

Elevators and Ether, Weather Bureaus and Fountain Pens: 19th-century Bequests to the 20th

Editor's note: At the turn of the century, a professor at Tufts College compiled the following list of what the 19th century had received as legacies from the 18th, and what it bequeathed to the 20th. The compendium, which appeared in various versions in the nation's newspapers and periodicals in December 1900 and January 1901, reminds us today of the astounding technological advances of the 19th century.

"We received the horse and ox; we bequeath the locomotive, the automobile and the bicycle.

We received the goose quill; we bequeath the fountain pen and typewriter.

We received the scythe; we bequeath the mowing machine.

We received the sickle; we bequeath the harvester.

We received the sewing and knitting needle; we bequeath the sewing and knitting machine.

We received the hand printing press; we bequeath the cylinder press.

We received the typesetter; we bequeath the linotype.

We received the sledge; we bequeath the steam drill and hammer.

We received the flintlock musket; we bequeath automatic Maxims.

We received the sail ship, six weeks to Europe; we bequeath the steamship Majestic, six days to Europe.

We received gunpowder; we bequeath nitroglycerin.

We received the hand loom; we bequeath the cotton gin and woolen mill.

We received the leather fire bucket; we bequeath the steam fire engine.

We received the wood and stone structures; we bequeath twenty-storied steel structures on which the sky may rest.

We received the staircase; we bequeath the elevator.

We received Johnson's Dictionary with 20,000 words; we bequeath the Standard Dictionary with 240,000 words.

We received 22,000,000 speaking the English language; we bequeath 116,000,000.

We received the painter's brush and easel; we bequeath lithography and photography.

We received the lodestone; we bequeath the electromagnet.

We received the glass electric machine; we bequeath the dynamo.

We received the tallow dip; we bequeath the arclight and the Standard Oil Company.

We received the four-inch achromatic telescope; we bequeath the four-foot telescope.

We received two dozen members of the solar system; we bequeath 500.

We received a million stars; we bequeath 100,000,000.

We received the tinder box; we bequeath the friction match.

We received ordinary light; we bequeath Roentgen rays.

We received the beacon signal fires; we bequeath the telegraph, the telephone and wireless telegraphy.

We received the weather unannounced; we bequeath the weather bureau.

We received less than twenty known elements; we bequeath eighty.

We received the products of distant countries as rarities; we bequeath them as bountiful as home productions.

We received history as events remembered and recorded; we bequeath the kinoscope.

We received the past as silent; we bequeath the phonograph, and the voices of the dead may again be heard.

We received pain as an allotment to man; we bequeath ether, chloroform and cocaine.

We received gangrene; we bequeath antiseptic surgery.

We received the old oaken bucket; we bequeath the driven well and the water tower.

We received decomposition helplessly; we bequeath cold storage.

We received foods for immediate consumption; we bequeath the canning industry.

We received butter solely from milk; we bequeath oleomargarine.

We received the pontoon; we bequeath the Brooklyn bridge.

We received the hedgerow and the rail fence; we bequeath the barbed wire fence.

We received cement steel; we bequeath Bessemer steel.

We received unlimited dependence upon muscles; we bequeath automatic mechanism." ❖

Source: Originally published at the turn of the century in the *Congregationalist* and since reprinted in Michael E. Stevens, ed., *Yesterday's Future: The Twentieth Century Begins* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1999), 61-63