A Brief History of the First Typewriter
and the QWERTY Keyboard

1. Typewriter patents date back to 1713.
2. The first typewriter proven to have worked was built by Pellegrino Turri in 1808 for his blind friend Countess Carolina Fantoni da Fivizzano.
3. Commercial production began with the “writing ball” created by Malling Hansen a Danish pastor in 1870. (See Figure 1)
4. The most significant first typewriter created was the “Sholes & Glidden Type Writer” in 1873.
   - Named after Christopher Latham Sholes (the main creator) and Carlos Glidden (who provided Sholes with the most help in creating the typewriter) (See Figure 2)
   - Manufactured by E. Remington & Sons in Ilion, New York
   - The idea began at Kleinsteuber’s Machine Shop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1868
   - A group of men wanted to participate in the Age of Invention and create something that would improve Mankind
   - The idea of “typewriting” came from an article they were reading in the “Scientific American”
5. The “Sholes & Glidden Type Writer” had very little success.
   - Only 5,000 were sold in the first 5 years
   - It was sluggish, finicky, inefficient, and constantly jammed
   - Only typed in capital letters
   - Similar to a sewing machine - a foot treadle (pedal) was provided for the carriage return (See Figure 3)
   - However, it founded a worldwide industry, and it brought mechanization to office work
   - Also, it introduced the QWERTY keyboard
6. Remington (the manufacturer) did not give up and in 1878 introduced the “Remington No. 2” which became a huge success a decade later.
   - It typed both upper and lower case letters and used a shift key
   - Established the archetype open-black-box look typewriters would have for decades to come
7. The QWERTY keyboard was born
   - Sholes’s first model arranged the keys alphabetically in two rows
     - problem was that the “typebars” would overlap and frequently jam
   - Sholes figured he had to take the most common letter pairs and move them apart as far as possible
   - He did this using a study of letter-pair frequency prepared by educator Amos Densmore
   - The rearrangement of the “typebars” resulted in the QWERTY configuration (See Figure 4)
   - The name is derived from the first six letters in the top alphabet row
   - It survives because of its initial momentum, typists reluctance to change, and economic reasons

All information obtained from the web site http://xavier.xu.edu/~polt/tw-history.html on January 2, 2002.