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ETCetera
Journal of the
Early Typewriter
Collectors' Association

No. 73 -- March 2006

GETTING DOWN TO
BUSINESS
My first words as editor are, of course, words of thanks to Darryl Rehr for getting this magazine going and producing 49 beautiful issues, and to Chuck Dilts and Rich Cincotta for publishing so much, so well, over the last five years. I’m going to do my best to meet the high standards our readers have come to expect.

The lucky few who’ve handled a Skrivekugel tell me that it’s a wonderful, precision-built instrument. Pastor Rasmus Malling-Hansen was obviously a gifted inventor. Did you know that he even produced a partially electrified Writing Ball?

Now a Malling-Hansen Society is being formed in Denmark. If you’d like to join, send an e-mail to Christian Barnholdt, cb@pro-kom.dk.

Spotted on eBay earlier this year: a Model T. Not a Ford, but a Remington—the British name variant of the no. 3 portable. This Model T came with a beautiful leather case including various pockets, and it sold for a hefty £410.

Another offering was an American version of the same concept: a maroon Remington Noiseless Portable in a leather case made by Abercrombie & Fitch with compartments for writing supplies. I was the lucky winner of this item, and I found from the used carbon paper in one pocket that it was used by a farmer’s wife in Pennsylvania in the 1940s.

One more eBay typewriter in a fancy leather case, including a pocket for documents, was a Royal flatbed No. 5. Now that’s a substantial piece of luggage!

The “Collector’s Corner” interviews will resume in our next issue, where you’ll meet Tilman Elster and his amazing collection of writing machines. If you’re interested in being interviewed, do let me know.

On Our Cover

This photo of a mysterious prototype machine was kindly shared with us by Dennis Clark.

Whose Business is it?

Dennis believes it is this machine patented by Herbert C. Hess in 1900 patents 64,4515 and 64,4516. Hess also patented a four bank version in 1903 726222 which is reminiscent of the Triumph Perfect Visible.

Felice Vitale sends us this photo of his new Swedish-keyboard Pittsburg No. 10 (Daugherty style) equipped with a typebar cover that completely changes the typewriter’s appearance. I wonder whether the company had received complaints from some of its customers who found the writing mechanism a little too visible!

This machine was ahead of its time; the concept of a removable typebar cover appeared later in the 20th century on machines such as the Mercedes Superba portable.
Typewriter Collector Periodicals: A Brief History

Richard Polt

Typewriter collecting must have begun not long after serious manufacturing. The major companies developed collections for research, and private enthusiasts were active too. (A circa 1909 ad reprinted in Mike Brown's new book on J.N. Williams states that “A PARTY Making A Collection of Old Typewriters ... will pay good price for antiques.”) But when were there enough collectors to form associations and start publishing their own periodicals? I figured that as the new editor of one such periodical, I ought to inform myself. According to a newspaper article cited in ET Cetera #56, the Typewriter Collectors’ Society had 60 members in 1975, but I haven’t uncovered any periodicals published before 1980 (although one could perhaps count Au fil de la plume, a French journal for collectors of writing instruments in general from 1979). What follows are the results of my research so far; I invite your corrections and additions. Many thanks to François Babilot, Ned Brooks, Mike Brown, Dennis Clark, Chuck Dilts, Tilman Elster, Graham Forsdyke, Edmond Kern, Jos Legrand, Flavio Mantelli, Peter Muckermann, Fritz Niemann, and Darryl Rehr for helping me track down this information.

Rundschreiben, Leertaste, Tauschtaste

Germany, 1980-1987
Editor: Fritz Niemann

Fritz Niemann was a crucial contributor to the early days of the German typewriter collectors’ community, which is so active today. He began with a questionnaire asking whether collectors would be interested in a magazine and meetings. After getting a positive response he produced Rundschreiben, renamed Leertaste (“empty key,” i.e. spacebar) in 1981. He also hosted over 25 meetings. Leertaste published 3 or 4 large issues per year (30-50 pages), and was supplemented by a monthly newsletter of current events called Tauschtaste (“exchange key”) from 1985 to 1987. (The same system—a magazine plus a more frequent newsletter—is followed today by the German and French associations.) In 1988 Leertaste became part of Büro Wirtschaft (renamed Büromarkt in 1990), an office equipment trade magazine with about 10,000 readers; Fritz became the editor of the magazine’s antique department, and Peter Muckermann succeeded him. Büromarkt eventually folded, but Muckermann continued serving the collectors’ community with his Typenkorb newsletter, and he is still editing a newsletter today (see Typenkorb, Typenkorb & Typenhebel, and HBw Aktuell).

The Typewriter Exchange
USA, 1981-present
Editors: Dan Post (1981-88); Tom FitzGerald (1989-94); Michael A. Brown (1997-present)

This “Newsletter for the Writing Machine Collector” was begun by Dan Post, also well-known for reprinting several excellent books and pamphlets. He published it sporadically, with no issues between Summer 1982 and Spring 1985, but produced 84 pages in all. Tom FitzGerald produced another 100 pages. After a three-year hiatus, Mike Brown took over, and has been publishing every three months since then, with a record of nearly 500 pages so far. “Typex” features color photos, eBay reports, auction and meeting news, research articles, and Mike’s enjoyable sense of humor. The magazine comes as separate three-hole-punched pages that can be put in a binder. Yearly cost is $25 for North America, $30 overseas. Send checks or money orders payable to Michael A. Brown to P.O. Box 52607, Philadelphia, PA 19115. Email: typex1@aol.com. Phone: 215-934-7998. Back issues are available; contact Mike with your request.

Kwbl, Dutch Q, TPC

Netherlands, 1982-1996
Editor: Jos Legrand

The cryptic name Kwbl is short for Kwartaalblad voor de Schrijfmachine verzamelaar, or Quarterly for the Writer Collector. The not-quite-quarterly magazine ran to dozens of pages and focused on research, getting into some fascinating minutiae of little-known machines such as the Adjí Sákà. Kwbl reached about 100 subscribers in 17 countries. Dutch Q was an appendix...
with English summaries and articles, later including *Kwbl Deutsch* in German. In 1990 Legrand also initiated a little magazine called *TPC Typemachine Patent Club*, which ran for six issues and reached ... four subscribers! The complete 34 back issues of *Kwbl* can be ordered for $165 postpaid from Jos Legrand, Redemptielaan 35 B, 6213 JC Maastricht, Netherlands, jjlegrand@hetnet.nl.

This modest bimonthly black-and-white newsletter was the organ of the Typewriter and Sewing Machine Collectors' Society. When the society split into two separate groups, so did the publication; the typewriter newsletter was renamed *Type Writer Times*. Mr. Forsdyke (graham@ismacs.u-net.com) graciously offers to make photocopies of *S&R* for interested collectors.

**Historische Bürowelt**

*Germany, 1982-present*

Editors: Uwe Breker (1982-1996); Leonhard Dingwerth (1997-2001); Lothar K. Friedrich (2002-present)

This large, professional-looking magazine (*Historic Office World, HBw* for short) currently appears three times a year and is the largest publication of the Internationales Forum Historische Bürowelt (IFHB). Under Dingwerth's editorship, it was known as *Scribomaschinen und Büro Zeitung*. Technically expert articles discuss typewriters and other office machines, with an emphasis on German products. The director of the IFHB is Wolfgang Mock, Ge markenstr. 61, D-49147 Essen, Germany. Yearly dues are €65 (or €68 by PayPal to typenkorb@versanet.de). E-mail: ifhbev@t-online.de. Web site: www.ifhbd.de. Back issues of *Historische Bürowelt* are available. Members also receive *HBw Aktuell* (see below), and sometimes get free books on old office technology.

**The Shuttle & Ribbon**

*UK, 1982-1985*

Editor: Graham Forsdyke

This modest bimonthly black-and-white newsletter was the organ of the Typewriter and Sewing Machine Collectors' Society. When the society split into two separate groups, so did the publication; the typewriter newsletter was renamed *Type Writer Times*. Mr. Forsdyke (graham@ismacs.u-net.com) graciously offers to make photocopies of *S&R* for interested collectors.

**HBw-Aktuell**

*Germany, 1984-present*

Editors: Uwe Breker (1984-1990); Thomas Butzbach (1991-1993); Dr. Lutz Rolf (1994-1996); Claus-Peter Soelter (Dec. 1996); Peter Muckermann (1997-present)

This is the IFHB's monthly news organ, mostly reporting on meetings and sales. Through 1996, *HBw Aktuell* and Peter Muckermann's *Typenkorb & Typenhebel* (see below) were two separate publications. In January 1997, the old *HBw Aktuell* was absorbed into Muckermann's newsletter, which from then on used the name *HBw Aktuell*. He offers printed back issues from 2003-5 (€20/yr. including shipping); contact Peter Muckermann, Auf der Warte 34, 33378 Rheda-Wiedenbrück, Germany, typenkorb@versanet.de. English summaries are provided.

**AZERTYUIOP**

*France, 1984-present*

Editor: Denis Seguin

Named after the French keyboard layout, this is the quarterly newsletter of the Association Lorraine des Collectionneurs de Machines de Bureau, with about fifty members. Eight black-and-white pages with articles and news. President: André Verney, 11, rue Canrobert, F 54000 Nancy, France. Tel: 00 33 3 83 35 33 95. E-mail: verney andre@wanadoo.fr.

**The Typewriter Collector**

*USA, 1985*

Editor: Ed Peters

This rather crudely printed 6-10 page magazine ran monthly throughout 1985; its first issue was titled *Typewriter Topics*. Contents included practical advice for collectors, historical research, and letters. The Oliver logo was designed by Siegfried Snyder.

**Type-Writer Times**

*UK/USA, 1985-1991*

Editors: Graham Forsdyke (#1-6); Peter Tandy (#7-12); Paul Lippman (#13-22)

*Type-Writer Times* evolved from a small, sometimes manually typed newsletter to a computer-prepared publication with color photographs glued to its cover. Contents included research on early machines, news reports, anecdotes, and editorials. Issues 1-10 are the “Journal of the Typewriter Collectors' Society,” 11-22 are the “Journal of the Anglo-American Typewriter Collectors’ Society.” In 1991 the magazine became *The Type Writer*.

**ETCetera**

*USA, 1987-present*

In its inception the Early Typewriter Collectors Association was headed by several California collectors. Its main function soon became the publication of Rehr’s quarterly ET Cetera, which from the start featured professional-quality layout, attractive graphics, and original research. ET Cetera eventually included four-color printing and German translations. Dues are $25/year in North America, $30 elsewhere. Back issues 1-49 can be downloaded at home.earthlink.net/~ajrehr/archive.html, or ordered on CD or paper at cafepress.com/vtm. Issues 50-72 are available for $13 per year to North America and $14 elsewhere, postpaid; send a check or money order payable to Chuck Dilts to P.O. Box 286, Southboro, MA 01772, or make a payment to etcetera@writeme.com at paypal.com.

Typenkorb
Germany, 1988-1996
Editor: Peter Muckermann
This monthly newsletter (whose name means “typebasket”) primarily contained reports on meetings, auction results, and advertisements. Typenkorb merged with Typenhebel in January 1994, and Typenkorb & Typenhebel became HBw Aktuell in January 1997; so Peter Muckermann’s news letter has been published continuously since 1988 under three different names.

Medium
Netherlands, 1988-1992
Editor: Peter de Valois
A four-page monthly in Dutch and English, featuring advertisements.

Typenhebel
Switzerland, 1989-1993
Editors: Stefan Beck; Heidi Frei
Typenhebel means “typebar.” This short but lively monthly of the Swiss office machine collectors’ organization merged with Typenkorb in January 1994.

Mercurius
Netherlands, 1993-1994
Editor: Peter de Valois
This successor to Medium was the monthly magazine of the short-lived club also named Mercurius.

The Type Writer
USA, 1991-1993
Editor: Paul Lippman
Issue 1 of this “Journal of Writing Machine History and Technology” explains that “Typewriter Times has severed its relationship with the Anglo-American Typewriter Collectors’ Society, since the great majority of its subscribers are in North America.” The six issues of the magazine printed a wide variety of attractive articles. Lippman also finished his book American Typewriters: A Collector’s Encyclopedia in 1992. Unfortunately, a mysterious neurological illness was to take his life in 1995.

Arts mécaniques
France, 1994-present
Editor: Edmond Kern
This is the magazine of the Association Nationale des Collectionneurs de Machines à Écrire et à Calculer Mécaniques, founded in 1993 by Maxime Cunin and François Babilot. There are about 100 members in France and elsewhere. Arts mécaniques appears twice a year; Contact (see below) is bimonthly. ANCMCA membership is €50 a year, payable to international bank account FR35 2004 1010 1206 0144 8N03 334, Bank Identifier Code PSSTFRPPSCE. President François Babilot can be contacted at Boîte Postale n° 5, 37210 Rochechonbon, France, or by e-mail at fambillot@aol.com. Phone: 00 33 2 47 52 52 67, Edmond Kern can be reached at 11, rue Ravel, F 67310 Walselonne, phone 06 33 33 88 87 06 91, edmondkern@yahoo.fr.

Typenkorb & Typenhebel
Germany, 1994-1997
Editor: Peter Muckermann
This was the former Typenkorb, which in turn became HBw Aktuell (see above).

L’ufficio d’epoca
Italy, 1994-present
Editors: Glauco Pegorini (1994-1997); Giuseppe Colangelo, Carlo Torchio, Ugo Armaroli and Silvano Gabotti (1998-present)
This journal, whose name means The Antique Office, is published six times a year by the Associazione Italiana Collezionisti Macchine per Ufficio d’Epoca. It focuses on technical descriptions of typewriters and other office machines, and also includes
This is the bimonthly news bulletin of ANCMECA, including announcements, reports on meetings, and interesting short articles.

It's a good time to be a typewriter collector, with fine magazines being produced worldwide. Look for “Around the World” in the next ETCetera—a regular feature that will quickly inform you of what’s appeared recently in the planet’s typewriter collector periodicals.

Meet the Kabouter

Paul Beijersbergen contributed this shot of a Kabouter, serial number 3771. This rarity is a Dutch name variant of the German-made Faktotum (1912); the Faktotum was based on the Imperial A, and was the predecessor of the Rofa. A kabouter is a gnome or imp … could there be any connection to the quite different mystery typewriter in the Mantelli collection, with a Dutch keyboard and a picture of a gnome on it, which is documented in issue 2.4 of the Virtual Typewriter Journal?

Marketplace

Wanted: Odell 1A (dog-bone/paw feet base), Trebla, Yankee. I am also interested in very rare typewriters in need of restoration (any condition, including parts machines). Flavio Mantelli, mantelliflavio@yahoo.it

Advertising in ETCetera is free for all ETCA members. Just send your ad to the editor.
The character tray is removed, revealing the "finger" that raises the character slugs.

When a handle is pressed, the "finger" raises the slug, which is seized by the rectangular sleeve just below the little white ceramic roller. After printing, the slug is released by a push from the ceramic roller and drops back into the tray.

The character slugs are small metal pieces with special notches for orientation and for the sleeve to latch them.

The Nikkei Master with platen, typing assembly, and character tray. 12 inch ruler shown for scale.

Some time ago, my son told me that one of his friends had an old Japanese typewriter in his basement. The boys were playing with it and some of the characters had already been lost. After some negotiating, I was given the typewriter. It was made by the Nippon Keieiki Co. in 1965. It is called a “Master.” A better name might be “Monster”: the machine weighs 50 pounds, and that’s without the character tray that weighs 23 pounds! Japanese writing is based on ideograms known as kanji (and another set known as kana). Kanji are actually Chinese characters. There are some 50,000 kanji characters in the Japanese lexicon. Sugimoto Kyota (1882-1972) invented the Japanese typewriter around 1915. He found some 2,400 kanji that were most commonly used and developed a tray that contained them. Each character is in the shape of a small printer’s slug. The typewriter has a rod, or finger, underneath the tray, which can push the slug upwards. At the same time, a lever above grips the slug and bangs it against the paper. You move the tray to place the character slug you want exactly under the “gripper”; the platen assembly can also be moved to facilitate the connection. There is a good film clip of the working of the machine on www.honco.net/japanese. In the hands of an expert, the typewriter could write about twice as fast as a person with a brush. The result was also a neater copy. But it was obvious that expertise was required, and these typewriters were not widely used outside official and business circles. In 1978, Mori Ken’ichi of the Toshiba Corporation developed the electronic word processor, which was commercialized by 1985. The mechanical typewriter quickly became obsolete. I have already sold off some of my larger typewriters due to lack of space. The big question now is: what do I do with the “Monster”?

—John Wilkinson, Schoharie, N.Y.

Share one of your favorite typewriters with our readers: send us a big, clear photograph along with a paragraph about what makes the machine special. Even common typewriters can have interesting stories!
The development of the Victor Portable came at a point in Max Garbell’s career when it might well have seemed necessary to him to find stable ground. Garbell had begun to develop a small portable employing gear-operated thrust-action type bars, and which was inexpensive to manufacture, around 1918. The first patent for what would eventually become the GAR-BELL portable was filed in that year, by Garbell himself. Shortly, he would form the Garbell Typewriter Corporation, which was incorporated in Delaware but which was located in Chicago, with production actually beginning in March 1919. The company had little success in penetrating the market, and by July 1923 had been liquidated and essentially bought out by O. D. Jennings & Company of Chicago. Patents for alterations to the GAR-BELL were granted to this latter company through 1925, but the machine was an almost complete failure.

Following this debacle, Garbell took out a patent for a machine which used conventionally pivoted type-bars, but which still included a form of gear drive. This machine’s design, filed in 1924 and granted patent in 1925, was unusual in that the type basket dropped down and raised up very much like that of the early Remington portables. It is believed that none were actually built, but hints of his following design were present.

The first patent for what would eventually become the Victor Portable was filed by Garbell in 1924, although at that time he still had no backing to produce the machine. This changed when he either approached, or was approached by, Victor Adding Machine Company. In 1925, according to the official Victor history printed in book form as It All Adds Up (Edwin Darby, 1968), the board of directors employed Max Garbell. He was given 2000 shares of stock, and a salary of $5000 annually in exchange for patent rights to this new machine and his continued development of it exclusively for Victor, this development to be entirely at Victor’s expense. He was to be given commission if the machines could be built and sold; up to 50 units per day, Garbell would receive 25 cents each. If production went up to 100 a day, he would receive 20 cents for every one over 50, and if it even got higher, he would get 15 cents for those. Victor executive A. C. Buehler was assigned to assist with a prototype. Victor intended to get into the portable type writer market in a big way.

Now, Victor faced a challenge on two fronts. The first was the fact that the trade name of “Victor” for typewriters was owned by International Textbook Company of Scranton, Pennsylvania, who had been the final owners of the Victor Typewriter Company. This latter entity had already shut down by this time, but Victor Adding Machine still needed rights to the name. The board authorized a maximum of $20,000 to be paid for the name, but was able to purchase the rights for it for five thousand less.

The other hurdle was quite simply the overall design of the machine, which was perhaps overly ambitious. Garbell had designed the machine to be not only light in weight and compact, but also to be relatively inexpensive to build, so that an offering price of around $60 would still allow a handsome profit. The devil was in the details, though, as the production of developmental prototypes indicated that the machine’s design was not fully debugged, or even close. During the following several years, a large number of patents were filed by Garbell, assigned to Victor, covering a large number of changes and improvements to the machine. In fact, there are no fewer than 29 patents for the Victor portable; one block of thirteen was all granted on the same day, even though they had been filed variously from 1924 through 1929. What is illuminating is the content of these patents—and the already mentioned date of 1929.

This batch of patents includes direct statements by Garbell as to actual problems experienced with the machine, and corrective measures. In short, problems were being experienced with the rocking carriage shift (bouncing, motion, and ribbon vibrator and feed problems), the type
John Newton Williams is known to collectors as the inventor of the Williams typewriter, with its ingenious “grasshopper” mechanism. But as this new book by Typex editor Mike Brown tells us, there is indeed an untold story. Williams (1840-1929) turns out to have been a busy and resourceful man. He fought in the Civil War, raced horses, and in addition to developing his typewriter invented machines such as a check punch, two- and three-wheeled motorcycles, and a helicopter, hobnobbing with the likes of Alexander Graham Bell and Glenn Curtiss.

I wish all histories were organized the way this one is. After a general summary of his findings, Mike divides the 188-page book into twenty chronological sections. Each section provides a timeline and a collection of relevant documents: photos, letters, legal papers, patents—even an ad in which Mr. Williams promotes Paine’s Celery Compound. This approach lets the reader delve directly into the sources. It’s almost like time travel as we follow Williams (and his magnificent moustache) through the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Gay Nineties, and the birth of aviation.

We get to see a number of patent drawings, and learn that some aspects of the Williams typewriter keyboard are borrowed from the Fitch. The Phonographic World reported that Williams also based his design in part on the Slocum typewriter. Mike could not confirm this, but he does show us an ad for this very obscure machine.

Mike was not able to track down some of the patents that are listed on the front of Williams typewriters; but with the help of Dirk Schumann’s wonderful “Patentbase” data DVD, most of these are easy to find—for example, the patent of April 30, 1878 is #202923, filed by Byron A. Brooks. (I will send a copy of the DVD to any ETCA member free upon request.) By the way, Mike reports that Brooks sued Williams in the 1890s, and speculates that lawsuits like this eventually contributed to the demise of the company.

This book is the product of many years of research, and I recommend it to anyone who loves invention. Postpaid copies may be ordered for $30 (North America) or $37 (overseas) from Michael A. Brown, P.O. Box 52607, Philadelphia, PA 19115.

—Richard Polt
Back to Basics

Typewriter Photography

by Martin Howard

Reviving a feature of the earliest ETCeteras, this column will consider the fundamentals issues that nearly everyone who loves writing machines is bound to deal with. These articles will be useful to beginners, but also worthwhile for experienced collectors. Most of us eventually want to photograph our typewriters to document them, to show them to distant friends, or to post them online. But a mechanical object can be surprisingly difficult to capture. Who better to advise us than Martin Howard, whose website antiquetypewriters.com features lovely shots of his collection, some by Martin himself and some by professional photographer Jon Muldoon. Prints of the latter are for sale on the site. The photos here were taken by Martin with a digital camera. —Ed.

The key element, I found, in achieving good results was a lot of playing around with the camera and lighting to realize the best combination of choices. Using only the basic equipment in my possession, I became happily obsessed in this quest and in getting the best imaging for my website. These are the choices that worked for me.

Background

Use a clean paper background to highlight the typewriter. A large sheet around 30” x 40” works well. Visit your local art shop to get what you need.

Lighting

Use halogen and incandescent desk lamps to illuminate the typewriter. The combination of these lamps will produce a richer image, each one pulling out different colors. I have found that the ceiling light, being high up, often creates “hot spots” on the typewriter.

Moving the two desk lamps around and not using the ceiling light gives better results, as one can change the angle of the reflected light and reduce and often eliminate these hot spots. [Ed.: indirect sunlight also works.

In Photoshop (or similar) the image can be brightened up, so don’t worry if the image looks dim on the computer screen.

Do not use the flash on your camera. The flash creates hot spots on the subject and washes out surrounding color. Again, bringing the photo into Photoshop allows one to easily adjust for brightness and end up with a much better image. A remote flash (away from the camera) can work very well, but I have not used one.

Play around with your lighting. You will enjoy the creative process and you will extract the best possible results.

Shooting

Use a tripod for a steady shot. This is essential when shooting at the preferred lower light levels mentioned above. Take many shots, six or so, and experiment with the following:

- varying light levels and angles of incoming light
- orientation of the typewriter to the camera
- distance between camera and subject

You will find the best images by playing around freely. Remember to write down what worked well, when it happens.

Resolution

Take the photo with enough resolution (pixels) so the image can be shown large enough on the
screen. Try the different settings on your camera and see the resulting image sizes created. Small images will never satisfy other viewers who want to see your typewriters.

**Angle of shot**

Generally speaking, the angle of the shot will match the angle an observer would have, when standing and looking at the typewriter on a desk. It is often best to shoot the typewriter turned sideways, to give depth of view and the side detail.

**Cropping**

Always crop the image to show case the typewriter. It is best not to crop through a shadow.

Photography is a creative process. Success comes from playing with and enjoying one's camera and computer. Have fun and enjoy your results.

_In the next “Back to Basics”: an eBay primer._

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**Tennessee Williams' Typewriters**

This 1934 Underwood portable, serial 717166, sold for $3750 in December. Why? Because according to the auctioneers, it's the very machine featured in this story told in Donald Spoto's *The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams.*

On September 8, 1982, five months before his death, Williams was in a bar in Key Largo, Florida, where he struck up a conversation with a couple having coffee. When Williams found out that the husband, Steven Kunes, was a writer, he introduced himself and asked that they call him Tom. Eventually, the Kuneses drove him back to his home in Key West, where Steven Kunes told Williams about his novel in progress. “And that's when it happened. Williams went into another room and emerged with a square black case, telling me to look inside. It was an Underwood typewriter... 'I used it for *Summer and Smoke* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. It needs a new ribbon, and perhaps some oil... Write a play, Steven. Just write a play. I know you can hit the core... Don't be flattered when I say this. You can flatter me by using this old machine to do the job.'”

As Lucy Jacobs commented on the online Portable Typewriter Forum, “To me, this story just doesn't fit Williams—he slept anywhere, wrote anywhere, threw the typed pages behind him (his agent had to rescue them)—he just had to be typing every morning at dawn. By 1955 (when *Cat* was written) he was no starving artist, so he could afford to pick up a new machine wherever he was. I think the seller might be telling the truth of what Williams told the man—but I bet the real story was that Williams had an old typewriter and made up the story on the spot for dramatic effect.”

One thing is sure: TW loved to use TWs, and to have himself photographed with them. Here we see a dapper Tennessee on a circa 1940 Corona, a humid Tennessee on a Royal KMM, and a fumaceous Tennessee with an Olivetti Studio 44.
Letters

From 1955 to maybe the early 1960s my father used a Varityper for setting the copy for his newspaper. The first machine was an A-20, and then he got a DSJ, which from his point of view was not an improvement. My father wrote his newspaper articles on a standard desk typewriter from maybe 1920. The two-inch column in the paper was 30 characters wide in the font he had chosen to use, and that knowledge allowed him to avoid double typing. Here’s how he did it.

123456789012345678901234567890
This is a story that would have appeared in the Wilmington Town Crier. By putting the x’s at the end of each line, he could write stories anywhere there was a type writer, and submit the copy to be set to the Varityper operator, who would move the justification lever for each line by counting the number of x’s before she typed it.

There would be a slight problem if the name of David Cox happened to fall at the end of the line, of course.

Once you get into the habit of writing a story that way it’s not hard to do. You have to be good at hyphenation without using a dictionary, and my father was unjustifiably proud of his ability to do without one. (His spelling of the words “devide” and “hugh,” for huge, were famous.) To be fair, we are talking about a man who would do the Sunday NYT crossword puzzle in ink, vertically only.

My father later got a Friden Jostowriter system, which had two separate machines. The composing machine produced a five-level Bau dot-coded paper tape, but the tape was seven levels wide, and the extra bits signified the justification information for the line just entered. The other machine read the tape in a pair of reading stations.

Later, typesetting was done with machines from Photon and then Compugraphic, both companies located in Wilmington, Massachusetts, where my father ran his newspaper. He was negotiating with Compugraphic for a new system that would have been somewhere around $100,000 in 1983, but when he and my brothers discovered the Macintosh, everything changed instantly. The Wilmington Town Crier was one of the first newspapers to be set on a Mac. Photon and Compugraphic are gone.

Peter Neilson
Sanford, N.C.

In our area, there has been a resurgence of typewriter use among young people. The LA Times printed an article about it a couple of months ago, and our own paper, the Pasadena Star News, ran a story about this same topic. Most days you will find as many people using manual portables as laptops at the local coffee shops. When I took my daughter’s Hermes (with the cool mint green keys) to get it fixed, Jesse tells me, “You know, son, my business has been picking up, lots of young folks are bringing in typewriters to me. When I started in 1962, there were 250 typewriter repair shops listed in the Yellow Pages, now there are only three.”

Rudy Martinez
South Pasadena, Cal.

New on the Shelf
Tony Casillo: Shimer
Thomas Fürtig: Gourland, Regia, Weltblick
Richard Polt: Tip Tip, Monica 1
Herman Price: Genia, Blick 5 telegraphic, Neya 2
Peter Weil: celluloid pillbox from Mexico with Oliver L-10 ad
Reinmar Wochinz: Gardner, Pearl (Searing), Stenotype 3, Dactyle 3

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