

# The impact of the typewriter history essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The typewriter was one of the greatest turning points in history. Writing, a previously laborious task, was made immensely easier. The typewriter benefited countless businessmen, researchers, and professionals who were all “ obliged to undergo the drudgery of the pen.”[1]It brought convenience and productivity to people everywhere. Even more important, however, was its impact on businesses and society. Companies were grew and expanded in unparalleled ways because of this newfound speed in writing. Because of the speed of writing the Sholes-Glidden typewriter brought to the table, the typewriter became the driving force in nearly every company’s growth. The Sholes-Glidden typewriter, however, was not the first typewriter to be made, nor was it the first to be faster than hand-writing-it was simply the first commercially successful typewriter. In order to trace the roots of the typewriter, one must go back several centuries to a time long before keyboards.

Writing had been a long, tedious process since its creation. Words and symbols had to be meticulously copied by hand, stroke-for-stroke, word-for-word, again and again in order to make a single copy or write down a single record. In fact, the writing process was so arduous that there were people-scribes-whose lives were dedicated just to writing and copying. They were honored and renowned, too, just because of how difficult writing was. Despite the difficulty, however, writing was an integral part of human progression. By the 1400s, people had already gotten tired of writing’s difficulty and looked for new ways to reduce this labor. The result was the printing press, the first invention that revolutionized the world of writing. [2]Following this success, humans began seeking for even more ways to

improve writing and make it easier. The next major revolution in writing came in the mid-1600s in the form of William Petty's writing machine. In the machine's patent, Charles I described it as a machine that:

"...might be learnt in an hour's time, and of great advantage to lawyers, scriveners,

merchants, scholars, registars, clerks, etcetera; it saving the labour of examination,

discovering or preventing falsification, and performing the business of writing-as

with ease and speed-so with privacy."[3]

In essence, Petty's invention was really just a machine that wrote with two pens at once. However, Charles I's description could also be applied to the typewriter perfectly. In 1714, nearly sixty years later, Henry Mill created the next notable typewriter. In the patent granted to him by the Queen, Mill's typewriter was described as:

"...an artificial machine or method for impressing or transcribing of letters, singly or progressively one after the other, as in writing, whereby all writings whatsoever may be engrossed on paper or parchment so neat and exact as not to be distinguished from print...the impression being deeper and more lasting than any other writing..."[4]

Unlike Petty's two-pen writing machine, Mill's machine was much more similar to the 20th century typewriter. In just sixty years since the first

notable typewriter, tremendous progress had already been achieved on the journey to creating writing's most revolutionizing invention.

Invented in 1829, William Austin Burt's Typographer became the first American writing machine.[5]A person would type on Burt's Typographer by spinning a large wheel with many characters on it until his/her desired character was in front of the typing point. Next, a hammer would bring the type to the surface of the paper, creating a character on the paper. This, however, was a very slow process-even slower than hand-writing. It was also very prone to spelling errors, as proved in a letter he wrote to his wife.

[6]Despite its flaws, many people saw potential in the machine. One such person was John Sheldon, the editor of the Michigan Gazette. He was so impressed with the typewriter, in fact, that he even went so far as to write to Andrew Jackson, the president at the time. However, Sheldon was not able to come up with enough funds to manufacture the Typographer, and the typographer was brought to a premature end. Much like Charles I and the Queen's descriptions of previous typewriters, Sheldon's letter was meant to predict the impact of Burt's Typographer, but instead managed to better predict the eventual outcome of the typewriter. In his letter, Sheldon wrote that the writing machine " will be ranked with the most novel, useful, and pleasing inventions of this age." [7]Following Burt, many inventors tried to create their own typing machines-but none of them were nearly as progressive as Burt's.[8]These later typewriters were not really able to impact the world or garner as much attention as Burt's, and, as a result, their inventors' names and faces became lost in the depths of history.

In 1831, the next notable typewriter emerged, born into a time of great conflict within America herself. Originally built as a hobby by John Pratt, the “Pterotype” would eventually become the inspiration for the first commercially successful typewriter.[9] Because taking out a patent was very hard during the Civil War, Pratt decided to finish his machine in London, where he was able to obtain a British patent in 1864. His Pterotype aroused much interest and speculation in many English citizens.[10] In fact, the machine was so profound that when Pratt returned to America at the end of the Civil War, he found an editorial, “Type Writing Machine”, written in Scientific American that described his machine as

“A machine by which it is assumed that a man may print his thoughts twice as fast as he can write them, and with the advantage of the legibility, compactness and neatness of print, has lately been exhibited before the London Society of Arts by the inventor, Mr. Pratt... The subject of typewriting is one of the interesting aspects of the near future. Its manifest feasibility and advantage indicate that the laborious and unsatisfactory performance of the pen must, sooner or later, become obsolete for general purposes”.[11]

This description, applicable both to typewriters and to more recent models, described many important advantages of the typewriter. Unfortunately for Pratt, by the time he had been granted an American patent for his “Pterotype”, Charles Latham Sholes had already been granted a patent for his typing machine. Because of this difference in timing, Sholes’s model became much more well-known in America and far overshadowed the Pterotype.[12]

Charles Latham Sholes is usually known by most as the inventor of the first typewriter.[13]While this is not true, the Sholes-Glidden typewriter Sholes would later invent was indeed the first truly successful typewriter. Sholes lived near a local machine shop, the Kleinsteuber, and would often visit it with his friends Samuel W. Soule and Carlos Glidden. In July 1867, Sholes came across the article in Scientific America describing Pratt's "Pterotype". Inspired by this "Type Writing Machine", Sholes set out to make his own machine, arguing that Pratt's machine was too complex.[14]Through a great deal of experimenting and inventing, Sholes and his friends were finally able to make a machine that was able to print one letter: W.[15]For Sholes and his friends, this was a monumental achievement, and one that really spurred them on to continue with their work.

With one letter under their metaphorical belts, Sholes, Soule, and Glidden continued to develop their typing machine until it was capable of typing the entire English alphabet. The first prototype of this typewriter was shaped almost exactly like a piano, with white and black keys made of ivory and ebony, respectively.[16]They named their new typewriting machine the Type-Writer after the title of the article that had originally inspired them. [17]Sholes knew that without money, their new machine was not going anywhere no matter how revolutionary it was. Sholes decided to contact people for support, and so began writing investors (with their new Type-Writer, of course). One of the investors, James Densmore, was very interested in Sholes's writing machine. In order to seal his position, James readily paid them the hefty six-hundred dollars they had asked for in return for a portion of the company. He also stayed with the project, constantly

pushing Soles to create the perfect machine.[18]While Densmore was infallibly confident in the typing machine, saying of the “ typewriter” (a name he had created), “ I believe in the invention from the top-most corner of my hat to the bottom-most head of the nails of my boot heels...”, Sholes was not as confident in the machine he had invented, and sold it to Densmore. In 1872, his friend, Yost, visited him in Milwaukee and recommended to him the factory of E. Remington & Son, a factory that had manufactured guns and sewing machines prior the end of the Civil War. In 1873 a deal was made to remodel the machine for manufacturing, and the factory set to work creating 1, 000 typewriters-1, 000 Type-Writers that revolutionized the world of writing and began the industry of the typewriter.[19]

The biggest feature of the Sholes-Glidden typewriter was that one could finally type faster on it than one could write with a pen.[20]The first production Sholes-Glidden typewriter’s appearance was very different from that of more modern typewriters-it was shaped like a sewing machine (the Remington Arms Company had manufactured sewing machines and guns during the war.) However, the real legacy that the Sholes-Glidden typewriter has left us is not its sewing-machine like appearance, but rather its unique keyboard layout. As Sholes was creating his typewriter, he found a very annoying problem: when the keys were hit too quickly in succession, the hammers that printed characters would get jammed, tied up with each other. Sholes decided that the best way to resolve this problem would be to change the keyboard format to a more difficult one with keys commonly used together placed farther apart. Instead of the usual A-Z keyboard layout of its time, Sholes arranged his typewriter in the format everyone is well-versed in

today, the QWERTY keyboard layout in order to prevent excessive jams.

[21]As the popularity and success of Sholes's typewriter grew and people began to adapt to its new keyboard layout, other companies saw the QWERTY layout's success and followed suit. Today, nearly every keyboard is created in the QWERTY layout-a beautiful showcase of the Sholes-Glidden typewriter's lasting impact.

Created by James B. Hammond, the Hammond model typewriter surfaced shortly after Sholes's typewriter was released. Seeing the terrible misfortune Pratt had in the timing of his patent, Hammond offered Pratt a large sum of money as well as a percentage of the profits if Pratt consented to leaving the typewriter industry.[22]Then, taking Pratt's plans and patents, Hammond "created" a typewriter that utilized the revolutionary idea of interchangeable type, or the "shift" button on today's keyboards.[23]This new mechanism allowed for two sets of keys on each hammer that could be swapped at the push of a button, allowing for typists to type with a far greater range of symbols and letters despite having a smaller amount of visible keys on the surface.

Due to a general misunderstanding of what a typewriter was, the Sholes-Glidden typewriter did not sell very well when it was first released. People often confused the typewriter with the age-old printing press, not realizing that the typewriter was a brand-new revolutionary invention. When people began to understand the advantages of the typewriter, however, society was changed for the better in incredible ways. Typewriters' unrivaled speed in producing text became necessities for both priests and clergymen, who were now able to type up sermons and record purchases in half of the time.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-impact-of-the-typewriter-history-essay/>



Despite the typewriter's learning curve, everybody recognized that typewriters had much potential, as evidenced by Mark Twain's letter to his own typewriter:

" I AM TRYING TTO GET THE HANG OF THIS NEW FFANGLED WRITING MACHINE, BUT AM NOT MAKING A SHINING SUCCESS OF IT. HOWEVER THIS IS THE FIRST ATTEMPT I EVER HAVE MADE &YET I PERCEIVETHAT I SHALL SOON &EASILY ACQUIRE A FINE FACILITY IN ITS USE.[24]

The aforementioned piece in Scientific American wrote that "[I]legal copying, and the writing and delivering of sermons and lectures, not to speak of letters and editorials, will undergo a revolution as remarkable as that effected in books by the invention of printing." [25] Everyone, no matter what occupation or hobby, was benefited in one way or another. New conveniences previously un-thought of became realities, too, as evidenced by the letters one could have typed and printed for less than a dollar. [26] Even with these improvements typewriters brought to life, however, many still objected to many of the typewriter's uses. One prominent example would be that of typing letters-when the typewriter was first released to the public, people would be offended if they received a typed letter, thinking that the sender did not care enough about them to hand-write the letter. Even so, though, it simply could not go unnoticed that the typewriter had begun to seep into every part of peoples' lives, and generally improving that person's life as well.

Not only did they improve everyday life and increase workflow, typewriters created many new opportunities for women. Because of the typewriter's

ever-growing popularity in the late 1800s, women were given a new opportunity to enter business.[27]While women used to be limited to working in factories and sweatshops, factories with terrible and inhumane conditions, typewriters gave them new opportunities for clerical work, which usually provided higher pay in better working conditions.[28]Sholes himself soon acknowledged himself that his typewriter provided women with new freedoms, saying, “ I do feel I have done something for the women who have always had to work so hard. This will enable them more easily to earn a living...whatever I may have felt in the early days of the value of the typewriter, it is obviously a blessing to mankind, and especially to womankind.”[29]Sholes must certainly have felt very surprised at all of the changes his typewriter brought. No matter who his original target demographic was, his Type-Writer gave thousands of women new lives and new conditions, all the while affording them a springboard from which they could jump to even higher positions in society later on.[30]

The typewriter is one of the most revolutionary inventions in history. It brought speed to writers, productivity to offices, and convenience to workers. It brought jobs to women, letters to friends, and computers to people. While the journey in the creation of the typewriter was a long and arduous one, it was a very necessary one. It was created over centuries of work by countless people, people from inventors who improved upon the typewriter to investors who poured their heart and money into these machines. From writers who gave typewriters the public attention they needed to grow to hobbyists whose inventions led to a more versatile machine, each man adding onto the previous man's work. After a long

voyage, the typewriter finally met its purpose as it made its way into the lives of every man and woman. Today, everyone uses a keyboard of some sort. Nearly every one of those keyboards is formatted in Sholes's QWERTY layout, and every one of those keyboards includes Hammond's shift key. The type-writing machine, though very much forgotten today, still lives in nearly everything man-made, from the keyboards on our laptops to the text on our magazines produced by type-writing machines all around the world.