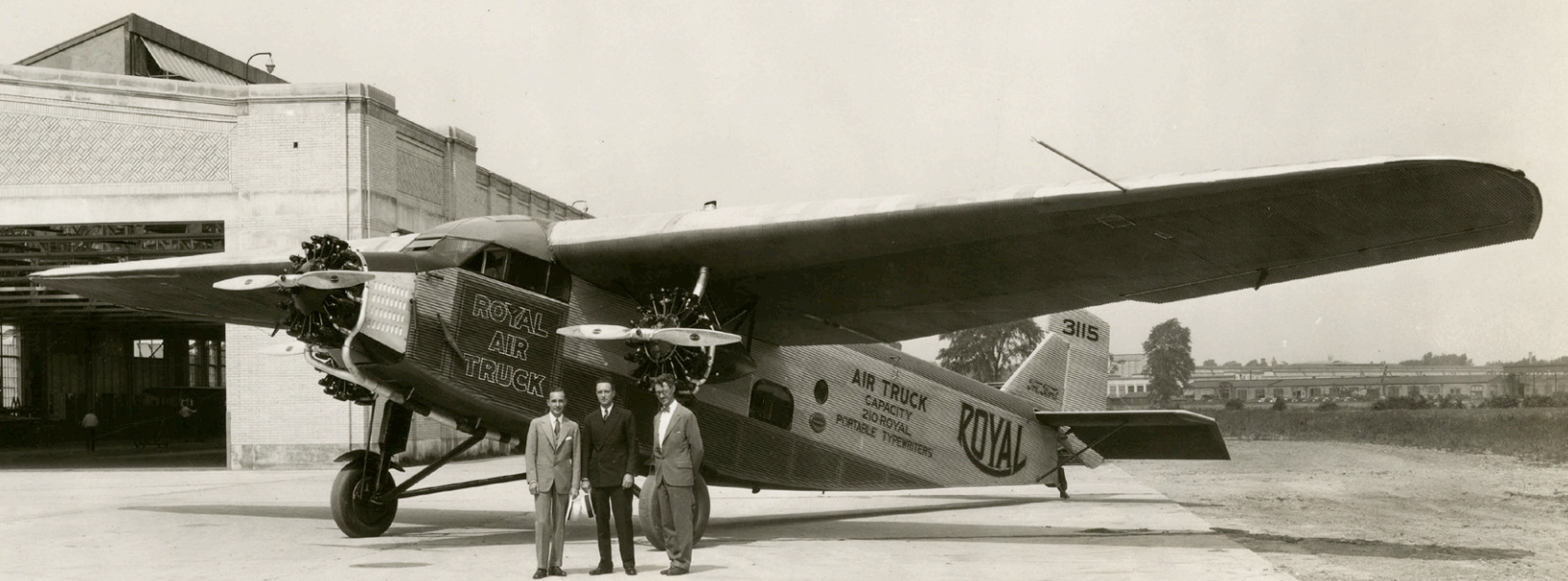




ETCetera

Journal of the Early Typewriter Collectors' Association
No. 124 • Spring 2019



Portables by Parachute

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On the Cover

Edsel B. Ford, Richard E. Byrd, and William B. Stout with Royal Typewriter's Ford Tri-Motor 4-AT-8, 1927. Dearborn, Michigan, 1 Aug. 1927. Accession #189, Log 4504 (84.1.1660.P.189.4504/THF135655). Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.



Editor's Notes

I HAVE A SIMPLE TEST FOR WHETHER A typewriter publication is a good one: does it excite me? Does it stimulate my dreams and desires? Does it make me want to find, restore, or use a special typewriter that I hadn't been dreaming of before?

By that test, I believe you're holding a great issue of *ETCetera*. You'll learn about the Daugherty, the pioneering frontstroke machine; the proportional Ideal, which simulates fine German printing; and the exquisite Hughes Typograph, a pioneering device from the mid-19th century.

And that's not all. In our cover story, Ian Brumfield will take you on a thrilling plane ride, delivering Royals from Hartford to Havana. And Brent Wiggins will introduce you to some of today's most dedicated typists.

Speaking of those typists, Joe Van Cleave is contributing a story to *Cold Hard Type*, and Linda Au is helping to design and produce the collection. This is the project I mentioned in our last issue—an anthology of futuristic tales based on the premise that digital technology is decaying or has collapsed, and typewriters are back. My call for contributions was met by a flood of inquiries and a strong set of submissions. With a bit of luck, the collection will be available around the time our next issue reaches you.

My own story for the collection was drafted on a Hermes 8, a two-tone green Remington Noiseless Portable, a Royal KHM, and a MacBook Pro; I plan to type the final version on a Woodstock N. Without giving away the plot, I'll say that it was inspired in part by various disturbing trends in our contemporary use of digital devices. I can't understand why millions of people are voluntarily putting "smart speakers" in their homes—devices that constantly listen to

you and analyze your speech, searching for opportunities to make you ever more dependent on would-be-monopolistic corporations. For some disabled people, a voice-activated digital assistant is helpful, but for the average user, surely the risks outweigh the advantages—especially at a time when there is so much disinformation, deception, and fraud afoot in the digital world. It's my honest belief that nearly everyone who currently owns a smart speaker—or is owned by one—would be much better off with an honest, self-contained, mechanical device that waits for you to act, that responds to your touch, and that helps you express yourself while never putting words in your mouth. Let's see... where could we ever find a machine like that?



Which reminds me of my favorite passage from Tove Jansson's *Finn Family Moomintroll*:

"A machine for finding things out," said the Snork, "a machine that tells you whether things are right or wrong, good or bad."

"That's too difficult," said the Hobgoblin, shaking his head, "I can't manage that."

"Well, in that case I should like a typewriter," said the Snork. ■

Facebook's Typewriter Collectors

BY BRENT WIGGINS

APPLE SAYS “THINK DIFFERENT,” BUT THE company rolls out the same thing every year. Facebook says “Move fast with stable infra” and Google says “Do the right thing,” when just moments ago they said “Move fast, break things” and “Don’t be evil.” Amazon is the “earth’s most customer-centric company”? Buying and using the newest technology has become more a necessity than a luxury.

You know nothing about your computer, only the people who took a bite of the Apple do. You decide to Google the answer instead, but there is one more thing, and a googol of things, you did not know. Self-conscious about your digital dependence and ineptitude, you turn to the familiar faces of Facebook. There you find digital detox groups, pen pal groups, and a group of typists who swim against that trending digital tide. People who love living off the grid but get back on it frequently enough to introduce the virtual to reality. 5,000 members strong, including five typists we’ll meet within these pages, this is the Antique Typewriter Collectors Group.

No Average Joe

YOU GO TO EBAY AND PURCHASE A TYPEWRITER on instinct. It arrives undamaged but dirtier than a bad reputation. You never had to clean a computer before and if you did, it happened behind a curtain at an Apple Store. You doubt the store’s technicians can defrag a typewriter, so you call on the best customer service you know. The man from the New Mexico desert sits in front of your YouTube screen and kindly assures you with a fireside chat. After a good dusting, greasing, and scrubbing, the machine types everything under the sun, and beckons everyone under the sun.

“My family has been here in the East Mesa since 1903, before Albuquerque and



Joe Van Cleave

New Mexico were a city and a state,” Joe Van Cleave said, the man from the desert with an adobe rose complexion and a voice fit for radio.

Joe’s first memory of a typewriter is of his mother’s machine, when he was five years old. “She went to the kitchen and I stood on the chair with the typewriter on the table. I couldn’t read but I had matched the letters or their shapes on the page with the ones on the keyboard. I remember my mother praising me for typing the same sentence she had typed.”

People know Joe from his YouTube channel, the home of his long-running series on typewriters. “One of the good things about having a collection of typewriters is if you only had one machine, and it was finicky and it had issues, then you might be less than satisfied with typewriters,” Joe ponders. His channel, he says, is an open forum about the history of typewriters, how they work, how to fix them, and what creative potential they hold for us.

The typewriters he uses the most are a Brother Webster XL-747, a Royal Mercury, and a Royal Quiet De Luxe. “I like an elite machine, twelve characters per inch. I don’t have to use the carriage return quite as often. The other thing I like to use is rolls of paper in the spirit of Jack Kerouac.”

He notes the deceit of “user-friendly” digital technology: “When you have a black box with microscopic transistors and software, you don’t know how it really works. It’s really wanting to use you as a product to gain information and sell that; at least network technology seems to be that way. Typewriters are transparent, they’re not trying to be purposely deceptive.” The typewriter, he says, is more than a conversation piece, it is a tool that is a means of conversation itself. Likewise, his videos are conversations about his personal perspective on life, as well as how-to demonstrations.

LET’S MEET ANOTHER FOUR MODERN typists who hang out on Facebook.

Robert Urban is the author of three books including *101 Awesome Things To Do With Your Child & Other Musings Of A Divorced Dad* and is a former Marine with a doctorate in environmental science from Longwood, Florida. He is now the founder of his internet marketing company, PaperBoat Media.

He says “there is a lot of modern obsolescence,” and believes that people are trying to be like hares when they should instead be like tortoises.

“There’s an anonymity to social media and our devices make communication

more convenient but less sympathetic and empathetic. We forget that a human is behind those devices.”

Robert continues to believe in the design and ingenuity of the typewriter.

“I think the number one thing in sales, in relationships, even education, is: how good of a storyteller can you become? While we’re slowing down with typewriters, it forces us to slow down with other technology.”

Robert’s next book, *Christmas Gorilla*, is scheduled for Amazon this winter. He hopes to make it a part of American folklore.



Grant Andrews

Grant Andrews is a novice collector from Southwestern Ontario, Canada, who works in a lumber yard by day and writes fiction by night. The first typewriter he owned was a Brother Charger 11.

“Six or seven months ago, I found myself losing focus as I tried to write at my computer. There was always too much to do. Typewriters’ independence from electricity also struck me.”

He speaks matter-of-factly about his machines and the digital landscape.

“My typewriters are tools first and foremost. Secondly, they are appreciated as triumphs of design and human ingenuity. Digital media is immortal and bodiless. Analog technologies have finite, mortal bodies and memories within those bodies. I think that the slight trend back toward analog technology is rooted in that.”

He believes that typewriters and computers are equals as tools for writing, but typewriters are meant for “pure stream of consciousness” and computers are for revision.

Grant jokes that the number of typewriters he would like to own “fluctuates between three and three hundred,” but he has six now and is looking for a possible ten, one for each finger.



Heidi (right) presents the award for “Most Mistakes” to her mother (center) in the typing contest at her last type-in, co-hosted by Paul Lundy (left), owner of Bremerton Office Machine Co. and hosted by Don Feldman of Typewriter Fever.

Heidi Newitt Lewis lives in Kingston, Washington and works in office administration. She has a degree in English literature and has taught English for nine years to adults in Switzerland, the place where her typewriter collecting habit started.

She first learned about the Antique Typewriter Collectors from Paul Lundy, the owner of Bremerton Office Machine Company.

Her first typewriter was her mother’s IBM Selectric II before she bought a Royal Royalite for college. She collects manuals only and has 35 at the moment alongside a small library of 600 books, a 1929 Singer treadle-operated machine, vinyl records, and classic cars.

“There’s something about the physical connection to the action—feeling the metal joints moving and working. That keeps you present in the moment. It’s transcendent.”

Heidi is now the creator of her own local typewriter group, Puget Sound Typewriter Enthusiasts, which can be found on Facebook and in the Seattle area.



Linda types the first drafts of her books every year for NaNoWriMo on her IBM Selectric II.

Linda M. Au is from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University. One of her typecast entries about her first type-in can be

found in Richard Polt’s analog field guide, *The Typewriter Revolution*.

She believes the typewriter is the bridge for equality:

“Sharing something as unique as a love of typewriters allows this diverse group of people to come together and ignore their differences completely. Who knew something so specific would let us each be so broadly accepting of each other? Sure, typewriters aren’t going to usher in world peace, but honestly, it’s nice to get excited about something that isn’t going to break down into an all-out war over beliefs. Well, unless you start asking people what they think of the Hermes 3000.”

Linda installs a new film ribbon in her IBM Selectric II, ready for her fifteenth NaNoWriMo. Readers can learn more about Linda in issue 120 of *ETCetera*.

“WE ARE TOOLMAKERS,” JOE SAYS, “AND SO WE ARE STORYTELLERS. That’s why we collect so many typewriters; it’s the haptics, how the typewriter feels and makes us feel.”

If he could go back, Joe says he would make the machines more colorful and “writer-friendly” with different keyboard layouts and different options for characters on the keys and typebars, similar to Smith-Corona’s Changeable Type.

Similarly, he thinks there is a demand and niche market for distraction-free technology, like the AlphaSmart Neo and FreeWrite word processors, but, he says, they are not building the right kind of alternative typewriter.

“The problem with computers is they’re a universal, general, information-processing device. You can make them do almost anything you want. They’re the jack of all trades, master of none, and with software and the internet, there’s more manipulation than creation happening.”

Joe says that the typewriter can be manufactured better than the copycats, like the We R Memory Keepers Typecast Typewriter.

“For the typewriter, most parts have to be manufactured in a factory, you can’t just 3D print everything the same way. You have to market it well as a single-use device, a specialist technology, and sell it for a high enough price that represents a quality machine.”

He loves the newfound interest in typewriters but feels it inadvertently is

destroying them. “People don’t always buy locally,” he explains, “and because of that, they risk receiving a damaged typewriter from poor shipping.” Buying locally and type-testing before you buy are his suggestions.

Joe and his fellow typewriter collectors share their closing thoughts on the lasting impact of the analog machine.

Robert types of a future still up in the air for typewriters. “A lot of enthusiasts repair their own but there’s an expiration date, just not any time soon, not with this nostalgic boom for it right now,” he says.

Grant types a bittersweet hello and goodbye. “The computer lets me say whatever I want, whenever I want to. It’s limitless to the point where it might as well have a warp drive. I personally don’t think that people will come back to the typewriter as a culture. It may well remain a hobbyist or enthusiast item from here until the end of time. I think that 3D printing might have some effect on the longevity of existing typewriters by printing new and spare parts, and that is exciting to me.”

Heidi types a steadfast affirmation. “Analog technology lasts far longer than digital, at least in the current digital landscape. Most people ignore the fact that computers fail constantly, that they lose data, or change format and become unreadable. Books made of paper or vellum can last millennia. Typewriters that are a hundred years old can work like new, or be brought back almost from the dead.”

Linda types a moderate view for the future of typewriters. “I don’t think society is headed offline any time soon—we’ve come too far for that—but I do think people will start to temper their constantly online states. They’ll become a little more thoughtful about their time on the internet, a little more deliberate. I think the knee-jerking to being always online will settle down at some point. That’s when the typewriter will shine again.”

Joe rolls the platen, lifts the paper bail, relieves the pressure on the paper release lever, and pulls out and reads his inked thoughts.

“What if there was a typewriter delivery service? I can imagine almost crowd-sourcing this, the way Uber works. Drivers get paid extra to safely deliver your typewriter. I see the typewriter as an alternative technology to word-processing and compulsive or instant editing. It’s from an era with that phase of undistracted writing, where we gave ourselves time to think. I’ve always said that the bottleneck in the whole writing process is not the writing technology, it’s always what’s going on between your ears. It’s finding the right words, finding that creative place to be in, that’s really the limit. The speed of typing is irrelevant, it doesn’t matter how fast you can type. It’s really about how deeply you can create.”

You glare back at the computer. Without it, you never would have known these anachronists. You also realize that the computer never blinks. The tabs, the

links, the webpages, the programs, the notifications, all of it is so bottomless and demanding. A sinking feeling comes over you, and then, another click. The computer finally blinks. The typewriter sees you reach for a paper, feed the page to its platen, and with ease, type. ■



Grant’s Olympia SM9



Heidi’s Lettera 32

Portables by Parachute

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The Ideal Proportions for Fraktur Acknowledgements (cont. from page 12)

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