

The typewriter man

'ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT TYPEWRITERS IS THE STORIES THEY TELL.'

An Astoria man embraces his mania for all things typewriters and their cultural history

By MATT LOVE

I bet most people don't know that Astoria boasts one of the best typewriter museums in the country. It's pretty exclusive, and I believe I'm the only visitor so far.

The museum is the brainchild of Ray Montgomery, and it's not really a museum open to the public. Rather, it's a fantastic collection of 140 or so vintage, non-electric typewriters in his split-level home in the Peter Pan Park neighborhood of Astoria. Ray recently relocated to Astoria from New Jersey to live near his sister. He's retired after a long career as an aerospace engineer who worked for defense contractors.

Ray's mania for collecting typewriters began two years ago when he saw a vintage typewriter on display at Powell's Technical Bookstore in Portland. "I was hooked right there," he said.

From that moment on, Ray began acquiring typewriters from all over the country and has amassed an eclectic collection that features machines in different sizes, colors and designs. All of them are in good working order. The Remington Noiseless model from the 1940s is his favorite.

Ray contacted me after reading an article of mine about my type-in event during the Fort George Brewery's Festival of Dark Arts this past February. He invited me over to see his collection, and I agreed because I am a bit of collector myself.

I intended to stay only a few minutes but remained for well over an hour, marveling at his machines and listening to him speak with such passion and knowledge about all thing typewriters and their cultural history.

He truly put on a great show!

"One of the best things about typewriters," Ray told me, "is the stories they tell and how so many people have fond memories of using them or hearing a parent or grandparent typing away in the next room."

During my visit, I got to try a popular Hermes 3000 model from the 1960s, exquisitely manufactured by the Swiss. After a few strokes of the keys, I could not believe how buttery smooth it was to type with the machine. The sound it made in operation was music to my ears. I didn't want to stop! It made me want to fly home, immediately buy a Hermes, and write letters, drafts of articles, and maybe start a novel on it.

In recent years, typewriters have made something of a comeback, particularly with millennials. Typewriting enthusiasts from all over the country host type-in events in bookstores, cafes, libraries and bars where people reconnect to the old machines or try them out for the first time. "They will last forever," said Ray, "and you can keep writing by candle if the power goes out!" Ray also forgot to mention another benefit to typewriters: no upgrades or viruses — ever. Just new ribbons from time to time.

(Ray is looking for opportunities to make presentations about typewriters and display part of his collection in public places. Contact him at rhmontg0354@gmail.com for more information.)

Matt Love is the author/editor of 14 books, including "A Nice Piece of Astoria" and "The Great Birthright." His books are available at coastal bookstores or his web site, nestucaspitpress.com

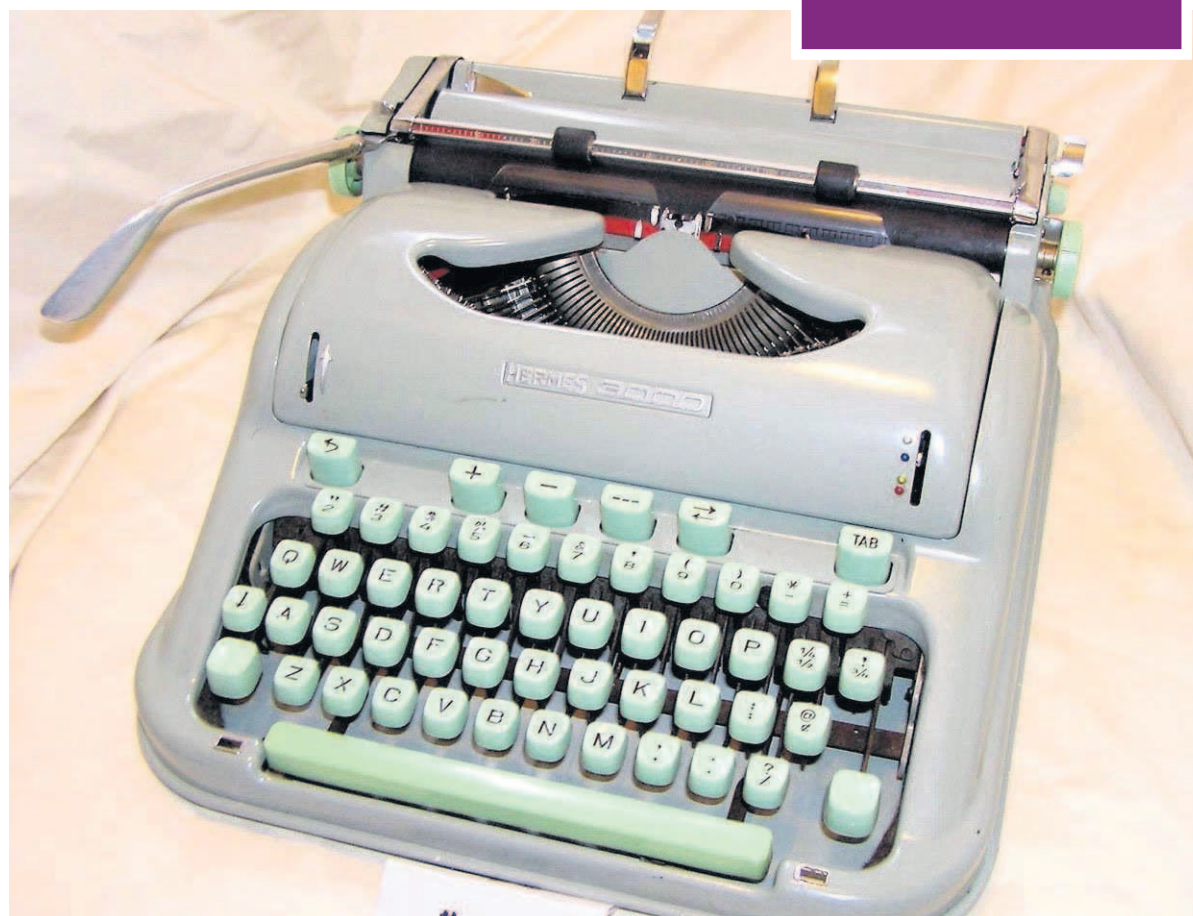


PHOTO BY MATT LOVE

First introduced in 1958, the Swiss-made Hermes 3000 typewriter was an instant success and widely popular in the U.S and around the world.

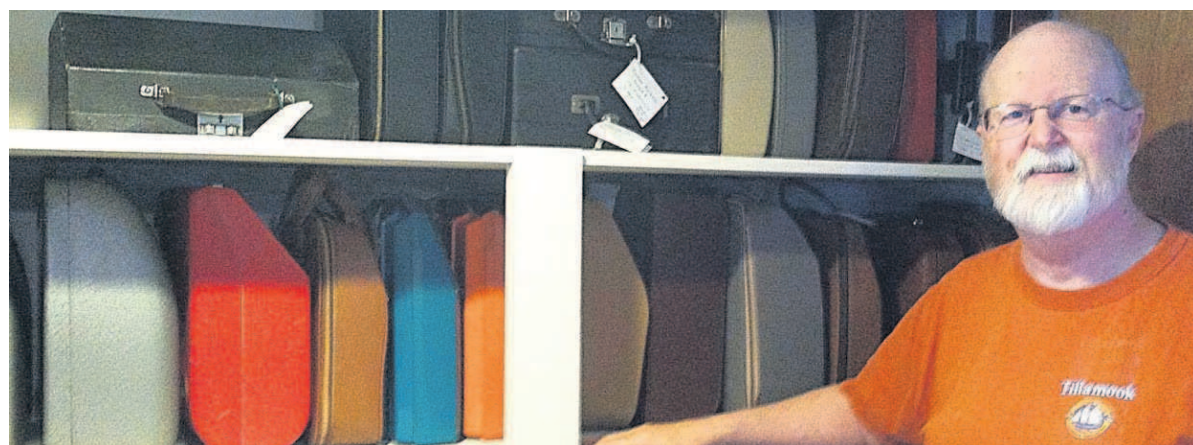


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Astoria man Ray Montgomery owns a collection of 140 vintage typewriters.