

Art Week

'Click, Clack, Ding!' At NBMAA

Wethersfield Collector Is Expert In Evolution Of Typewriter

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Greg Fudacz has been a collector all his life: comics, CDs, coins, stickers, kid stuff. But he didn't hit the collecting big time until he bought his first antique typewriter. That was more than 15 years ago.

Today, Fudacz, of Wethersfield, owns about 250 antique machines and is an expert on the evolution of a device that hardly anybody uses anymore.

Twenty-one of Fudacz's favorite typewriters are on view now in "Click, Clack, Ding!" the delightful new show at New Britain Museum of American Art.

"At some point, it stops becoming about inventions and innovations and it becomes all about design," Fudacz says. "It's just a matter of packaging it in a more aesthetically pleasing way."

The exhibit has examples ranging from 1876 to 1966, from a clunky but prettily painted "blindwriter" (the typist couldn't see the paper) to a sleek Royal Safari. That Space Age model sits in the gallery next to a gold-plated 1956 Royal Quiet Deluxe, just like the typewriter on which Ian Fleming wrote the "James Bond" novels. It was manufactured in Hartford. Many of the typewriters in the exhibit were made in Connecticut.

The earliest designs are often funny. One art nouveau-inspired 1889 model is dominated by an ornate leaf-blade design perched on top of the unit. A cute multicolored child's typewriter from 1938 is shown with an adorable newspaper ad promoting it. "Index typewriters" resemble crossbows more than writing machines. The semicircular 1884 Hammond looks like a piano.

That 1884 specimen does not have a QWERTY keyboard. That was invented in 1873 by Christopher Latham Sholes of Wisconsin. Sholes and Glidden began producing QWERTY boards and they caught on fast, bringing most of the industry in line. Some manufacturers challenged it, to no avail.

"There are better layouts, but we're such creatures of habit," Fudacz said. "People are used to the QWERTY."

"CLICK, CLACK, DING!" will be on view until June 1 the New Britain Museum of American Art. Information: www.nbmaa.org.