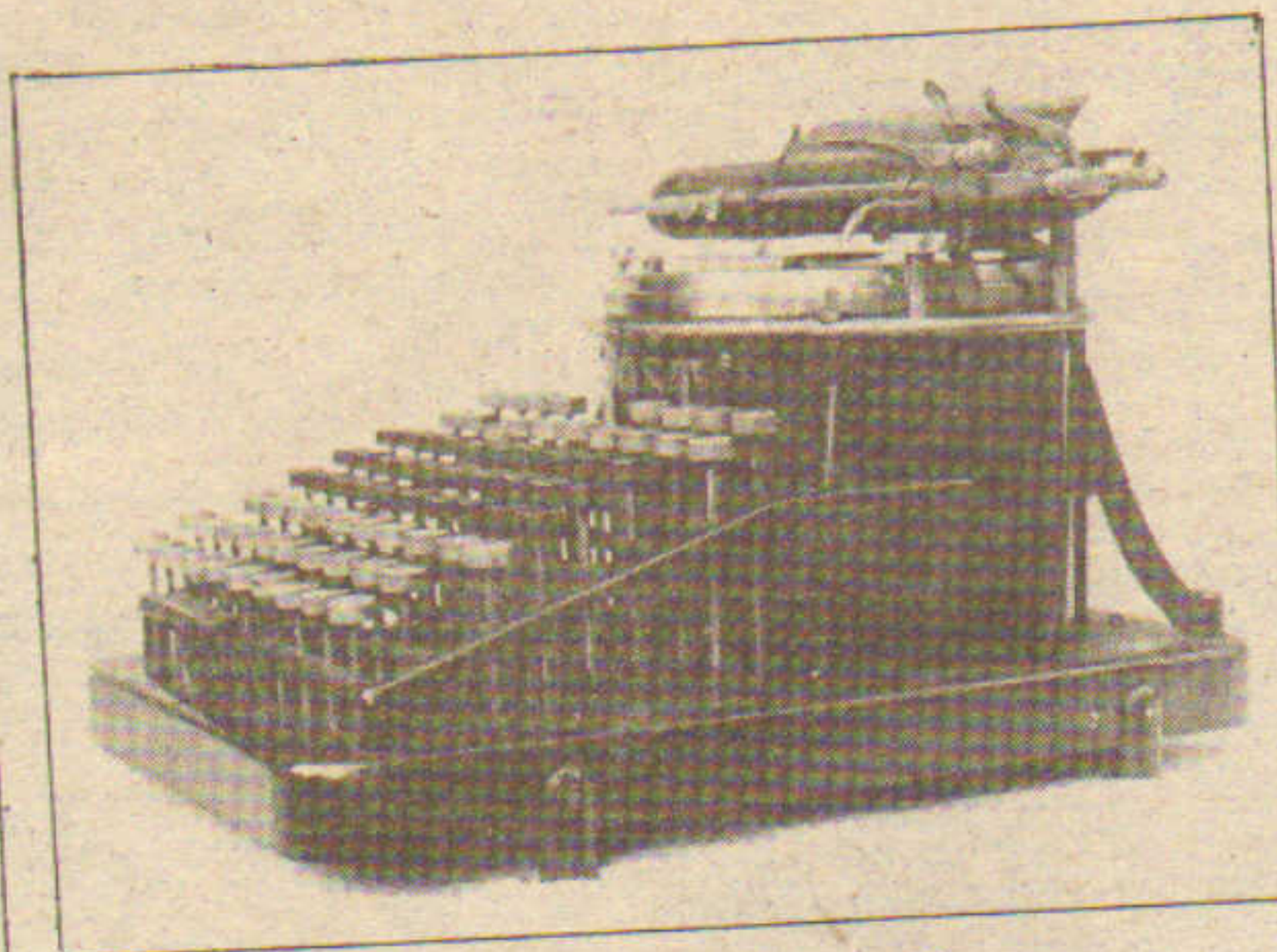
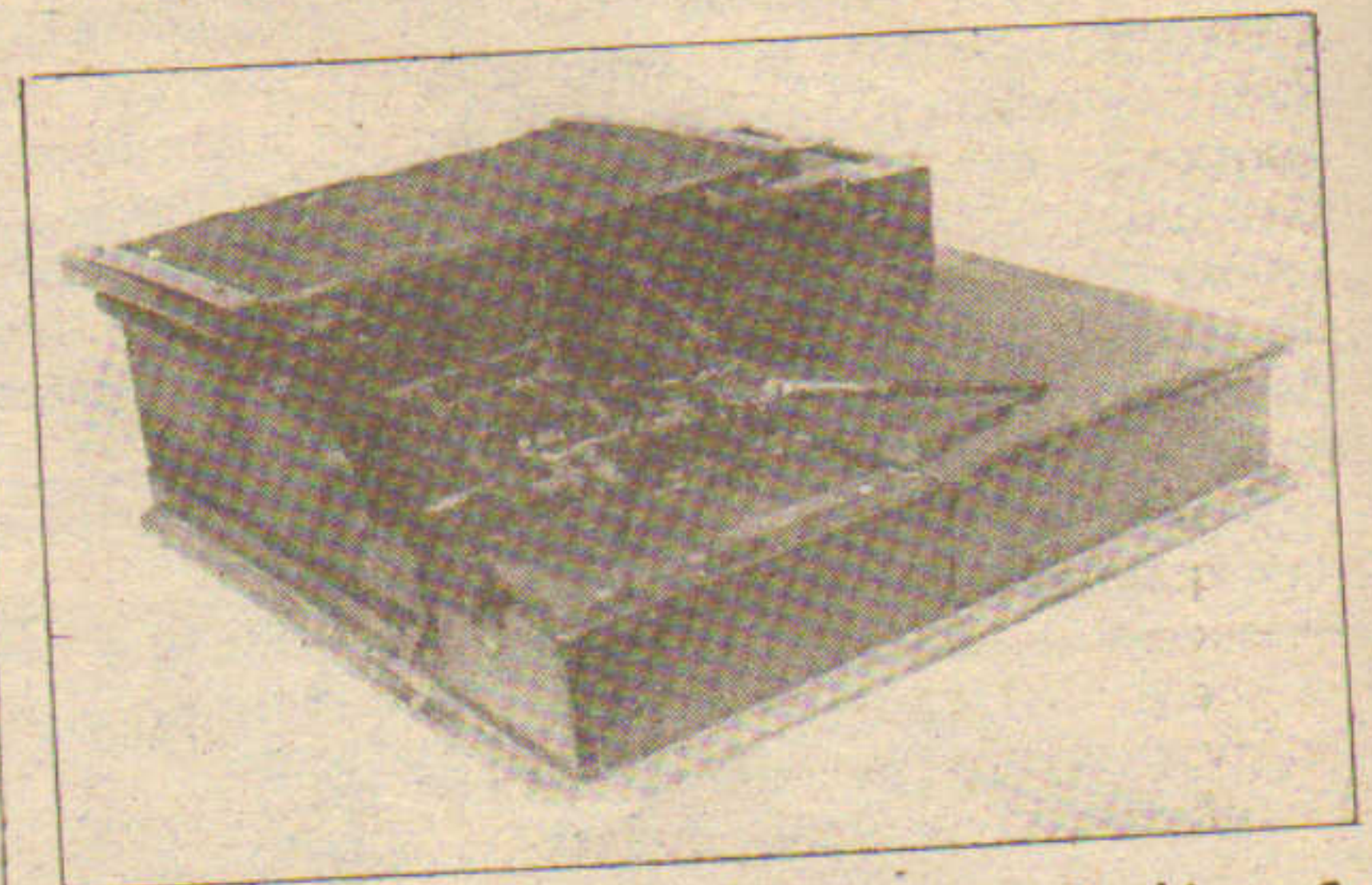


Sholes &amp; Glidden Type Writer, 1874.



Yost typewriter, c. 1892.



Edwin T. Ponting Multiple Writing Machine, c. 1840s.

enormous majority of girls who are now in the profession. They may, in short, have come to look upon stenography as girl's work."

Much as "girl's work" may have been frowned upon by the red-blooded young man of the age — even as it is by the red-blooded young woman of today — an early presumption was that women would be better equipped as typists because, unlike men, who presumably were out all day playing baseball, women studied subjects of higher cultural aspiration. "Young ladies who have practiced more or less on the piano," advised a typists' manual of 1886, "will find (manipulation of typewriter keys) an easy matter; but young men, very few of whom have had such practice, will find it difficult."

Nearly every historian of typewriters does emphasize the significance of the typewriter to the feminist cause, but, ultimately, every development of the mechanical age had a significance upon the social order as it now stands. Sure, it is interesting to contemplate how woman's role evolved as a result of the presence of typewriting machines, just as it is intriguing to consider how telephones, phonographs, automobiles, radios and televisions contributed to the people we are today. But to try to aggrandize the typewriter on this basis, as so many commentators seem to do, is to miss the point. The typewriter, as should be apparent by this late point in the recounting, has its areas of interest that are intrinsic: its mechanical excellence, and its demonstration of the awesome variety of ways the human mind can conceptualize solutions to a single problem. People who try to glorify the typewriter because of its sociological effect pick such rationalizations because, probably, they themselves hold the underlying conviction that the contrivance is banal.

Yet for all the dispassion with which the typewriter is viewed, most of the world concedes that, though it may be dull, the machine is important. Because it is thought to be dull, hardly anybody knows who its inventor was; but because it is important, everybody and his uncle claims the invention to be his. One of the most hotly contested propositions concerning typewriter history is that:

#### THE FIRST TYPEWRITER WAS INVENTED BY CHRISTOPHER LATHAM SHOLES

Depending upon how you choose to define the terms "invent" and "typewriter," the "typewriter" was "invented" by between 52 and 112 different people, in different parts of the world, beginning over 150 years before Christopher Latham Sholes sat down to "invent the typewriter."

In short, there is no shortage of interpretation on the subject of who gets to be called the father of the typewriter.

What is a certainty is that C.L. Sholes, publisher, politician, Utopian, and amateur inventor, struggled his way through 30 to 50 experimental writing-machine models during the years 1867-73; that he became dismayed and wanted to quit over and over again; that he was browbeaten into continuing by his backer, James Densmore; that another associate, George Washington Newton Yost, persuaded Philo Remington, head of the Remington firearm company, to undertake manufacture of a revised 1873 model; and that the outcome was the Sholes & Glidden Type Writer, which eventually evolved into the Remington Standard Typewriter.

It is also a certainty that G.W.N. Yost broke off from the Remington interests and engaged a German mechanic, Franz X. Wagner, to develop the Caligraph; that Yost later broke off from the Caligraph and hired some mechanics to develop the Yost typewriter; that James Densmore's relatives hired mechanics, including Franz X. Wagner, to develop the Densmore typewriter; that Franz X. Wagner invented a typewriter of his own which he sold to a businessman named John Underwood, with an outcome already described.

It is also true that Byron Brooks who invented the Brooks typewriter, Lucian Crandall who invented the Crandall typewriter, James Hammond who invented the Hammond typewriter, and Thomas Edison who invented the Edison typewriter, all had some contact with Sholes or Densmore or Yost or Remington. It therefore can be said that a considerable amount of early typewriter history has its origins around Christopher Latham Sholes and his invention.

It is also generally acknowledged that Sholes was inspired to "invent the typewriter" by reports he read of

a writing machine, called the Pterotype, already developed (and some apparently sold) in England by an American named John Pratt.

It is also known that a Swedish writing machine called the Schrievkugel was on sale at least by 1872, and probably during the 1860s.

It is also known that the earlier 19th century virtually crawls with writing machines, most experimental models but some functional, bearing names like Mechanical Typographer and Mechanical Chirographer and Literary Piano and Writing Harpsichord.

It is also known that many of the design concepts ultimately employed in the Sholes & Glidden were present in a variety of the earlier designs.

Of the Mechanical Typographer, it is known that one John Jones manufactured well over one hundred of them in the 1850s with the intention of marketing them. His plans were foiled because all but one were destroyed when the factory burned down.

In his book, Michael Adler reproduces typewritten correspondence that he traces to Italy in 1809.

Although it is not known whether he built it, an Englishman, Henry Mill, was granted a patent for a writing machine by Queen Anne in 1714.

So who invented the typewriter? Who cares?

The celebration of a technological "first" is meaningful mostly to those whose job it is to set the date on which to hang the crepe and hire the brass bands. Everybody loves a party, particularly those who have something to gain from it. Nationalistic British, Italian, French, and German individuals like to glorify their countries by claiming that writing machines were in use there prior to the Sholes invention, and/or that Sholes "stole" the ideas of their local heroes. The Russians, needless to say, claim to have invented the first typewriter, a machine called the Alissoff, which was presented to the American public at the Centennial Exhibition in 1876, and which the Russians claim predated the Sholes & Glidden by many years. Akin to nationalism is regionalism; a plaque erected in John Pratt's home town in Virginia proclaims that this was the birthplace of the true inventor of the typewriter. Meantime, relatives and descendants, lacking any achievements of their own, go about seeking glory-by-association by proclaiming

their assorted ancestors as the true inventor of the typewriter.

As for the Remington interests, they were only delighted to support Sholes's pre-eminence, since this rationalized their advertising claim of "time-honored principles." They were unconcerned that Sholes himself regarded the Sholes & Glidden as a colossal failure and spent the rest of his life, apparently obsessed, trying to invent a better typewriter (including single-element designs).

For all the flexibility of interpretation of "invention of the typewriter," for all the precursors of the Sholes machine, and for all the claims and counter-claims, it might as well be allowed that the Sholes & Glidden was the first typewriter. The fact is that it was the first to be manufactured in really substantial quantities — educated guesses put total production at 4,000 — and it was the earliest machine that underwent continuous development into successive evolutionary models over the years; and that, as the Remington, its line continues throughout the era of machine writing. It may not have been the first typewriter in the most literal sense, but it did constitute the spearhead of what became the typewriter industry. As definitions for the "invention" of the "typewriter," these are as good as any.

Then again, Thomas Hall had already taken out patents on writing machines early in the 1870s, and as already stated, had a highly successful product on the market early in the 1880s. Meantime James Hammond acquired the patents of John Pratt, subjected them to further development, and turned them into the Hammond typewriter also in the early 1880s.

Of all the arguments defending the definition of the "inventor" of the "typewriter," the broadest group does go to Sholes. For want of a better interpretation, let's say he was the first. If he hadn't been, he would have been the second or the third. Or maybe the fourth, or maybe the 113th.

#### TYPEWRITERS WILL BECOME THE NEXT COLLECTING "RAGE"

It has been suggested by other writers that typewriters will become the next really "big" collectable; that people will fall all over one another to get their hands on typewriters, that prices for the

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