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Objects: La Salle Stenotype Machine

1950s Stenotype Machine

Joe Strickland explains how to use a stenotype machine using the House Collection's 1950s model.
Interview recorded November 14, 2018

STRICKLAND: There's nothing electronic in this machine. There's a wheel in here with a ribbon that you ink. And there's still a little bit of ink coming out, which is kind of amazing to me. The keys on this machine are exactly like the keys on a modern machine now. So the shorthand that the person who wrote on this machine can write on a modern machine, an electronic machine. It probably won't translate because he hasn't worked out all of his conflicts with the homonyms and stuff. I'm going to turn it back. These keys are initial consonants. These keys over here are final consonants. And these four keys down here are the vowels.

So an easy word to write would be like "cat." "K-A-T." It's the sound of cat. Not the spelling of cat, right? So that's easy. It looks like cat. They used to call the SAT test "S-A-T." Because it looks "S-A-T" on the paper. It's when you start making combinations of letters. Like see these four keys? That's "G." So that looks like garbage to anyone who doesn't know shorthand. The other thing that's cool about the way shorthand works is not only are these final consonants sounds, but there are sounds like "shun," like convention. These two keys make the "shun" sound. There's even an "unction," like function. So you write "F-U-unction". So see how you're write—you're playing chords basically on the keyboard to make words. "House of Representatives." That's my House of Representatives like that. And it comes up "H-O-U-P-S," hopes. But it translates on the computer as House of Representatives. So anyway, that's how it works.

ETHIER: Great.

STRICKLAND: That's basically exactly the same, except now you have to take this paper and some poor schlub has to type that and translate the shorthand again. So you needed a well-trained stenographer. But then you also needed a well-trained transcriber who could read the steno, and then turn it into English and type it.