

# When hot type was high-tech

Mizzou alumni remember when typewriters were trendy, when slide rules ruled and when pilots and transistor radios wore leather jackets. Check out MIZZOU readers' recollections of gadgets from their college days.

Story compiled by Dale Smith  
Illustrations by Deborah Zemke

## I triple-dog-dare you

I was in J-School on election night in 1936, in those exciting days when we worked all night on the results and the next day's paper. The hand-counted votes came in a few at a time from reporters at the polls; we assembled them and answered calls from the public about their candidates. I was a 21-year-old redheaded girl, born and reared in a newspaper family and in school to learn to edit the *Gasconade County Republican* in place of my late father.

At some point during that particular night, someone told my fellow

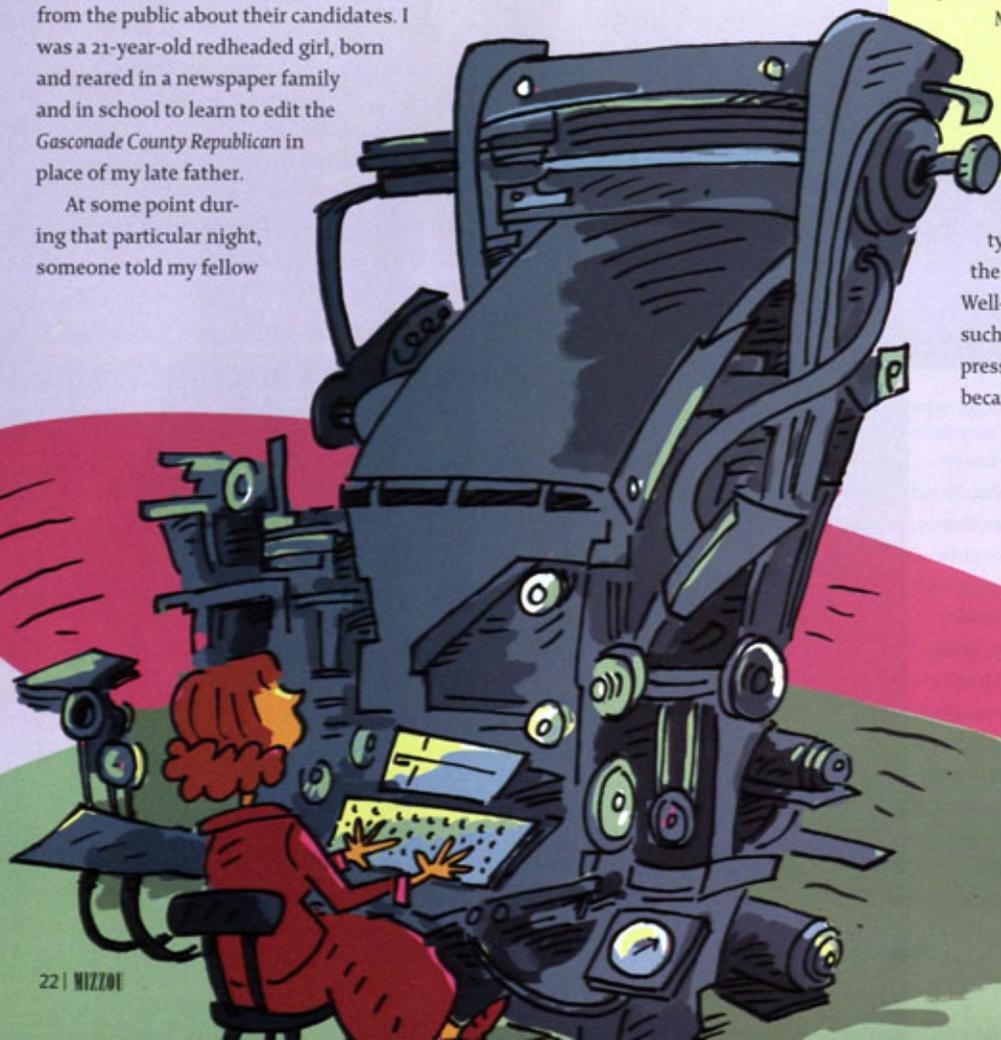
students that I could operate a linotype machine. No one believed it, and after much ado they dared me to use one of the machines. That wasn't easy because the printer's union allowed only its members to sit at a linotype. Some insisted that was

my way of bragging about something without having to prove it.

After quite a bit of negotiating, professors Sharp and Morelock finally made it possible for me to set a few lines. Much to everyone's surprise, I could operate the machine.

More to the surprise of the union operators, I was up and ready to repair the machine when it malfunctioned, and I had what was known as a squirt — a scar from a wound made when hot metal squirted out of a linotype onto my arm instead of onto the matrices that form the letters. Well-used linotypes regularly caused such scars. And yes, I could run a job press, too — not well perhaps, but if it became necessary.

Blanche Boyd Wolpers, BJ '37  
Poplar Bluff, Mo.



Dec. 7, 1941

Battery-operated radios were just coming on the scene when I arrived at Mizzou as a freshman in 1941. I had one in a leather case, and I heard the terrible news about Pearl Harbor on it. I took the radio to sociology class the next morning. The instructor stopped his lecture, and we listened to FDR's "Day of Infamy" speech. After that, they broadcast the "Star-Spangled Banner," and we all joined in.

Bill Bookman, BJ '44  
Columbus, Ohio



### Dousing Doc

This moist adventure happened at the height of a water-gun fad in 1947 (possibly 1948). Every self-respecting engineer was carrying one, fully loaded. One day, Ralph Scoriah — we called him Doc — came in to teach his thermodynamics class and announced that everyone should put their water guns up on his desk. So we did. After we all returned to our seats, Doc said, "Wait a minute, I'll be right back." Then he left the room. A few minutes later, he returned wearing a raincoat and toting two water guns, and he started blazing away at the class! Chaos ensued, as we all scrambled for our guns and started firing. When everyone was out of "ammunition," Doc restored order. Then, after banning water guns from the remainder of his classes, he pronounced the session cancelled.

Adolf P. Bahlkow, BS EE '49  
Sudbury, Mass.

### Ribald recording

Phil Chance was an engineering major and lived on the second floor of the ATO house in 1953–54 at the end of the hall right above the incoming telephone wires. Phil had the first wire recorder I had ever seen up close. I believe it was a Wollensack. Phil was a tinkerer with all things electronic and did what came naturally to him — he tapped into one of the incoming telephone lines.

Spider Miller was a physical education major and was taking an anatomy class. He was also well-known for folding his 6-foot 5-inch frame into one of the telephone booths and talking endlessly to his girlfriend.

These two universes came together with the help of the house mimic, Ron Lauder. Using the wire recorder, Phil made a recording of Spider telling his girlfriend about his day with a cadaver. Ron dubbed over some of Spider's words, turning an academic experience into an erotic one.

Soon, we were all gathered outside Phil's room laughing at the result of Ron's dubbing when Spider came up to the group from the rear. He was laughing as hard as the rest of us until suddenly he heard himself saying something he couldn't believe he would have ever said to his girlfriend.

I was standing right in front of him when he started yelling, "I didn't say that to her, did I?" He was hot about the incident but eventually cooled off. I'm sure that if he reads this, he'll laugh like the rest of us at our introduction to wire recorders.

Leon Wahlbrink, BA '58  
Osage Beach, Mo.



### Technology — not

Technology at MU between 1949 and 1953? You have got to be kidding. My parents did not own a car, so I arrived via Greyhound bus with one large piece of luggage and a “train case” for cosmetics.

Of course there were no cell phones. I lived in a barracks known as TD-5 converted to rooms for two. We had a lounge with a piano for our entertainment. Phone? There was one at the entrance desk where we received calls from our friends. The person on duty at the desk would shout down the hall for whomever the caller had requested. If we wanted to make a private call, we could use one of the two phone booths in the lobby.

For music, some people had small radios, maybe a phonograph, and there were jukeboxes to dance to at places where we hung out. In 1949, 45 RPM records were all the rage.

We had no TVs in dorm rooms or lounges, but Memorial Union had one that you could sometimes watch. We were better stocked for movie theaters. At one, for 25 cents you could see a movie and a vaudeville act. After the movies we could go to a drive-in restaurant for a snack. We also had pinball machines for amusement.

The library had a then-new electronic device called a facsimile machine that transmitted information. I don't recall any copy machines at Ellis, nor were there any computers for looking up materials, just the card catalog.

Some people had cars, but most of us walked everywhere in town. If you were lucky, you could get a ride home at spring break with someone who owned a car, rather than going by bus.

We did not have credit cards for getting cash at an ATM or for shopping. Instead, we had to keep our checkbooks balanced.

Lois J. Williams Swezey, BS Ed '53  
Kansas City, Mo.



### Easy now

In 1957, we sometimes wore slide rules on the belt like a six-shooter. During a test, the sound of a slide rule clattering on the floor told you who was freaking out.

Arnie Kaestner, BS ChE '57  
Houston

### Picnic on a rope

Hungry after dorm lock-down hours? In 1951, the only way to have your hunger satisfied was to call the men next door to bring some food. We'd send money down in a basket. They would leave campus to bring the goodies. Then we hauled them back up in a basket outside the window. How's that for low-tech?

Eleanor Rhein Kaiser, BS Ed '55  
St. Louis

### Hot time in the dorm

Although cooking appliances were forbidden in the dorms during the 1960s, my roommate and I had one of those heating coils that you immerse in a cup of water to heat it for coffee, tea or soup. It worked fine at first, but then it burst into flames. We never had the nerve to try one again. They still sell these things for foreign travel. Do you think airport security allows them on airplanes?

Francine Gair, BJ '67  
Chico, Calif.

### Former Farmer

During my sophomore year in 1964, I took Zoology 101, a five-hour course with videotaped lectures by Dr. Farmer. The lectures were presented in a large auditorium-like setting with hundreds of students in attendance.

The sound quality of the black-and-white videotape was not always the best. One day, the video was malfunctioning, and Dr. Farmer was seemingly in fast-forward mode. He spoke so quickly that it was difficult to take notes, and even my reel-to-reel tape recorder — the size of a bread box — was of little help.

After class, I asked the proctor if he could ask Dr. Farmer to slow down a little for the next session. “He’s as slow as he is going to get,” the proctor replied. He said that Dr. Farmer had passed away a couple of years earlier.

Linda Permer Dillon, BS Ed '67  
Biscayne Park, Fla.



### Rock on

It was the summer of 1969. Life was good, my courses were easy enough, and I worked at the Beverage House Liquor Store on Business Loop 70. One night after closing, I came back to the apartment I shared with three other guys. A friend had brought over this little contraption that rocked with music from *Hair*. I had never before seen an eight-track player. I was astounded!

Lowell Newsom, BS '69  
Maryland Heights, Mo.

### May I take a message?

My favorite techno-memory is typing a term paper in a lighted phone booth on my Bright Range manual IBM typewriter for Perry Sweet (now my husband). It was after hours, and he was on scholastic probation, so we worked in the booth across from Gillett and Hudson halls. Campus police weren't pleased, but they let us finish the paper.

Judy Selvidge Sweet, BS Ed '70  
Old Hickory, Tenn.

### Processing words

In 1987, I arrived on campus as a freshman toting an IBM Selectric typewriter. I still owned a trusty Royal manual typewriter but opted to leave it at home. By the beginning of sophomore year, I was using a Brother word processor. By the end of that year, I was using the campus Macintosh computer lab exclusively and arrived junior year with no word processing equipment other than a box of floppy disks.

Christopher Scott, BS Ed '92  
Chicago

### Dirty downloads

For my Introduction to Journalism class in the summer of 1993, I wrote a profile of a math professor who was a pioneer at using the Internet as a teaching tool. His students used what was then a relatively powerful program, Mathematica, and so were granted more than the usual amount of storage in their fledgling Mizzou Internet accounts. One of the professor's jobs was to patrol the students' memory usage for spikes, which could mean a student was downloading

unsavory pictures. The professor then spoke to the student or froze that account.

I first started seeing fairly widespread e-mail use during my senior year (1994-95). I hiked to a computer lab in the General Classroom Building [now Arvarh E. Strickland Hall] to try it out. The terminals were in a low cabinet with the screens facing upward through a pane of glass, so I stared down into the cabinet to see the green characters on the monitor. In those days, I got about two e-mails a week, and "spam" was a food.

Jennifer Murphy Romig, BA, BJ '95  
Atlanta

### Next slide, please

When I was taking art history classes in Pickard Hall, we had dueling slide projectors and regularly employed a 16mm film projector, too. Now such things are done using overhead data projectors linked to computers. And all this was way back in 1996.

Andrew Reinhard, MA '96  
Lake Bluff, Ill.

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