Ephemera by Peter Weil

MARKETING THE SHOLES AND GLIDDEN TYPEWRITER

This little jingle published in Tarbell’s 1875 trade catalog is a small part of the body of evidence that shows how the first fifteen years of the creation of the typewriter industry were paralleled by and made ultimately successful through the gradual identification of the product’s market and the development of more sophisticated and varied advertising aimed at it. In honor of the 140th anniversary of the manufacturing of Sholes and Glidden Type Writers by E. Remington 1.

1. Martin Howard collection. The jingle probably was authored by D. Tarbell for his 1875 trade catalog cited below. Tarbell himself apparently began as an agent for Ingers and became a regional agent for eastern New York. Later, he added northern Pennsylvania to his territory. The catalog appears to have been composed of carbon copy pages that were typed on a Sholes and Glidden. Also, please note that all images are of items in the author’s collection except for those specifically attributed to collections owned by others.

2. This column was made possible with the great assistance of Bert Kirschbaum. Further essential support was provided by Gale Burbano, Dennis Clark, Jim Dux, Thomas Furtig, Martin Howard, Al Machka, and Herman Price. I also want to thank Cornelia Weil for her editorial assistance.

3. The issue of the use or non-use of the hyphen between the words “Type” and “Writer” is a historically complex one. Branding in the time of the early marketing of the Sholes and Glidden typewriters was relatively unsophisticated by today’s standards. Clarity as to the use of a hyphen only appears fairly late in the history, especially after 1882. Thus, after an initial use of both forms by the first overall agents, Desmonor, Yost and Company, in 1870-72 and Locke Yost and Barnes in 1876-77, the predominant national and regional distributors usually did not consistently use the hyphen in advertising until 1882, when Wyckoff Seams and Benedict (WSB) took over marketing and finally ownership (1886) of “The Type-Writer.” In contrast, local agents commonly used both forms until WSB relatively standardized the use of the hyphen in national and most local agents’ marketing.

4. This early, square-keyed example is in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History collection. The images were taken in 2012 by Bert Kirschbaum and his daughter and generously shared with me.


The birth of the typewriter industry previously has been celebrated as an historical event, a reassertion of Remington’s mythical charter as the true creator of the writing machine, and as a commemoration of the creation of American industrial culture. For example, Remington marked the 50th anniversary most elaborately in 1923 through several gala events, floridly documented, in several publications, including its own Remington Notes.
Twenty-five years later, in 1948, the company again recognized the founding event through the distribution of this lapel pinback and publications and news releases.

Perhaps also commemorating the same event, a benchmark in popular culture recognizing the introduction of The Type-Writer and its meanings is the 1947 film "The Shocking Miss Pilgrim." In the film, the primary character (played by Betty Grable) is an early typist student of the Sholes and Glidden who rises to become an important staff member of a shipping office staffed otherwise by men (see lobby card, right) and a vigorous proponent of women's rights.

Remington's manufacturing of the first examples of the Sholes and Glidden was not followed by sales until March, 1874, when one of the first machines of an original order of 25,000 was delivered to James Densoer, president of the marketing firm of Densoer, Yost and Co. (see envelope below) and the most powerful of the owners of The Type Writer Company, a corporation that then held the patents and ultimate rights to the machine. The first sales of significant numbers of the Type Writer were initiated the next month by the sale of all or most to Western Union in Chicago. Between 1873 and the end of 1874, approximately 550 machines were manufactured by Remington. There were at least three versions of the design that were manufactured during this first sixteen-month period. They were most obviously distinguished by their carriage return mechanisms, one of which was a cable that was manually pulled down on the right side of the machine, as illustrated in the photograph of the early square-keyed model. This was quickly dropped in favor of a cable. The lobby card is cropped to highlight Miss Pilgrim's use of the Sholes and Glidden.

8. The letterhead is from the Herman Price collection. The date of the envelope is May 23, 1875, about a year after Densoer received his first machine.

9. Engraving from The Welcome Magazine [UK], no. 281, ca 1875. The photo was taken by Bert Kerschaumberger.

The economic conditions and the consequent problem of selling the already-manufactured and growing inventory of new and exchanged repaired machines were addressed by a complex, dual-centered marketing organization. Ideally, according to 1873 and 1874 contracts with Remington, Densoer and other owners of The Type Writer Company controlled the marketing of the product. But, in practice, there were two primary centers: Densoer, Yost and Co., and E. Remington and Sons. Adding to the confusion about marketing and names, James Densoer early on left the Densoer, Yost and Co. and was replaced by Edward D. Luxton, but the name of the marketing firm was unchanged. This firm, which lasted until the fall of 1875, sold through a variety of regional (for example, Western Electric in the midwest and Tarbell for eastern New York state) and local agents (for example, see leaving the factory was quite low, a characteristic that constantly worried Densoer, especially when he discovered as late as early 1877 that each machine was being hand built by Remington employees piece by piece.

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cover of the ca. 1874 trade catalog cover for Barber and Barron in New York City and this July, 1875, ad for Soule, Thomas and Wentworth in St. Louis. Paralleling the marketing structure of Densmore Yost and of its next two successor central agencies—Locke, Yost and Bates (late 1875—early 1878), on the one hand, and Fairbanks and Co. (1878–1881), on the other—was E. Remington and Sons (often as Remington “Arms” or “Armory” and “Remington Sewing Machine Co.”) and its own distributors. Remington’s own conceptualization before 1882 is well-represented in the 1877 look plate opposite in which its arms and farm equipment are accompanied, near the very bottom, by what it then labeled “The American Type Writer.” This low marketing priority concerning commercial firms is emphasized even more dramatically in this 1875 ad.11

Note the miniscule mention of the Type Writer near the bottom. Remington also had regional distributors, and we see the same pattern of low priority for the Type Writer repeated in the below 1874–75 business card for Remington’s western regional distributor.

11. The “Barron” of Barber and Barron was Densmore’s step son.

12. Bert Kerschbaumer collection. The ad is from The American Agriculturist, November, 1875.

Local distributors for Remington were also appointed by the company and its regional agencies. For example, Hoig and Mittelberg, a Remington Arms local agent, distributed the Sholes and Glidden in St. Louis and did so at virtually the same time—1875—that Soule’s local agency of the other network was selling it in the same city. What is exceptional about this agency is that it is a Remington Arms dealer that gave priority in advertising to the Type Writer and specifically names it as “Sholes and Glidden.”

By the end of 1875, the Densmore, Yost and Co. national distributorship was dissolved and replaced by Locke, Yost, and Bates. When they began, a total of 1,850 Sholes and Gliddens had been manufactured, and by March, 1876, in spite of continuing challenges in the U.S. and European economies, all of those and at least 200 more had been sold. This success in clearing inventory took place without advertising that was related to any clear sizable market. For example, the first Locke, Yost and Co. ad, published in December, 1875, presented their $125 product primarily as a Christmas gift for children (see ad below, one of at least two different ones with the same theme in that month), a cost equivalent to nearly $2,600 in today’s dollars.

In another of their ads published only a few months later, the target was somewhat more focused, but commercial firms were still secondary.13 In 1876, the full year for Locke and company, 1,500 more were produced (i.e., the approximate last serial number was 3350). Some of this relative sales
success may have stemmed from the firm's growing network of local dealers. At least one of which, Hanson, Ayers and Co. of San Francisco, was an innovator in the early use of trade cards like that below to promote the Type Writer.

The year was also one in which the company products were marketed at the national Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia through the direct management of John W. Bain, another one of the Locke and company's local distributors. Sadly, participation in this sales initiative for the Sholes and Glidden, which was popular with the crowds drawn to the display's typing of letters and envelopes to send to friends and relatives as souvenirs, failed to win the positive attention of the judges who awarded medals and the publicity they could bring. Instead, they saw its Russian competitor's design, the Alisoff, as a much better and precise writing machine. This turn of events was followed in 1877 with the production in Iliion of only about 500 more machines (meaning, the last Sholes and Glidden produced in that year was approximately serial number 3850).

This drop in production stemmed from several factors, one of which was an unsold inventory that constrained further manufacturing. The company did advertise the machine more vigorously, but the primary focus of the ads, the intended market for Sholes and Glidden, continued to be diffuse and prioritized as a relatively small set of groups—clergymen and lawyers—just as in the earlier Denison and Remington advertising, were near or at the bottom of the list. Several sources indicate that this lack of clear identification of businesses as the primary market for the Type Writer was the result of the marketers' recognition of the limitations of the industrial world's economic problems and not their failure to identify the market. However, a very different explanation for the weak sales to commercial houses was offered in retrospect by the leading players in marketing the Sholes and Glidden. In that perspective, the marketers did focus on the business market and failed because of the conservatism of business leaders. From the end of the 19th century on, the directly involved proponents of this view often blamed the non-progressive businesses to whom they tried to market for the low sales. The sellers of the Type Writer claimed that they had tried to market to "mercantile houses" and other firms but had encountered rigid ideas and firm resistance to acquiring the new technology. Remington and other companies later used this alleged radical conservatism of the 1870s businesses as a metaphor for the dangers for businesses resisting claimed technological progress, as in the below Hammett-Bond ad from 1931, in which the men are quoted as saying "What! Write a LETTER on that new-fangled thing?"

Notwithstanding the problems for Locke, Yost and Bates, 1877 was a vital year for the future of the marketing of the Sholes and Glidden and the success of the typewriter industry. Key changes affecting that future were technological ones. First, a shift by Remington to mass production of parts made the Type Writer somewhat more dependable and easier to repair because much more of the components were better made and becoming truly interchangeable. An equally important change was embodied in a lever attached to the right end of the carriage that apparently was originally intended to more effectively control vertical spacing, but early on was seen as a simpler device to serve as a carriage return. The exact month in 1877 when this device was first introduced is unknown, but it appears to have been mid-year. Initially, the lever was added to Sholes and Glidden that also had the carriage return and wheel on the right side. One surviving example with this

14. The Saturday Evening Post, February 14, 1931. A similar illustration in the 1923 Remington Notes is accompanied by a similar quote attributed to overly-conservative business men.
exact arrangement is serial number 3645. Moreover, the new front spacing lever soon completely replaced the side lever and wheel as a carriage return. As noted by W.O. Wyckoff in a November, 1877, letter, "We are taking the side levers off of all our machines, and putting the front levers in their place..." The latter part of the year also included setting up the Ilion plant to produce the new shift machine, the No. 2.

In the midst of this technological change, the weak sales year convinced Remington and the Type Writer Co. that a new distribution system was needed. The idea was to ask a firm with a successful marketing network to take over the non-Remington marketing, and the selected firm, Fairbanks and Co. (also operating regionally and locally as "Fairbanks, Brown and Co." and "Fairbanks Scale Warehouses") began sales of the writing machine in early 1878 (see March, 1878 ad above and accompanying business card). Ironically, as was the case with Remington's own marketing of the machine, the new distributor's own products usually took precedence over the sale of the Type Writer, diverting it from emphasizing the sale of the Sholes and Glidden. However, now, in this and other early 1878 advertising, the term "Improved" is used to describe the machine with the new front lever carriage return and the new plain right side (as in the drawing on the business card).

During the first half of the year, more than a dozen additional technological changes were made to the basic Sholes and Glidden design, and the machine was re-labeled "The Perfected Type-Writer" (see 1878 catalog cover above). Inside this catalog, the machine also is referred to for the first time as "The No. 1 Type-Writer." In addition to the kinds of advertising already presented, Fairbanks turned to elaborately-designed trade cards embodying the Aesthetic art style that was strongly influenced by western interpretations of Japanese art (see example of the fan-shaped trade cards below). By 1879, Fairbanks had shifted its typewriter marketing to emphasize the new shift machine, which, like the Sholes and Glidden, it called "The Perfected Type-Writer" (see ad below). In this mixed context of creativity and an emphasis on marketing the shift machine at $125, Remington and Fairbanks first in 1879 cut the price of the new-outraged and slow-selling No. 1 from $125 to $100 and, again, down to an unspecified amount (see early 1881 Fairbanks catalog cover opposite).

Before the middle of 1881, E. Remington and Sons formed a new "Type Writer Department" and took over primary central responsibility for the marketing of what was by then "The Remington Type-Writer" along with the other writing machine models it was producing (see 1881 ad at bottom). By 1882, another dramatic economic downturn began, and Remington had far more challenging problems than the selling of its "prodigal child" writing machine. A new company, Wyckoff, Searman, and Benedict (WSB) was quickly formed by the senior people who best knew and believed in the technology, and it took over all marketing in August, 1882 (see ca 1884 business card opposite top). In an attempt to

Relief from the Drudgery of Writing.
adapt to the harsh economic conditions, the new firm virtually immediately cut the price of the Sholes and Glidden-based machine (now called the “Remington Type-Writer No. 1”) to $70 and also cut the prices of the No. 2 and No. 4 (see ca 1883 trade catalog). Now the primary market was seen as businesses and WSB’s machines were prominently touted as “the cheapest clerk a business man can hire.”

By early 1883, a further price cut to the again re-named “Remington Standard Type-Writer No. 1” was initiated, bringing the price down to $60 (with table) and $57.50, less than half the machine’s original price.

With the economy remaining in the dumps and primary emphasis on selling the No. 2, the company no later than 1885 renamed the Sholes and Glidden-based machine “The Remington Standard Type-Writer No. 1 (Old Style)” and further cut its price to $50 with a desk and $47.50 alone. At this point, Remington was nearly bankrupt, and, in an unsuccessful attempt to save itself, sold the Type Writer factory, the use of the Remington name, and all rights to the its writing machines to WSB. The deal was completed in 1886. The same year, the Sholes and Glidden design. Of these, approximately a hundred are thought to survive. The highest known confirmed serial number for an unmodified Sholes and Glidden, a Perfected version, is 4978. Based on the sources that discuss production numbers, this machine would have been built in 1878.

As has been illustrated above, producer-related marketing continued through 1885. Moreover, it appears that, beginning with the “Remington Type-Writer No. 1” in 1883, the serial number sequencing was reset and begun from number 1. The records of the Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) include three designated “Remington # 1” (as opposed to designated “Sholes and Glidden”) machines that include the serial numbers 11 and 815. The serial number of the third Remington is not identified.”

The post-1878 marketing history discussed above and the additional information from the MPM are the basis for suggesting that at least another thousand machines were made that directly trace their roots to the Sholes and Glidden design, making for about a total of about 6000.

There may be far more uncounted surviving Type Writers, perhaps rescued by descendants of original owners, private collectors, typewriter dealers, and museums. One of the last photographs taken of the Sholes and Glidden in actual use, as opposed to those of demonstrations at companies and museums, appeared in the Scientific American, January 1, 1898 on p. 3. It shows a typing class at the New York State Reformatory using a total of six Sholes and Gliddens. Where are these and those like them now? Such a picture of multiples of so rare and historically important a typewriter offers many of us hope for fulfilling our dream. As Tarbell’s doggrel might now declare:

ROUGE YOURSELF AND GO AND FIND A SHOLES AND GLIDDEN WRITING MACHINE!

17. Note that the name “Perfected” was dropped from all advertising of WSB machines.