

The Shimer Typewriter

by Martin Howard

The Shimer typewriter came out of the forge of late 19th century American industry. It glimmered, and then faded away as the 20th century arrived.

The Shimer typewriter even in its day was a great rarity. Emilio Budan, an Italian count who wrote a history of typewriters in 1902 (*Le Macchine da Scrivere dal 1714 al 1900*), mentioned the Shimer only in passing: "Eclipse, Shimer, Travis are machine names whose existence we have known only by the fact that manufacturers of accessories sometimes were asked for ribbons to adapt for these machines." (quote and translation, Jos Legrand)

Surprisingly, the Shimer typewriter is included in the alphabetical catalogue published by the F.S. Webster Company in 1898 entitled "Typewriters of all kinds and our galaxy of stars" (author's coll.). What is said about the Shimer in this very rare catalogue is both puzzling and revealing: "We had supposed that this typewriter would have been placed upon the market some time since, as we submitted sample ribbons for use upon it, something over a year ago. Not having heard from it however, and upon addressing an inquiry to the manufacturers, we have a letter from them in which they say that it is yet with-held from market, for reasons the nature of which they are not at liberty to state."

Today the Shimer typewriter is all but unknown since so few are left and so little information exists in the literature. It survives in passing references to its similarity to the Remington up-stroke machine and to its failure in the marketplace. In 2011, a new Shimer typewriter (author's coll.) was discovered, to bring the number known to seven, all in North America.

Model 2

		serial #
Casillo:	white keys, wood key levers, basket shift	79

Model 3 (as designated by collectors)

		serial #
Howard:	white keys, wood key levers, basket shift	25
Casillo:	white keys, wood key levers, basket shift	1088
Clark:	white keys, wood key levers, basket shift	1090
Clark:	black keys, metal key levers, basket shift	1162
Russo:	black keys, metal key levers, carriage shift	1204
Milton Museum, PA:		
	black keys, metal key levers, carriage shift	1235

How many were produced? There is no definitive answer but it is almost certain that after a few early machines, the serial numbers started at 1,000. As a parallel, all known Granville Automatic typewriters have serial numbers in the 5,000 range.



Martin Howard Collection

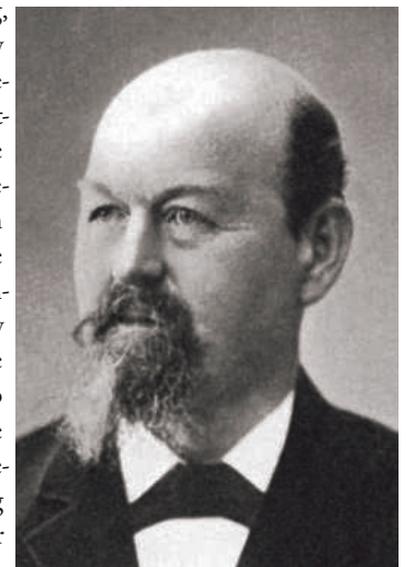
The Shimer Brothers

The Shimer family has a rich and well documented history. Samuel Shimer was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1837. He was raised and worked on the family farm until 1871 when, at the age of 34, he joined his brother George in Milton PA (120 miles away) to work at his lumber company, which he had started two years earlier.

The two brothers started to buy large tracts of land, where the timber was hauled to the lumber factory and cut into lumber. This was the beginning of the family business, which would evolve and grow to create great wealth for the Shimer family.

In 1873, in the small machine shop attached to the saw and planing mill, Samuel and George perfected a tool

that would have a profound effect on the family's business future and success. What they made was a 'Matcher Head', a pair of cutter heads that formed the tongue and grooves that were cut into the edge of boards for flooring, ceiling, and siding. They would develop a large selection of high quality cutter heads for a full range of profiles including baseboards and molding. When the sawmill burnt to the ground in 1880, the brothers took the opportunity to rebuild a large machine shop employing 75 men to focus their efforts on the cutter heads and other specialty products for planing mills. The Shimer cutter heads were the best on the market and were sold right across America and exported to many countries.



Samuel J. Shimer

In 1884 George retired and Samuel became the sole owner. In 1888 he brought his sons, Elmer and George, into the business

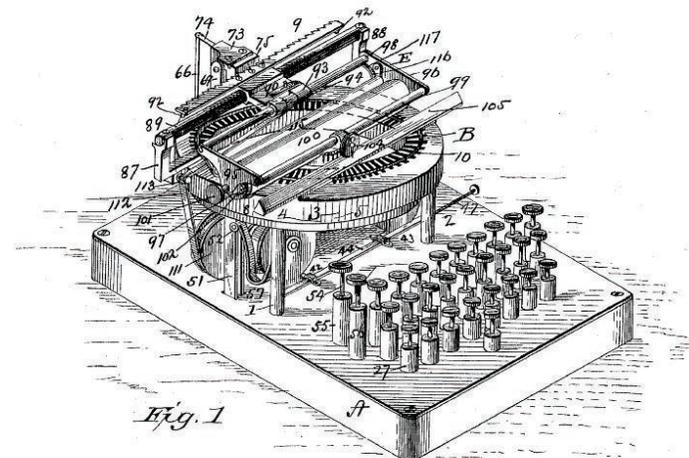
to form Samuel J. Shimer & Sons. The business continued to prosper. In 1889 Elmer invented a large and complicated machine to cut washers, which again would have tremendous success and bring further wealth to the family business. The business success and civic involvement made Samuel a notable citizen of Milton. "He is widely known and recognized as a gentleman of commendable enterprise and public spirit, as well as one of the most successful manufacturers of the West Branch Valley" (Bell's History of Northumberland 1891.)

Samuel and his two sons built large family homes next to each other, prominently positioned on the Susquehanna River in Milton. However, despite their success and comfortable lifestyle, their inventive minds did not rest.

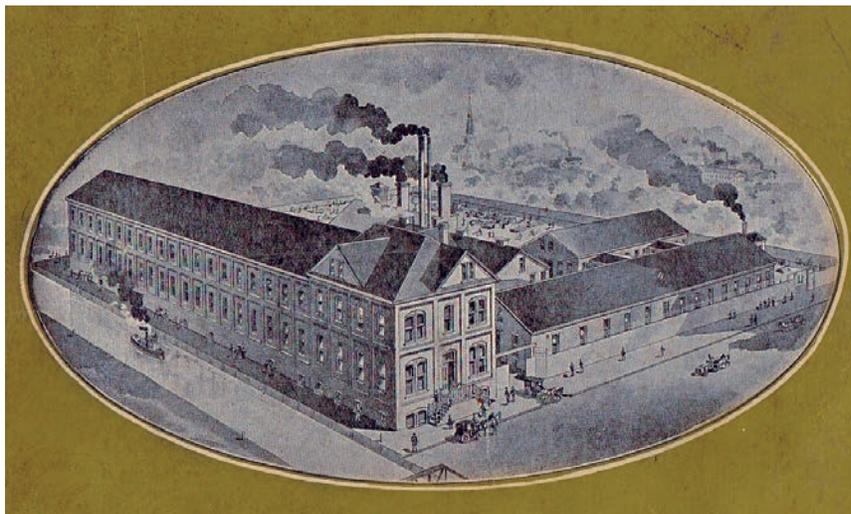
The Shimer typewriter

By the mid 1880s typewriters had become essential office machines and successful typewriter manufacturers were hard pressed to keep up with demand. With great wealth, mechanical ingenuity, and the means to build whatever they wanted, the Shimers were perfectly positioned to design and build a typewriter of their own. This was the challenge that Samuel Shimer and his sons found irresistible.

In 1891 the first patent (462,019) for the Shimer typewriter appeared.



This typewriter resembled the Yost typewriter of 1887. No model 1 Shimers are known to exist today. A dozen more patents would be granted through the 1890s, all for under-strike machines. Most of the patents name Elmer as the inventor but a few patents show



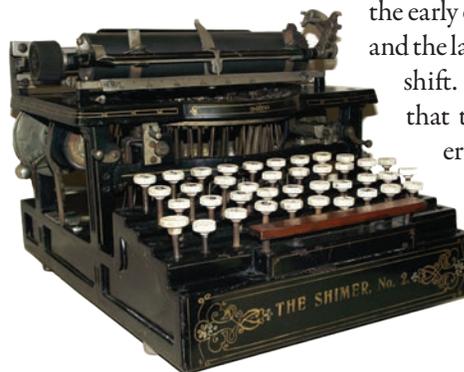
The Shimer factory as depicted on the back of the 1898 catalog.

Samuel and some show both Elmer and Samuel as the inventors. I can well imagine that this was a father and son project.

Of the known Shimers, no two are exactly the same. The development never ceased. The model 2, with a lower profile, has a different escapement from the model 3s. The early model 3 (#25) has the same carriage as model 2 but in an expanded

frame. Each Shimer typewriter was almost like a prototype but very well turned out. With so few surviving examples, one cannot say if they ever settled on a final design.

One of the main design differences with the model 3s, is that the early ones have a basket shift and the later ones have a carriage shift. It is interesting to note that the Rem-Sho typewriter is generally credited as



Shimer No.2.

Tony Casillo Collection

having the first basket shift, as mentioned in the 1896 patent (557,617). The Shimer though, in its original patent of 1891, clearly conveys the idea of

a basket shift. "By depressing the finger piece intended for shifting the type-bar ring from its normal position to bring a type-bar bearing a capital ... the proper type is imprinted on the paper."

Because the Shimer never achieved market success and is essentially unknown, the Rem-Sho is considered the first typewriter to have a basket shift. But the honor of the first typewriter to be made with this breakthrough shift idea should go to the Shimer typewriter. The Rem-Sho would be the first successful typewriter to offer the basket shift.

The Shimers had invented a design feature that would be seen on all 20th century typewriters. Ironically though, the later model 3s would



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have a carriage shift as seen on the under-strike Remington typewriters.

Other notable differences on the model 3s are in the frame profiles and in having either white (earlier models) or black keyboards.

The few Shimer typewriters that were sold appeared on the market in 1899. The only known advertisement of the Shimer typewriter appears in the 1900 Shimer general catalogue for cutter heads. The two-page display ad is placed on the last two pages of the catalogue. The text expounds on the quality construction of the machine but the illustrations are drab with no visual appeal for a prospective buyer.



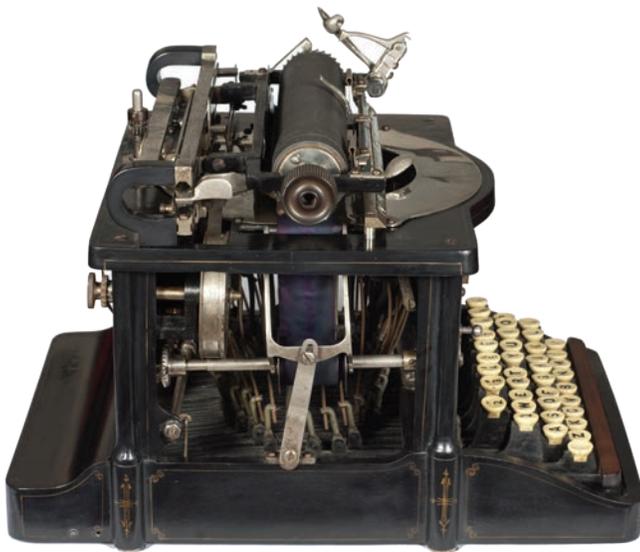
The Shimer factory as it appeared in the 1960s.

patenting a new machine and the tenacity to see it through to completion, even though measured market success eluded them. It is this very combination that produced so many great early typewriters that exist today.

The Shimer typewriter is a quality built machine

with some fine design ideas but, as an under-strike typewriter, it appeared far too late for commercial success. With other good under-strike typewriters, such as the Smith Premier and the revolutionary Underwood making their marks, there was no opportunity for the Shimer typewriter to become another great success story for the Shimer family. As for the collector's hope of finding more Shimer typewriters, that remains to be seen. ■

I wish to thank Tony Casillo, Jos Legrand, and Dennis Clark for their contributions and Norman Ball for so kindly proofing this article.



Above and right: Martin Howard Collection

(One can see the full advertisement and other images concerning the Shimer at my website - www.antiquetypewriters.com)

Samuel Shimer died in 1901. His son Elmer carried on, and obtained one final patent (739,728) in 1903 for a carriage feed mechanism.

The creation of the Shimer typewriter represents the desire and ingenuity of all inventors, the complexity of designing and

International Typewriter Collectors Convention

August 7-10, 2014, Milwaukee, Wisconsin **In Conjunction with the Milwaukee Public Museum**

- A day at the Milwaukee Public Museum: display of historically important typewriters from the museum's collection, lectures, & demonstrations.
- Auction of typewriters & related items. (Contact Gabe Burbano if you would like to include something.)
- Swap meet with fellow collectors
- A visit to Christopher Latham Sholes' grave site.

Host: Gabe Burbano, gburbano@optonline.net

Accommodations: Brookfield Suites Hotel & Convention Center, 1200 South Moorland Road, Brookfield, WI
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