

540 is the number on the building.

It is also the number on tens of thousands of letters which come addressed to that building every day from the most curious people in the world—the subscribers to TIME and LIFE and FORTUNE.

Their curiosity about the world and all it holds has swelled the combined TIME and LIFE and FORTUNE subscription lists to four and a half million—has made it necessary to print and mail a yearly total of well over two hundred million magazines.

No publishing company has ever before had to mail so many magazines to so many subscribers. No subscription office has ever before received so many letters from subscribers. No publishers have ever before had to devise a method for handling subscription details on such a large scale. *And yet, no organization ever felt more strongly that every single subscriber deserves swift, personal service on every subscription request he makes.*

Before the war TIME, LIFE and FORTUNE were able to give this kind of service with the subscription fulfillment system most other publishers still use—a system under which any information a circulation department needs to service your subscription is stamped into the metal plates used to address your copies of the magazine. But today, to give its subscribers the personal, effective kind of service they should have, TIME, LIFE and FORTUNE have had to assemble and put to work the most amazing collection of uncannily efficient machines and processes the publishing field has ever known—a completely new kind of subscription service system.

And, because curious people are most curious of all about things that touch their own lives and possessions, you might well like to know

"What is this new system all about?"

"What will it do for me?"

It would take an encyclopedia of engineering jargon to answer these questions completely. But here, in a few descriptive words and a few pictorial interpretations by TIME Cover Artist Boris Artzybasheff, are the impressions and information you would get if you were to visit the

SUBSCRIPTION FULLFILLMENT OFFICES OF TIME—LIFE—FORTUNE
540 NORTH MICHIGAN AVENUE • CHICAGO 11, ILLINOIS



YOU START YOUR TOUR on the top floor of 540 in the wire-enclosed, snap-locked "cage" where up to 80,000 letters are delivered in a single day. Here you see girls reading the mail, registering cash, separating orders from inquiries. One floor below, you meet other girls, arranging the thousands of letters and orders by city and state, and writing numbers on the letters, cards, and order slips. You learn that each set of these numbers forms a code which translates into one long line of figures some 22 odd bits of information about you and your order: such information as your name and address; how long your subscription has to run; the month and year it runs out; the price of it; whether you paid for it in advance or asked us to bill you; whether you ordered it through an agent or sent it in direct; whether you subscribed for yourself or gave or received the subscription as a gift.

All the thousands and thousands of letters you have seen so far are in human hands. For only the human mind can read and understand and translate, only the human hand can write each different personal subscriber's code. But once the codes are established and written down, the machines can go to work.



PUNCH

Then you meet a mathematician's delight—a machine that knows his numbers.

His name is Punch, and he has an operator who taps out on a keyboard the numerical code which contains all the information about each subscription. For each given number Punch knocks a rectangular hole into a card, a permanent Reference Card. This card is filed in its proper place with millions of others, to be referred to whenever the subscriber inquires about his subscription or renews it. With all the information about a subscriber in this form, other machines can find, sort, file and re-file the Reference Cards mechanically. (Of course, if an operator gives Punch the wrong numbers, he'll knock out the wrong holes. And that would lead to a lot of confusion if it weren't for . . . see next page.)



THE EYE

This is The Eye. (He looks a lot like Punch, but he has a very different job to do.) If a hole gets punched in the wrong place, HE KNOWS.

He has 20-20 vision—and he needs it. For The Eye piercingly scrutinizes every newly punched card, as *his* operator gives him the correct numbers on *his* keyboard. Each number focuses The Eye on the part of the card where a hole ought to be. If it isn't there, The Eye flashes crimson like a traffic light, his operator sees red and removes the offending card. She then sends it back and a new, correctly-punched card is made.

The Eye's operator can make a mistake, too. But the chance that she will tap the same wrong number on a card which Punch's operator has also muffed is very slim indeed. This machine-human checking combination is virtually foolproof in policing errors.

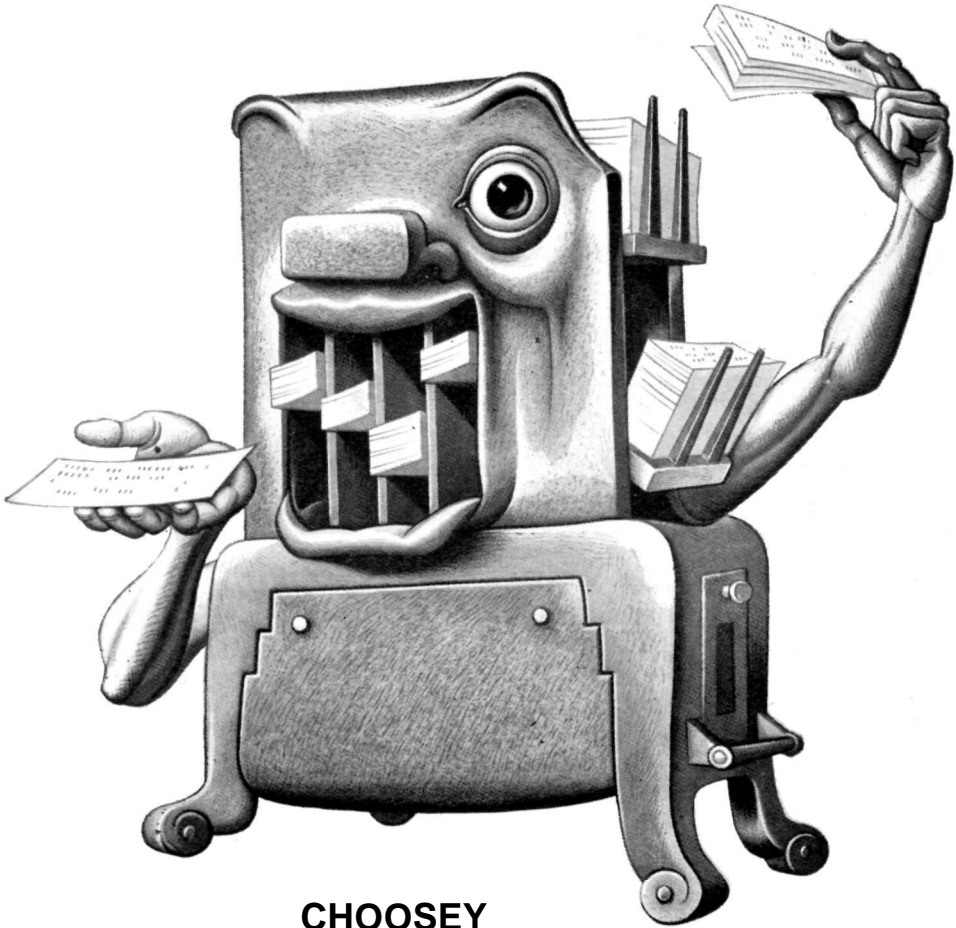


SORTER

This genial geographer knows his states and cities—and he has a tremendous sense of order.

After subscribers' cards have been punched and checked, they are as mixed up as the mail was when the postman delivered it—from all over the world, names whose initials range from "AA" to "ZZ". Sorter takes a pile of these mixed-up cards, riffles through, and just by feeling the holes he stacks the cards in alphabetical, geographical order.

(Confidentially, it isn't as difficult as it sounds. Sorter only feels the holes in the card which represent the numbers of the subscriber's code and arranges the cards in numerical order. It's his *speed* that makes the girls at 540 so fond of him, for he can sort 450 cards a minute . . . an astonishing total of 27,000 cards an hour!)

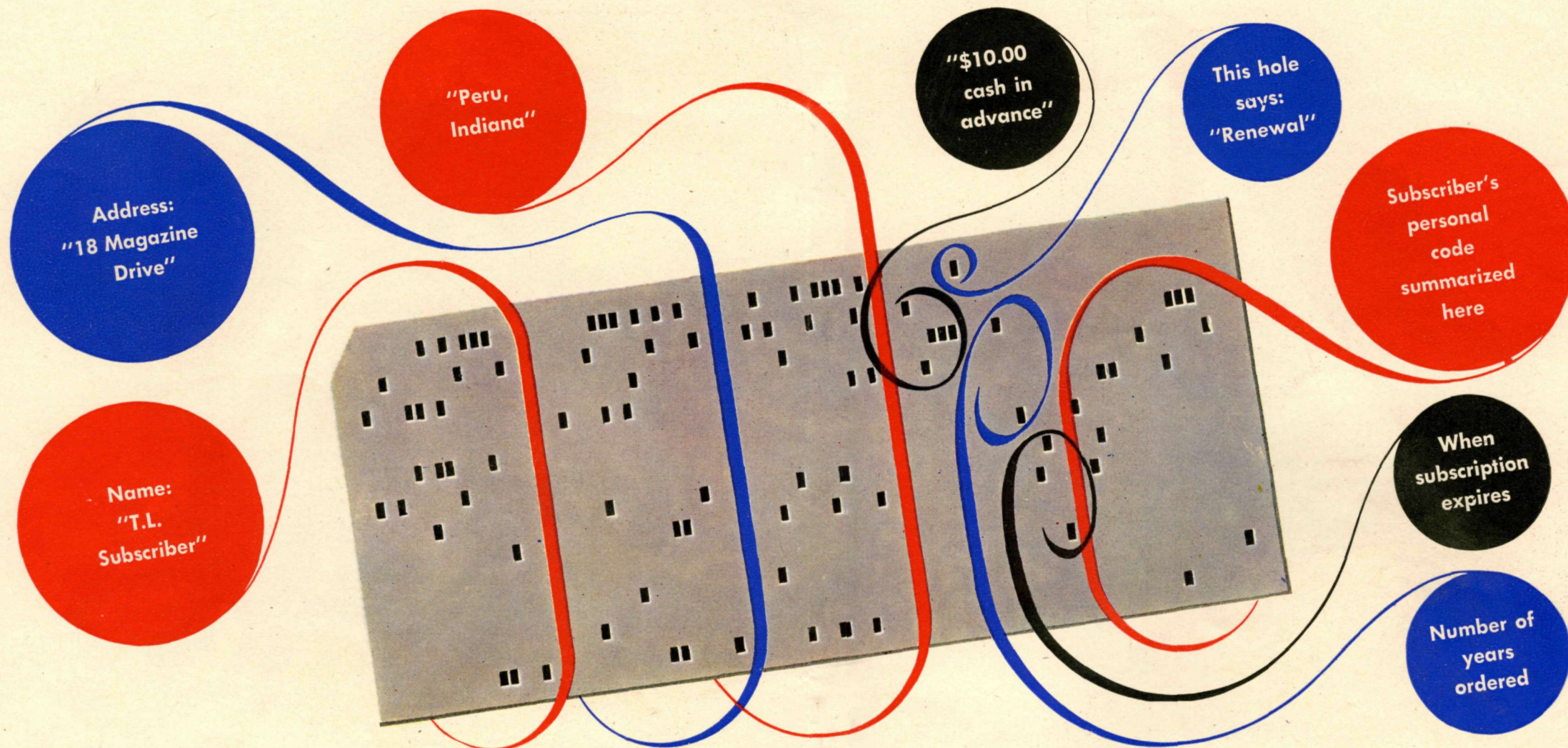


CHOOSEY

Choosey can pick your card from a pile of cards, or put it back in the right place—whichever his operator directs.

Suppose you have sent back one of those punched renewal cards you received from TIME or LIFE or FORTUNE. Sorter puts your returned renewal card in its right position along with thousands of others. Then the whole pile is given to Choosey. He notes the name and address holes in your renewal card, finds a permanent Reference Card whose holes match, pulls the latter from the files . . . and turns it over to the girls who record renewals. A new Reference Card is made for your renewed subscription, and he puts *that* right back in its proper place.

Choosey also finds your Reference Card, if you ask a question or pay a bill, so the girls can give you the answer you want.



THE CARD

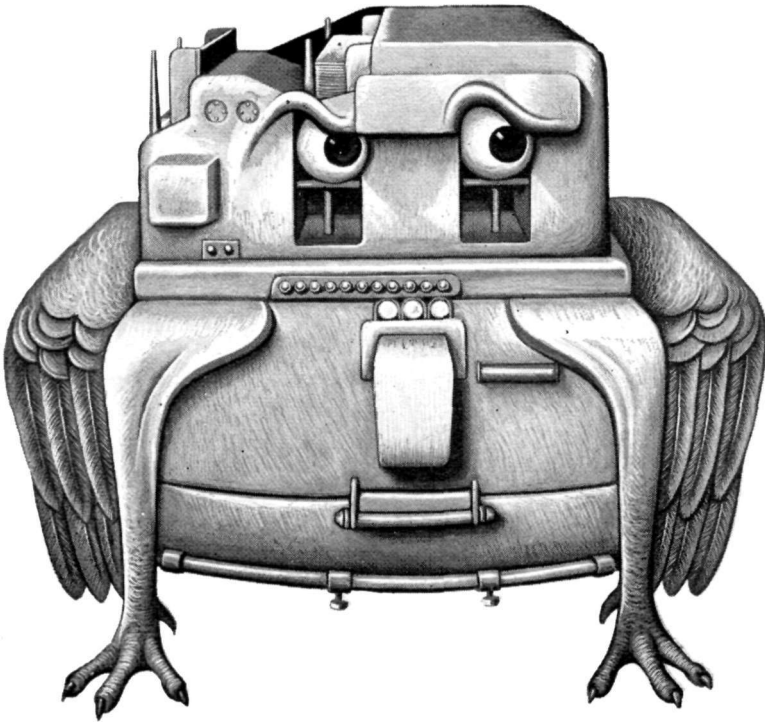
This is a simplified Reference Card, with only essential information punched. To put in card form *all* the information about you that an efficient subscription department needs would require many more holes, and they could be in any of 960 different places.

Cards like these and the machines that understand them now look up, record, sort, file, and re-file mechanically—and infinitely faster than by hand. And so it is now possible, during *normal* months to keep up with all the records and changing of records that are required by the renewing-

est, the moving-est, giving-est subscribers any publications ever had.

But in the fall and winter months, when the majority of you renew your own subscriptions and order many, many Christmas gift subscriptions besides, the routine operations multiply to such a staggering extent that even these swift machines have to work overtime to keep up with all of you!

(It's at times like these that both machines and operators bless the subscribers who mail in their renewals on the pre-punched cards we send you when your subscription is up for renewal.)

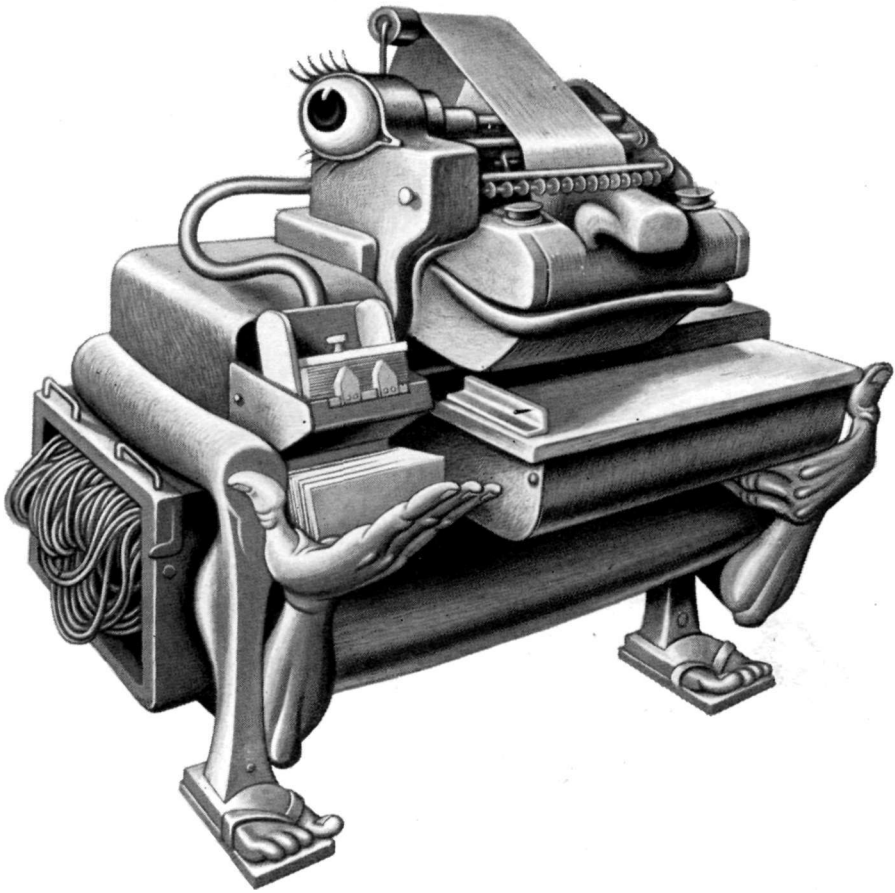


THE HEN

This is one chicken that came *after* the egg.

She wouldn't be around at all if other machines which do useful jobs for you didn't need special cards to guide them. *They* can't use your Reference Card because it must be available for reference at all times—in case you want to change your address, extend your subscription, give TIME, LIFE or FORTUNE to a friend. So the Hen must reproduce two other cards, holes and all.

This she does, in her own patient, prolific way. And the duplicate cards she produces for you are kept in another special file, to be brought out only when the purring paragon on the next page needs them to write your name and address, or register some essential information about you.

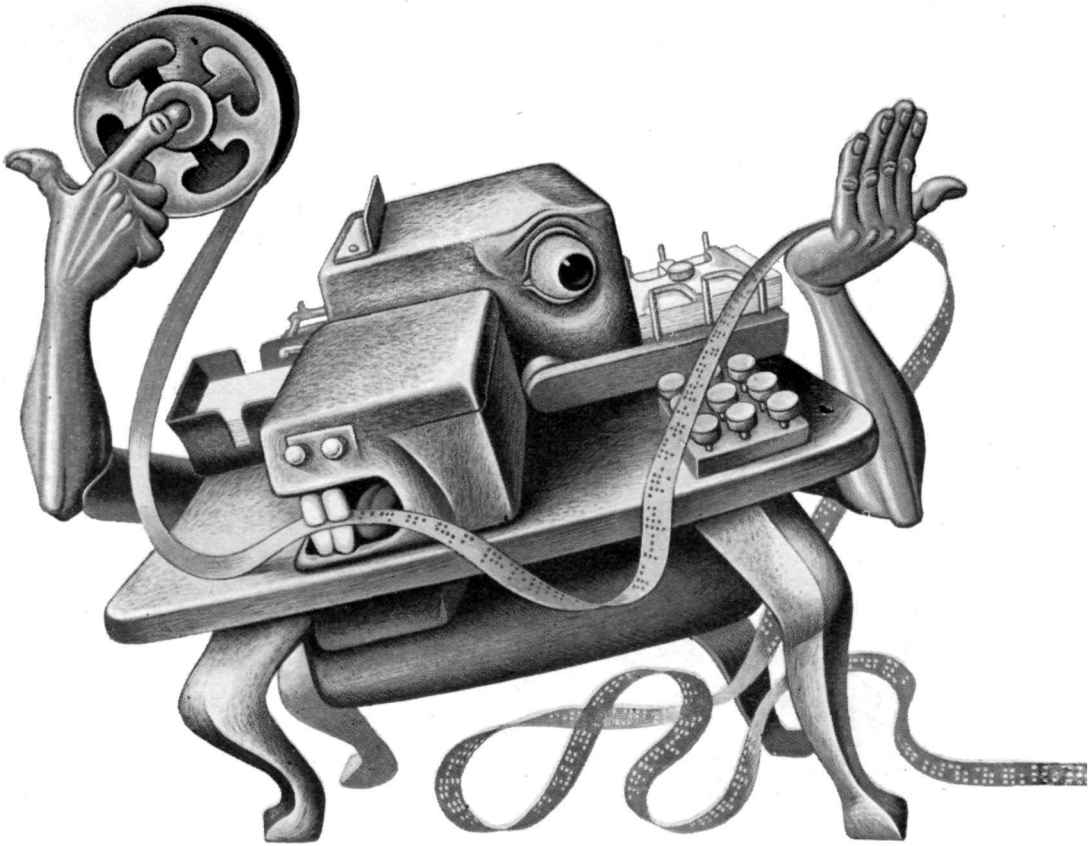


TABBY

Tabby uses the Hen-pecked cards to write your name and address.

By feeling the holes in one card, he comes up with the type that spells your name, street, and number. From the holes in the second card he spells out the rest of your address. And he actually prints the whole thing on the cards you receive when it is time to renew your subscription, or on the bills you receive if you did not pay for your subscription when you ordered it. He also runs off all sorts of *statistical* information about subscribers' orders for office records.

(Tabby is slightly temperamental. He still insists on two cards for every complete address. He doesn't know it yet, but one of these days he's going to transcribe a complete name and address from *one* card.)



What would you call him?

Much as his operator loves this hole-biting helper—and faithfully as Artist Artzybasheff has portrayed his character above—neither has thought of a suitable nickname for him. Probably because the work he does defies a one word name description.

But nameless as he is, this machine has won fame at 540 for his skillful and speedy tape-cutting.

Endowed with a rare Euclidean sense, not only does he understand the meaning of the rectangular holes in the cards—he can take a stack of these cards and translate their *rectangular* holes into *round* holes in a long roll of paper tape.

This he cheerfully and efficiently does for his not-so-erudite friend on the next page.



CLINKY

Even if Clinky isn't as brilliant as some of his friends, he's a very valuable citizen.

He feels each hole in the paper tape and clanks out a metal plate embossed with the subscriber's name and address—the address plate used to stamp your name and address on your copies for mailing.

Nowadays, when he has to make a new plate, he no longer stamps the date your subscription ends under your name and address. Instead he stamps your personal subscriber code, which summarizes this and much other information. This means your address plate does not have to be removed from its place or a new one made unless you change your address. Eventually, after all address plates have been remade, each will show only the personal permanent code for that subscriber.



You have now met one of each important group of machines.

The engineers say that together they do all the recording, sorting, filing, finding, and printing that can possibly be done mechanically in a modern subscription fulfillment system. Together they represent the *new* part of the new system.

Surrounding each mechanical operation are scores of hand and mind operations. People, not machines, still play an indispensable part in opening and reading your letters, writing and mailing your replies . . . carefully checking your orders, seeing that the copies you order are delivered accurately and swiftly . . . giving you the kind of personal attention no machine could ever give.

These people—some 1500 young women and quite a few young men—now concentrate on the personal, intelligent side of subscription fulfillment service. They are the clerks and coders, correspondents, machine operators, and supervisors. Many, particularly the technically-trained veterans among them, attend special classes, study new ways of making this mechanized system serve you best. And they represent a tradition which is as old as the first copy of the first magazine ever published by TIME Inc.



For ever since the name "TIME" was first written on an envelope, there has been someone at the receiving end resolved to treat each subscriber as if he were the only one in the world . . . to handle each subscription as if it were the only subscription . . . to treat each piece of mail, each question, each request as if it were from a personal friend.

During the war years, during the long period of conversion and confusion, that resolve could not always be carried out.

But now . . .



Freed by their mechanical helpers from the thousand and one routine details which once took too much of their time, the young men and women at 540 now turn their attention to the personal side of subscription fulfillment service.

They will continue to search and check to uncover and correct errors which carried over from the old days. But one of these days the new system will pass from the experimental to the tried and true working stage. And then, say the people of 540, they will be able to answer your letters as quickly, completely, and correctly as if you were their one and only responsibility.

