

Traveling Through Time

Time. For centuries man has toyed with the idea of going back in time, back to the very beginning through a tunnel of time.

Thick impenetrable blackness envelops the traveler. Voices and the scent of the surrounding pine forest focus attention on the simple campfire scene. Through a mist figures appear. They emerge clearly right next to the traveler. Incredible though it may seem it is all taking place 40,000 years ago! Screams... primordial encounter between beast and man...blood...and blackness once again. A door swings open.

"Pretty good, huh?" inquires a chuckling voice at my elbow. It was all a trick. The mind had suspended belief for a moment, and I'd been hurtled backward through time, in a fantastic machine at Maple Woods Community College.

"It's a tool," said John Stockmyer, history instructor and co-creator of the machine. "Every teacher uses tools, whether they're books, games or films. The time machine just happens to be my teaching tool."

The time machine is a result of a class Stockmyer took on behavior modification. Rewards for good work are an accepted method for teaching young children, and Stockmyer was intrigued with employing the same concept on college-age students in their study of history. "Everyone likes a good stroke when he's done something right," he said. "So if a student does well on an exam, he gets a ticket for a trip in the time machine. It's a spectacular motivator."

What Stockmyer has created is half hocus-pocus and half electronic gadgetry. The time machine itself is wedged into a light-tight, ten-foot-by-eight-foot janitor's closet in the basement of a classroom building, surrounded by the projectors, tape recorders, and dimmer switches that make it work. Flashes of light emitting from a globe on the front of the time machine heighten the sense of the unknown and add to the atmosphere.

"It's all necessary to the mood," explained Stockmyer. "In theory what you have is a combination of electromagnetic force and certain occult practices that carry you back. I can make you think you've broken the time barrier."

The visual image is probably the most important, and to achieve the

elemental three dimensional effect Stockmyer explored the possibilities of 3-D film using special glasses in a space helmet. However the technical expertise and highly sophisticated equipment necessary for 3-D production were not locally available. He found the same problem with using concave and convex screens to project the images.

"I hadn't given up on the thing, but I was stumped," admitted Stockmyer. "I just didn't know how to project a flat image and make it look real, until by chance I struck upon looking through a tube. It gives the same three dimensional effect, and I could use regular old super 8 movie film."

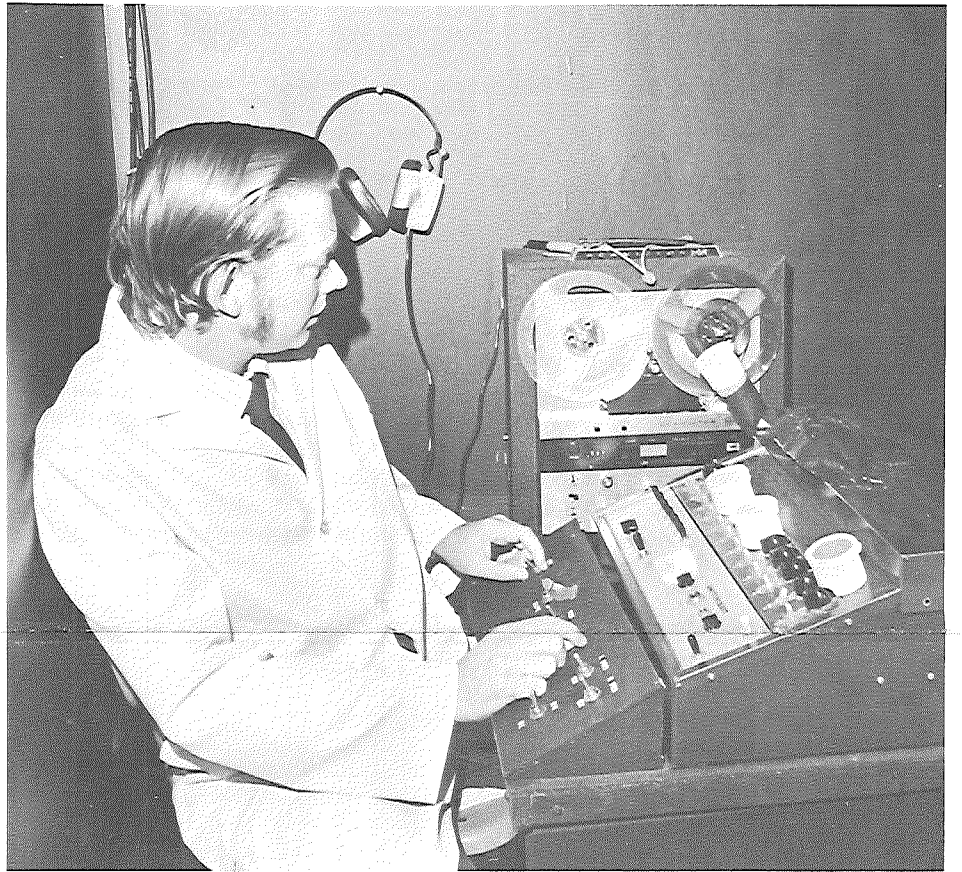
Once the traveler is inside the bathysphere-like time machine, Stockmyer has total control over the environment. All the senses are engaged. Headphones feed in the only sounds, and odors are transmitted through the breathing apparatus to promote the sense of reality. A hypnotic recording on "the nature of time" precedes each trip, reminding the traveler that time is the great unknown — and therefore what is about to happen may very well be reality. It's the perfect set-up inducing a mood of belief and apprehension. But it's what the traveler actually sees that is most convincing, simply because it looks so *real*.

People brush-up against the time machine, trees and grass touch the base and activity swirls around the traveler, not in front of him as if projected, but all around.

Stockmyer and his colleague Ronald Brink, dramatics instructor at Maple Woods, built the time machine, purchased the electronic gear, and produced three time sequences with a \$1,600 faculty development grant. The initial project required three months of work just to build the machine. Several months of research, writing, and language coaching were necessary before the final filming was accomplished.

The three existing sequences feature two lovers in Athens at the time of the Peloponnesian War, and the Roman poet Catullus reflecting on Caesar's greatness, as well as the visit with the Cro-Magnon cave men. Each trip is meticulous in detail, from vivid backgrounds to authentic costumes and appropriate languages. Actors are drawn from the ranks of students, faculty, and administrators at Maple Woods.

According to Stockmyer the project is at a standstill until further funding can be found. A grant proposal has been submitted to KRCHE to fund an additional 20 sequences



which would be used in conjunction with class assignments. The grant would also purchase more sophisticated sound and projection equipment.

"You wouldn't believe the way the students react to this thing," exclaimed Stockmyer. "Once they find out about it, they clamor for more."

Stockmyer would like to offer a one-credit course called, appropri-

ately enough, "time machine". The course would be a series of trips in the machine all during the same time period and from a single location, with sufficient clues so the student could eventually identify where the action is taking place, during what time period, and specifically what is happening. "Wouldn't it just be the ultimate history class," chuckled Stockmyer.

