its inventor, Lyman Roberts. It was a three-bank portable marketed as the Blick Ninety. There was some discussion at the time about reintroducing the Electric, but because of poor sales (partially due to anti-German sentiment), the firm was forced into bankruptcy.

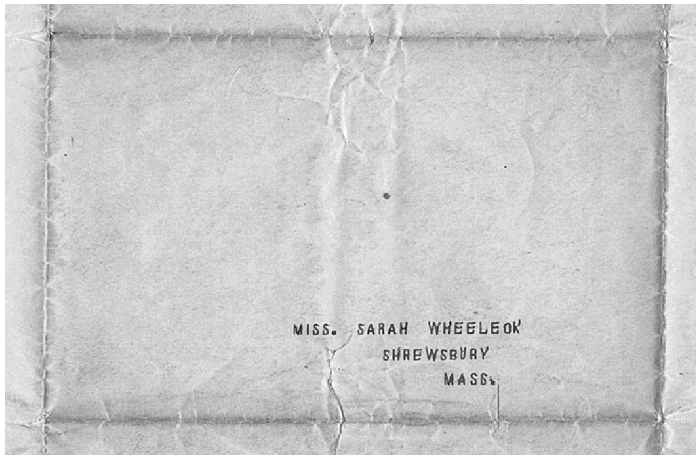
In 1921 a new company was formed by Roberts under a reorganization plan. All typewheel machine production ceased, but parts continued to be made for one year as required by a Connecticut law designed to protect buyers of products which were discontinued. All efforts were put into the promotion of the Roberts Ninety. Unfortunately, Lyman Roberts died in December of that year. Shortly thereafter, the firm went into receivership, probably to settle his estate.

I often wondered how Remington came into the picture. As you probably know, it introduced the Baby Rem and Rem Blick in the late Twenties. Some accounts state that the Blickensderfer patents had run out and Remington was free to make a version of the machine. This simply is not what happened. I finally found a Bankruptcy Settlement Record for 1926 that indicates the assets (tools, parts, drawings, etc.) of the L. R. Roberts Company were bought by the Remington Standard Company of Ilion, New York. Of course, that would also include the Blickensderfer stuff.

Failure of the Rem Blick should have been no surprise to anyone knowledgeable about the typewriter business. The basic design was almost thirty years old! The "universal" three-bank, double-shift keyboard was already on its way out! Why Remington chose to eliminate a backspace key and the folding inker arm assembly is beyond me. These two features might have made a difference.

A Rare Letter Rediscovered

by Darryl Rehr



On January 23, 1846, inventor Charles Thurber, then living in Norwich, Connecticut, wrote a letter to Miss Sarah Wheelock of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. This letter was written on Thurber's *Mechanical Chirographer*, a rather amazing early writing machine that used cams and levers to manipulate an actual *pen* to do the writing. The Wheelock letter was the earlier of two known specimens of work from this machine—the other being Thurber's letter to his patent attorneys, a piece widely reproduced in typewriter literature.

In an earlier article about Thurber (ETCetera No. 12, Sept. 1990), I mentioned the Wheelock letter, stating that the original had been lost and the copies were unsuitable for reproduction. Eight years later, however, that situation has been resolved, and the original Sarah Wheelock letter is reproduced in color on the back cover of this issue. The story of how this important artifact was "rediscovered" is an interesting one.

In July 1996 I received a letter from Ann Anderson, who had seen an article about me that month in the *Los Angeles Times*. Ms. Anderson enclosed a Xerox copy of the Wheelock letter, as well as an old *Believe it or Not* piece telling its story. None of this might have made much difference, except for Anderson's closing line: *"Sarah Wheelock was my great-grandmother."*

In preparing the ETCetera No. 12 piece, I had become aware that the Wheelock letter was in the possession of Minnesota's Martin County Historical Society. When I inquired further into the matter, curator Helen Simon sent me disappointing news: *"I did find in our files a letter saying the original letter is lost."* All she could send me was a copy taken from microfilm, which, while preserving the text, did little more.

ABOVE: "Believe it or Not" piece telling the story of the letter written to Sarah Wheelock by Charles Thurber. Note the erroneous attribution of the letter to Thurber's Patent Printer (illustrated). Jean Zierke, caricatured at lower right, is today's Jean Johnston, who provided the original letter to ETCetera.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: address portion of the Wheelock letter. Not only was Thurber having trouble operating his balky machine, he had problems spelling Wheelock's name, as well!

When Ann Anderson's letter arrived, I called to thank her for the material. I mentioned that the original Wheelock letter apparently had been lost, but she offered the suggestion that one of her cousins might have it. She put me in touch with Jean Johnston of St. Paul, Minnesota, another of Sarah Wheelock's great-granddaughters.

Mrs. Johnston was more than helpful. It turned out that *yes* she *did* have the original. Apparently it had been removed at some point by Judge Julius Haycraft, her great-uncle and onetime president of the Martin County Historical Society. Haycraft apparently simply forgot to return it, and it remained in his possession until his death, when it was handed down to Jean Johnston. Johnston's intent was to return it to the historical society, but I asked if she would express mail it to me first so that I could take a computer scan from it. Thus I actually held the letter in my hands (with gloves), although for a brief time only. In fact, I had the letter for less than 12 hours, since I returned it as soon as the computer scan was complete.

The actual letter is in remarkable condition for its age. The paper is light blue in color, with no trace of the crumbling acid decay we so often see in old papers. A stationer's mark is embossed in one of the upper corners, but it was too indistinct to read completely. The ink on the page is brown, a color that may have faded from black. The upper part of the page seems to have faded more than the bottom half, although the darker portion may represent the point at which Thurber re-inked his pen!

Most of the text is on one side, with the final four lines and the closing on the reverse. The letter was folded into a packet, with the address written on the outside. There was no postage stamp applied, since U.S. postage stamps did not arrive on the scene until 1847, just a year later.

For typewriter historians, a single sentence at the bottom of the first page is most important: "*This letter I write with my new machine. The letters you will notice are not smoothly formed, because the machinery is somewhat imperfect. The machine however operates as well as ever I expected.*"

In the letter Thurber wrote to his patent attorneys two weeks later, he identified the machine by name, "*We have, at length completed one of Thurber's Mechanical Chirographers…*" This helped clear up the long-lived misconception that the extant letters were written on Thurber's other (and more well-known) invention, the Patent Printer of 1843. This subject was explored in detail in ETCetera No. 12, so nothing more needs to be said here.

The rest of Thurber's letter to Sarah Wheelock is fascinating for the little window it opens into the past. In 1846, the ready availability of good food in Norwich's numerous groceries was a point worth writing about. Do some reading about the history of nutrition and you'll learn that the food we take for granted today was a major daily concern for people 150 years ago. Thurber also paints an amusing portrait of a certain "Elder Swan," who must certainly have exemplified the *fire-and-brimstone* school of religious preaching.

Judge Haycraft investigated the history behind the letter when he first became aware of it in the 1930s. In a 1935 article, Haycraft tells us that Sarah Wheelock married Samuel Carpenter in 1856, ten years after receiving Thurber's letter. The couple moved to Minnesota Territory, where their son Charles Wheelock Carpenter was born. Charles saved his mother's papers and later moved to Ontario, California (which explains the presence of his granddaughter Ann Anderson in the area).

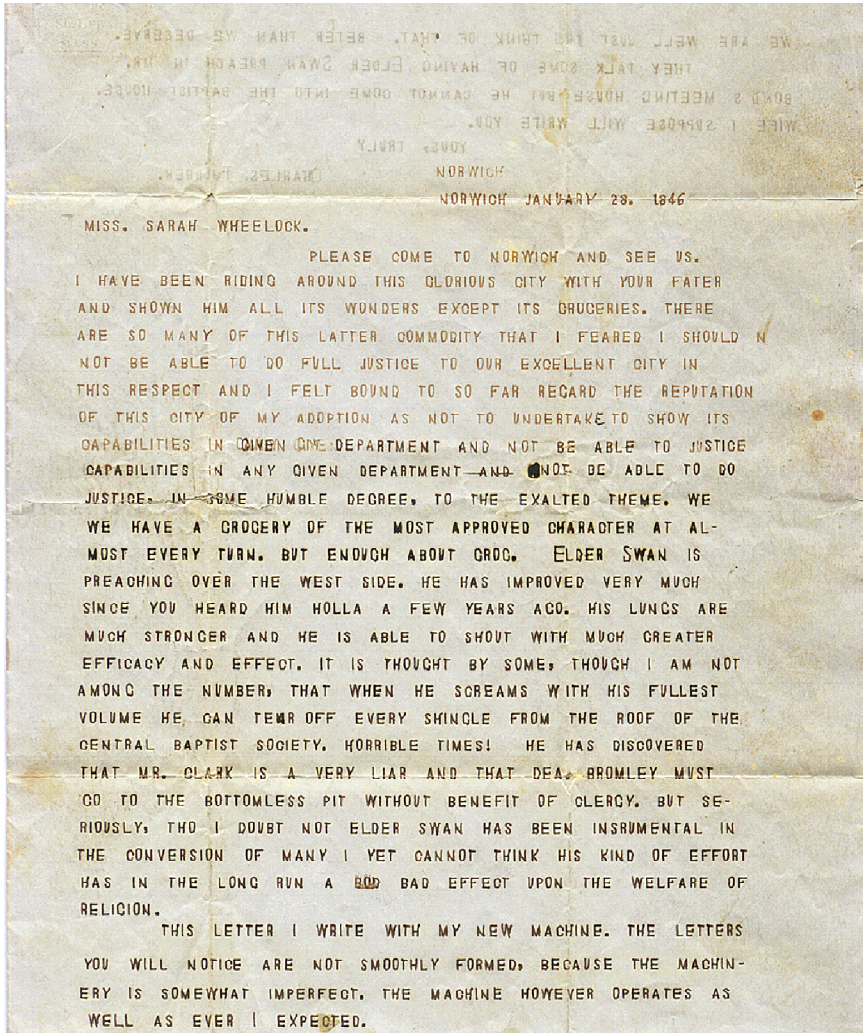
Jean Zierke, another of Carpenter's granddaughters, was a stamp collector, and she wrote to him asking for old family papers, hoping to find some good stamps. Zierke lived in Fairmont, Minnesota, location of the Martin County Historical Society, and she happened to show the letter to her great-uncle Judge Haycraft. She recognized the apparent anachronism: a *typewritten* letter written in 1846. Haycraft was then motivated to plunge into the history of typewriters and Charles Thurber. In the course of these events, the family donated the important piece to the historical society. Zierke is the same Jean Johnston who provided the letter to ETCetera for reproduction.

Haycraft, apparently unaware of the second Thurber letter, identified the Wheelock letter with Thurber's Patent Printer. He seems to have been swayed by literature received from the Remington Typewriter Co., which had sent the Patent Printer on tour, displaying it at dealerships across the country.

Haycraft does, however, provide a clue to the connection between Thurber and Wheelock. Charles Thurber was at one time a partner with his brother-in-law Ethan Allen (relation to Revolutionary War hero unknown) in a Massachusetts gun-making business. Also involved was another of Allen's brothers-in-law, by the name of T. P. Wheelock. It seems probable that Sarah Wheelock was related to T. P., quite possibly his daughter. However, Haycraft's notes (also provided by Jean Johnston) do not indicate he was able to confirm the fact.

It is intriguing how such pieces of history come to light. In 1990 the Wheelock letter was lost to us. However, by chance, one of her great-granddaughter's happens to live in Southern California, where she reads the *Los Angeles Times*. By another chance, a typewriter collector happens to live there, too. The *Times* writes about the typewriter collector, the great-granddaughter reads the article . . . and the Wheelock letter reappears. The circle is closed.

ABOUT THE LETTER: Closely examine the letter shown on the rear cover. It clearly demonstrates the intent of Thurber's mechanism. In his patent for the *Mechanical Chirographer* he descibes the use of cams to guide the mechanism, which moved a pen vertically, horizontally or in any compound motion made up of a combination of the two. In essence, it was something of an automated 19th century Etch-a-Sketch. Of particular interest is the occasional larger-size letters, used as capitals in "Elder Swan" and "Charles Thurber." Such a variation would be simple on a pen-writing machine, but not so on a true *type*writer.



NORWICH JANUARY 28. 1846

MISS. SARAH WHEELOCK.

PLEASE COME TO NORWICH AND SEE US. I HAVE BEEN RIDING AROUND THIS GLORIOUS CITY WITH YOUR FATER AND SHOWN HIM ALL ITS WONDERS EXCEPT ITS GROCERIES. THERE ARE SO MANY OF THIS LATTER COMMODITY THAT I FEARED I SHOULD N NOT BE ABLE TO DO FULL JUSTICE TO OUR EXCELLENT CITY IN THIS RESPECT AND I FELT BOUND TO SO FAR REGARD THE REPUTATION OF THIS CITY OF MY ADOPTION AS NOT TO UNDERTAKE TO SHOW ITS CAPABILITIES IN GIVEN ONE DEPARTMENT AND NOT BE ABLE TO JUSTICE CAPABILITIES IN ANY GIVEN DEPARTMENT AND NOT BE ABLE TO DO JUSTICE. IN SOME HUMBLE DEGREE, TO THE EXALTED THEME. WE WE HAVE A GROCERY OF THE MOST APPROVED CHARACTER AT ALMOST EVERY TURN. BUT ENOUGH ABOUT GROC. ELDER SWAN IS PREACHING OVER THE WEST SIDE. HE HAS IMPROVED VERY MUCH SINCE YOU HEARD HIM HOLLA A FEW YEARS AGO. HIS LUNGS ARE MUCH STRONGER AND HE IS ABLE TO SHOUT WITH MUCH GREATER EFFICACY AND EFFECT. IT IS THOUGHT BY SOME, THOUGH I AM NOT AMONG THE NUMBER, THAT WHEN HE SCREAMS WITH HIS FULLEST VOLUME HE CAN TEAR OFF EVERY SHINGLE FROM THE ROOF OF THE CENTRAL BAPTIST SOCIETY. HORRIBLE TIMES! HE HAS DISCOVERED THAT MR. CLARK IS A VERY LIAR AND THAT DEA. BROMLEY MUST GO TO THE BOTTOMLESS PIT WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CLERGY. BUT SERIOUSLY, THO I DOUBT NOT ELDER SWAN HAS BEEN INSRUMENTAL IN THE CONVERSION OF MANY I YET CANNOT THINK HIS KIND OF EFFORT HAS IN THE LONG RUN A BAD BAD EFFECT UPON THE WELFARE OF RELIGION.

THIS LETTER I WRITE WITH MY NEW MACHINE. THE LETTERS YOU WILL NOTICE ARE NOT SMOOTHLY FORMED, BECAUSE THE MACHINERY IS SOMEWHAT IMPERFECT. THE MACHINE HOWEVER OPERATES AS WELL AS EVER I EXPECTED.

WE ARE WELL JUST THI THINK OF THAT. BETER THAN WE DESERVE.

THEY TALK SOME OF HAVING ELDER SWAN PREACH IN MR. BOND S MEETING HOUSE BUT HE CANNOT COME INTO THE BAPTIST HOUSE. WIFE I SUPPOSE WILL WRITE YOU.

YOUS, TRULY

CHARLES THURBER.

Letter written from Charles Thurber to Sarah Wheelock, dated Jan. 28, 1846. The original size was 8 inches wide. Thurber wrote to Miss Wheelock using his "Mechanical Chirographer," one of two writing machines he invented in the 1840's.

CONTENTS

ETCetera

No. 42 Mar. 1998

Magazine of the Early Typewriter Collectors Association

The Typewriter Turns 125

1873 **1998**