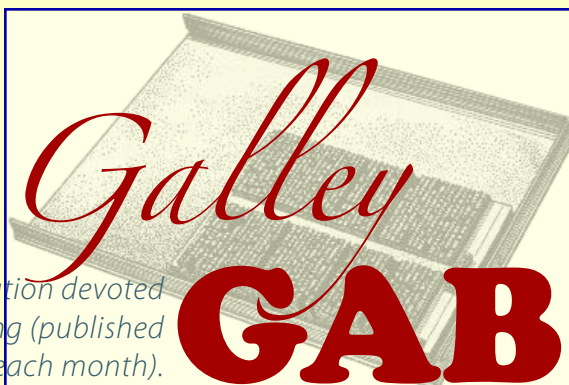


*A monthly online publication devoted
to letterpress printing (published
the first day of each month).*



INSIDE:

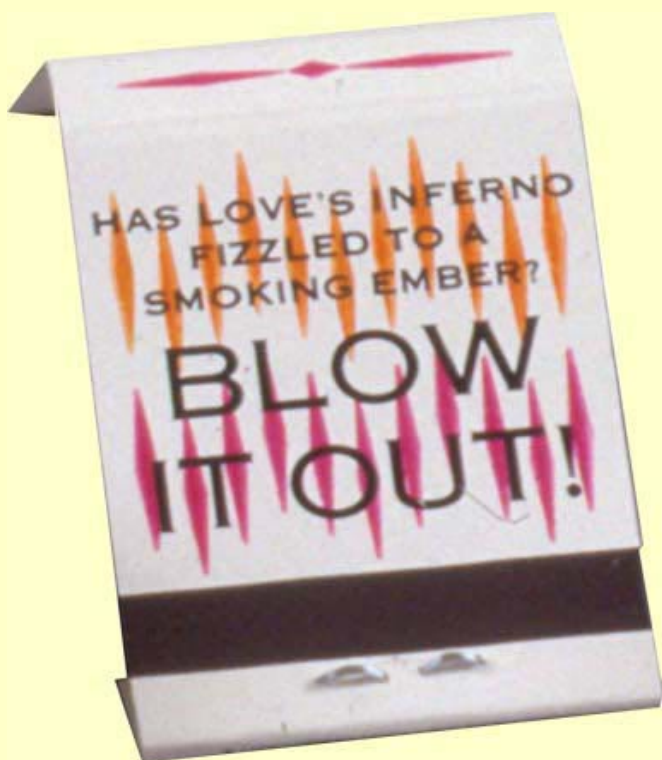
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No. 5 / **MAY 2007**



OLD FLAMES MIS-MATCHED:

*True stories
of
extinguished love*

THE WHY AND HOW OF PRINTING THE MATCHBOOKS

By CATHERINE ALICE MICHAELIS

AT ANY ONE TIME there are probably about a dozen ideas careening around in my design mind. Structures, images, themes, and influences all bouncing around until the right balls fall into the right slot in the right order. I am more of a writer than image-maker, so book shapes and designs that get me around the image making process move faster through my design process. Once the idea began evolving, old flames

seemed the obvious theme for a book of matches. I was mostly concerned the whole thing was trite.

Matchbook. The name was a challenge to me. I had been thinking about pocketbooks, and other words that suggested crossover possibilities. I had recently been involved in a printer's exquisite corpse project and I was still enchanted with the possibilities of mix and match pages, and I had also long been contemplating Keith Smith's ideas of an ephemeral book.

I spent a year thinking about printing on matches.



(See why faster is good?) It seemed really hard—the matches splay at the top, could I compensate for that? I liked my idea a lot though, so one day on the train to Portland I spent the 4 hours writing and designing the text and page order. Every layer had to read correctly in the “story” as each match on top of it was torn out. At home, I took a plain matchbook apart and did a sample proof. (I have a 10x15 C&P that was perfect for printing these.) It nearly worked, and I saw how I could do it.

I called a matchbook company and tried to order the matches and covers separately. Since I was calling as May Day Press, they weren’t convinced I wasn’t trying to compete with their printing on matchbook covers business and I had to buy the case of matchbooks bound. A friend and I spent 24 hours total unstapling the 2500 matchbooks without marring the covers. Of course then I had to buy a special stapler to cover the original staple holes.

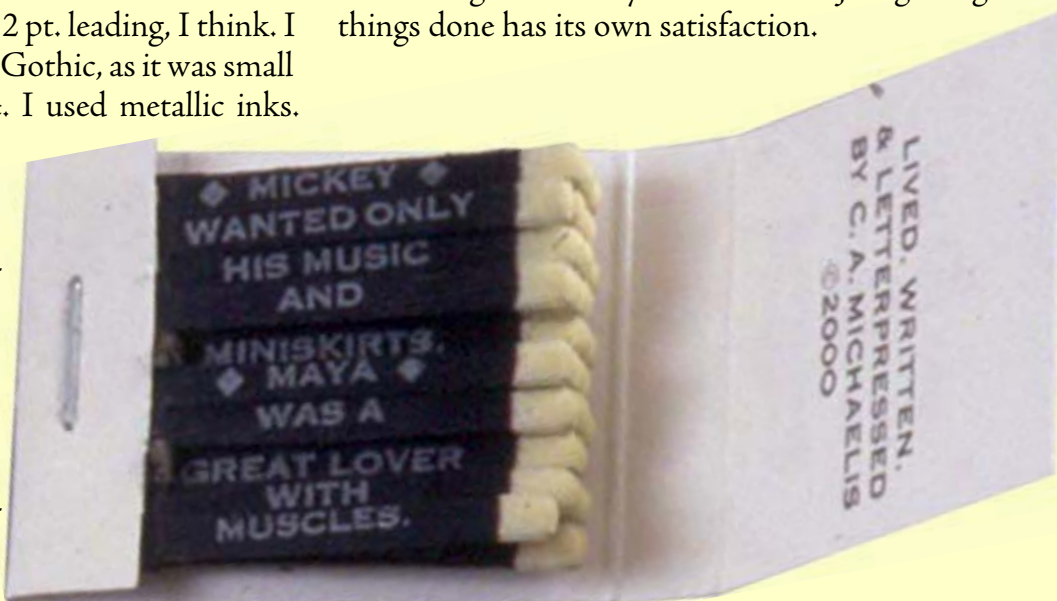
Between the lines I used 2 pt. leading, I think. I set the text in Copperplate Gothic, as it was small enough, but very readable. I used metallic inks. Volume I is printed in silver and 2 in gold. (This is in no way a rating system about any of my old flames.) Unfortunately the gold I used hasn’t been really stable over time, but the silver still looks good. I printed the form sideways in the chase, with the match card resting on quad guides in the C&P, just like any other

*“You asked if I did
a matchbook with all
my extinguished loves,
well, no.”*

paper would be. I printed low on the matchsticks, trying to avoid as much of the chemicals as I could, concerned they would degrade the ink. The fun thing about this book is that it was deceptively easy to print – it only seemed challenging. I took several proofs, adjusting for the splay with thin slips of paper in the leading to spread the type slightly at the top of the form until it registered. It took very little fussing and was fairly consistent each print run. Most commonly asked question – wouldn’t the matches catch fire? No.

Matchbooks come 2 cards or pages to the book. This was not enough for the effect I wanted of really being able to “mis-match” all the stories. So I wrote and bound them in pages of three using the easy peasy one staple binding.

The covers were the hard thing to print, as they weren’t square, and I assumed they were when I began printing. I haven’t been really happy with my cover designs, but they are done, and just getting things done has its own satisfaction.





You asked if I did a matchbook with all my extinguished loves, well, no. Defining “old flames” is very subjective. And not everyone I put into the books really lit up my heart. They were all people (men and women) I was “romantically” involved with. I used criteria best not printed to decide on my 12 loves for the two volumes. Some of the names are changed, but I was sure to change them to names I knew they wouldn’t like. I had to do two volumes, as I had so many matchbook parts. One gargantuan run of one volume was boring. Two volumes made for more variety and interest, and perhaps better sales because someone might be more tempted to buy both volumes, or buy one to keep and one to burn. (They retail for \$10 each.)

My work is rarely autobiographical. This was a fun way to say something about who I am, produce a book that was very affordable, and satisfy my own creative desires to make a book meant to be destroyed (and perhaps along with them any lingering feelings of resentment or disappointment toward my exes). The looks of shock or surprise I sometimes get from customers are satisfying. I look like your typical mild-mannered, middle-aged, letterpress printer living in the sticks. I had hoped people would be charmed by the many versions that could be read in the matchbooks by changing the order in which you tore out and used the matches. But so far, few seem willing to take on the ephemeral book concept as a practice.

I made the books in 2000. I had planned a mass marketing campaign in which I could sell out all 800 of each edition, but then a year later 9/11 hap-

pened. I am no longer allowed to put them in the US Mail, and have had them taken away at the airport. UPS seems fine about shipping them, but the order needs to be large enough to justify the cost.

Last year I ended the relationship I was in when I made the matchbooks. I could maybe squeeze out a third volume, but I am so happy with my new love that the memories of my old flames have truly gone out.

Catherine Alice Michaelis is a book artist and letterpress printer living in Shelton, Washington. For 15 years she has printed, painted, folded, and bound papers together under the imprint of May Day Press. She learned letterpress printing on Vashon Island in 1988 from two spirited women dedicated to writing and the environment. Working on a Vandercook 4 and a 10x15 C & P, Catherine Alice makes editioned books that express her love of plants, her spiritual outlook, her Native heritage, and her love to play.

MICHAELIS EXHIBITION—PORTLAND, OR

The work of Catherine Alice Michaelis and her May Day Press will be on exhibition at the John Wilson Special Collections, located on the second floor of the Central Library in Portland (801 SW 10th Ave.) from May 1 to June 30, 2007. Catherine Alice will give a lecture at the library on Sunday May 6 from 2-4 p.m.

In the last issue, Ian Robertson, in a letter commenting on learning letterpress, told how he learned a great deal from two “mentors” – Arthur Rushmore and Will Bradley. We asked

him to make some additional comments on his relationship with Will Bradley.

‘Have fun’ was part of advice from Will Bradley

By IAN ROBERTSON

I was introduced to Will Bradley by Arthur Rushmore.

He was unable to attend the luncheon in Bradley’s honor (given by Strathmore Paper Company, June 9, 1954) at the New York Athletic Club and submitted my name as a likely attendee. I was just 26 and had met Rushmore about a year earlier. I remember the event quite well, sitting at a table for five with some storied names in printing, design, and the like. I felt rather small. At any rate, I still have the folder of work that Will did for that Strathmore luncheon as well as the letter inviting me. Somewhere is the list of those attending but it’s in some box or other!

I spoke to Will afterward (in a knot of well-wishers – Bradley was in his mid-80’s then) and he was warm and encouraging and invited me to see him at his sister’s (Fern Dufner) home in Short Hills, New Jersey, where I lived and had my printing office. I saw him several times thereafter and (at his insistence) showed him some of my work. He was critical and encouraging (in other words: immensely helpful!) in his comments (very much as Arthur Rushmore was). He returned to California after a while, returning in 1955. He went to a madrigal concert at Christmas that year and wrote me a wonderful letter about the program I’d printed.

I saw him several more times. He gave me a set of the combination borders cast by ATF, several other

borders he had with him, his “Will Bradley: His Chapbook” and a complete set (with extra sheets) of 12 of “The American Chapbook.” Will and his daughter moved to California in 1957; I had a letter or two from him before his death in 1962.

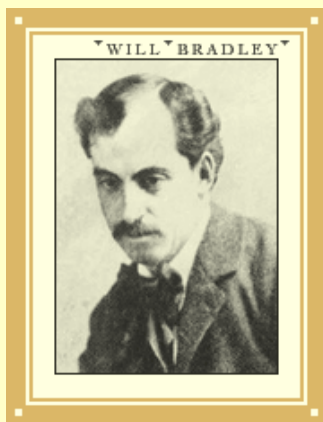
His time with me was limited to just a few visits at the Dufner home and once when he arrived unannounced at my shop in the basement of my house. He was, after all, well along in years though very lively nonetheless, and his mind was as clear as it always had been. His comments, criticism, observations about my work were germane and poked and prodded me to work even harder. (It was soon after that that I began printing books – mostly of poetry of that time:

Michael McClure, Joel Oppenheimer, Robert Creeley, et al.)

I still remember Will fondly – he was that warm kind of person – and as one of those mentors who somehow sense that you are doing the kind of thing you should be doing – the “father’s business” – and loving it. “Success comes while we are having fun” Will quoted from Robert Louis Stephenson to me in a letter that extolled the virtues of Caslon (which I still use), “...white space, type balance and simple directness that makes for readability’. He went on:

“Study the best in book typography – the only safe guide, be patient and do your best, keep hopeful, and have fun,” he wrote, “and you will have a fine future with plenty of encouragement along the way.”

Looking back, from my 80 years of prospect, I still know Will was right, as Arthur Rushmore was right. As long as you adhere to those few typographic principles you’ll do it right. And have fun, besides.



Your role in the future of letterpress

A few articles in the last issue of *Galley Gab* dealt with our “stuff” – the stuff being of course letterpress equipment and how much there’ll be around in the future.

However, the article really only touched on what we are doing to preserve our equipment once we leave this earth.

I’d be willing to bet that there is a good deal of equipment that will be visited by the junk dealer once its owner has departed. Most heirs for the most part wouldn’t have a clue what to do with all of this heavy metal and who can blame them?



We letterpress practioners must feel we are a fairly invincible lot – we just aren’t going to pass on so why worry about our type and presses.

So how much equipment is lost to the junk dealer every year? Who knows! But I would guess it has to be substantial. This may change as years go by and more and more folks become better acquainted with Google and eBay. We can only hope.

I think we’d all like to see our treasures go to someone who will make good use of them once we can’t play with them anymore. I know of many with substantial holdings of letterpress items and they have no plans whatsoever for their equipment once they pass on.

Both Don Black and Dave Churchman advised a mention of this in your will. Certainly it would be advisable to at least take a minute with a member of your family or close friend and let them know what to do with your letterpress items once you aren’t around anymore.

Death is a subject that no one cares to deal with. But if we have any concern at all about letterpress and its future, it seems to me we should be relatively certain of what will happen to our presses, etc. once we aren’t around anymore.



Hits to the *Galley Gab* web site to download an issue:
January, 291; February: 487; March, 872; April, 1149

Printing a hard copy of *Galley Gab*? If you’d like to print out your copy of *Galley Gab* – without the yellow background – there is a PDF available.

[Contact the editor](#) for a copy of the file.



SEND IN YOUR ITEM
TO THE EDITOR

The College & University Letterpress Printers’ Association (CULPA) is a brand new organization founded to bring together the various presses and printing programs in schools. There are more and more college-level print shops emerging. We hope to create a comprehensive list of who and what is out there in order to connect prospective students to schools and current students & faculty to each other and contribute to the greater community of letterpress printers.

It’s all in the attitude! Check out [Amos the printer](#) and follow his lead!

We leave you this month with this suggestion: “I recommended that quoins not be stored over a press because if they fell, there might be three quoins in the fountain!”
–Greg Fischer, Letpress List



...is published on the first day of the month. It is free and can be downloaded from [this site](#).

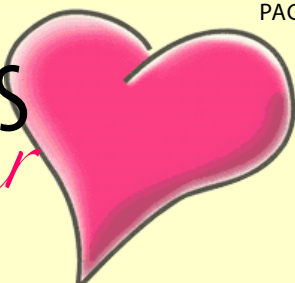
Mike O’Connor, Editor-Publisher

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

Mike Anderson :: Gerald Lange
Stan Nelson :: Steve Saxe
Jessica Spring

Galley Gab is published for the letterpress community. All letterpress printers are invited to comment and participate in each issue. All unsigned articles are those of the editor. Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of *Galley Gab*. [E-mail the editor](#) for information on submitting material for publication or expressing an opinion.

LETTERPRESS *mon amour*



By GERALD LANGE

This is in reply to Rich Hopkins' "Letterpress education a novelty?" in the [last issue](#) of *Galley Gab*. After reading it, I happened upon a sequence of photos documenting the letterpress printing of a wedding invitation on the [flickr group site](#) Vandercook Press. Several dozen photos revealed the engaging appeal of letterpress and the excitement evident to the practitioners. They also revealed one incorrect practice after another. The printers were obviously completely unaware of better or more appropriate ways to print. If there were a clearer example to illustrate Rich's frustration I do not know where I could find it. The printing, undertaken at an institutional facility, is indicative of the poor level of training and instruction provided those who enroll in letterpress classes and workshops.

What is wrong here? The problem, if there is a problem, is twofold; instructors poorly understand correct mechanical practice and the teaching of technical processes is not a priority in curriculum.

Administration is more concerned with 1) enrollment, 2) enrollment, and 3) enrollment. Concern for qualitative measures of workshops or courses is centered more on design and artistic endeavor proffered under the guise of encouraging and fostering creative and imaginative efforts through alternative approaches to expressive media. Letterpress is considered an alternative process that requires little technical expertise. Providing advanced coursework in letterpress risks lower head counts and is counter to the educa-

tional mission. Promoting letterpress as a career choice would simply be incorrect.

There is a vast ocean of difference between technical and industrial education in printing and that offered to the contemporary studio-letterpress world. The latter consists overwhelmingly of folks who have entered the practice with no technical training in printing.

Most educators who teach letterpress workshops are themselves graduates of workshops and have little practical field experience. Those who do have the experience and education to provide technical training are considered too expensive to hire, and given the current educational climate, are viewed as a liability rather than an asset.

While graphic design and art schools consider short courses in how to use software, applying the same rationale to traditional technical processes is dismissed as a waste of resources. The decline in respect for traditional technical approaches to artistic and craft practices is not limited to letterpress, of course, but is across the board. An example is contemporary jewelry making with the development of the metal clay process, which dispensed with the need for technical skill in creating jewelry. The new product of once traditional craft no longer entails respect for workmanship but rather immediate appeal to the uninitiated.

There are those who will counter this with the suggestion that the influx of masses of participants to any artistic or craft activity only benefits the field. The thinking is that this expands the market and is thus of inherent value to those who are at the

higher rung—the experienced professionals. In short, the cream will rise.

This, I believe to be false. Given the buying public's inability to distinguish between work that reflects the well made and that which does not, the only valid market is for those items that



are the more popular to shared taste, the lower in purchase price, or hyped beyond value with shrewd advertising. This also implies, with some form of optimism, that there are those within the maelstrom who will become “hooked” and begin an ascent up the ladder. This, however, has little likelihood since in our current culture there is no value given to it and there is little evidence of it happening. Folks tend to stay at a level that is accepting to them and acceptable to their peers. To find the “path” one has to abandon this, and frankly, such effort requires personal sacrifice and delayed gratification, which has no popular appeal, especially since contemporary studio-letterpress practice provides no measure of success.

The other side of the coin is so what? What does it matter? Let folks enjoy or have fun doing

whatever it is they want to do for as long as they want to do it, and learn whatever they can, or will, as they go.

Let the ball bounce where it may. If historical practices and techniques are lost as the result, why should anyone take it on himself or herself to be concerned? While commercial letterpress certainly survives in industry niches, the letterpress we all know and love died its death some many years ago. All we can do, each in our own way, is try to pay it the tribute it is due.

Gerald Lange is the proprietor of The Bieler Press, a fine press he established in 1975. He is the author of “Printing digital type on the hand-operated flatbed cylinder press,” a monograph on letterpress printing and the photopolymer plate process, and the founder of the online letterpress discussion group, PPLetterpress. [The Bieler Press blog](#).

Who defines ‘proper techniques’ when teaching letterpress?

MY TAKE | **Stuart Bradley**, Alexandria, VA :

I am writing in response to Rich Hopkins’ comments in the April issue. I would say that letterpress is evolving, and I think it is a good thing. It will survive after we are all gone as an art form.

I have had 47 students now in beginner workshops and more advanced classes. My students are mostly in their 20’s and 30’s and at least half are graphic designers. After I show them the basic technique they want to push the limits of design. Some of the printed results are quite good, others do not work out so well. But they want to experiment, and to me that means that letterpress is evolving into an art form.

I do not hold the composing stick “correctly” and many of my students do not wish to hold it at all, preferring to have both their hands free as they compose.

We hardly ever print in black. I have 15 different cans of VanSon Rubber Base ink, a Pantone color formula guide, a digital scale to weigh the parts of ink, and beveled glass. It has been fun to mix ink. One pair of friends that are starting a card business mixed an egg yolk color for their quote about a friend being “cracked.”

We are not talking about kids playing with finger paint and “enjoying getting our hands dirty”. Many of my students have established businesses creating greeting cards, wedding invitations, business logo designs, and announcements. They wish to enhance their business with letterpress as an option and many of them come to me having already purchased a press. I have also helped some of them find presses. They are creative people and for them the most important part of the workshop is the design. Many of them are very familiar with typography.

I know Rich Hopkins, he is a friend of mine, but I take issue with a few things he has written. I reject the notion that there is a “proper” way to do things. Other than keeping your hands out of the press, we are talking about techniques. As in oil paint-

**My
Take**
READERS
RESPOND

ing, there are certain techniques for making brush strokes. And as for “the pathetic caliber of letterpress teaching today” I would ask him for some actual examples of what he is talking about. I do not believe he is referring to myself and the other letterpress teachers featured in the March issue of *Galley Gab*.

I do believe that I am providing a valuable service in transferring my excitement for letterpress to my students, the future of letterpress. You could complain that as a result of this teaching by myself



Bradley teaching a student.

and others the cost of equipment has gone up in the last few years. Pilot presses are now going for \$1,000 each. I bought mine for \$400 three years ago. And now Vandercooks are \$6,000 and out of reach for me.

A more troubling issue for me is that this younger generation of letterpress printer does not seem to be interested in joining our social organizations. It is as if they say they just want the press and if they have a question they will go to Briar Press or a list serve to get it answered.

IS eBay[®] GOOD OR BAD FOR LETTERPRESS?

👍 I think it is good for the auction winners. I've bought a number of nice typefaces over the past month and there is no way I could have gotten anything nearly as good just looking around my locale. I also think it gives anyone that is at least reasonably serious the opportunity to get involved with letterpress. I do think the price of things is going up but that is almost always the case as things grow in interest.


I bought a 30" cutter, a Vandercook SP-15, about 4 full sets of wood type, and maybe another 6 full sets of metal type.

—Ray Nichols, Newark, DE


👎 I think it's bad in terms of trying to acquire things as it seems to be pushing the prices higher and higher. Wood type is almost as expensive as buying new. Metal type is getting to cost more than new cast by the likes of Sky Shipley and Mike Anderson and the others. It is probably caused by the number of people getting into letterpress as a result of schools of design incorporating it into their curriculum. If the trend continues it is entirely possible for us to see a rebirth of the industry. It may never be what it was prior to the closing of ATF but I think you will see it becoming more robust than it is now. I wouldn't be surprised to even seeing new presses become available. People

pay some pretty amazing money for new etching and litho presses...

—Mel Arndt, Toledo, OH

 eBay and antique dealers will be the death of the letterpress hobby because newbies won't be able to afford to buy their startup equipment and type at reasonable prices anymore. And when we die our heirs will want the best price for our stuff so will resort to ebay and the likes to get top dollar. No more gifting it to a fellow-printing hobbyist who learned letterpress with us as mentors, or to a museum unless the tax write-off is substantial. So that's my two cents.


—Barry Schrader, Dekalb, IL

 I've sold a lot of stuff on eBay and I can't think of much of anything that was letterpress related other than some junk cuts that I acquired for free many years ago. I have acquired some stuff also, mostly in the form of specific topic cuts I was looking for.


My personal sales philosophy is to get stuff into the hands of someone who wants it and will enjoy it (many specialized magazine sales) and out of my overburdened house.

In the sense that it allows some people to get some things they want that would be impossible to find otherwise, I can't say that it is bad. On the other hand, price inflation can be partially blamed on eBay and as usual there are some sellers that are merely out to make a buck and not looking at the sales in an altruistic manner.


—George Chapman, Silverton, CO

 As to rising prices on letterpress items, eBay is THE problem. It's destroyed the old person-to-person negotiations by which I acquired my collection—which isn't large, but I'm still proud of. I have never used – nor will I ever use ebay. I'm not going to spend my valuable time trying to outdo a covey of faceless bidders just to say, "I won."

—Jim Grisenti, Denver, CO

 eBay, taken in the right light, can be good for letterpress. The problem seems to be the person describing the item for sale and then the buyer not RECOGNIZING the errors in the description. "Printing blocks" alerts me to the fact that the person doesn't know what he has, and so, I pass on to the next item. Takes work to decipher, but well worth the time rather than bidding on it only to be sorry later. Entering late bids are probably unfair to the seller, on the other hand, the bidder gets the item for the price he/she is willing to pay. Some also place an undue burden by charging excess amounts for shipping. Read and ask questions *before* bidding, or be prepared to suffer your foolhardy expense.

—Jim Doletzky, Wayne, MI

 eBay has scored me two presses (a Chicago and a Pearl), a fairly modern miterer, and a host of cuts, all at fairly good prices. In that respect, I have had fun with it and it has been good for letterpress.

However, the influx of barely-trained and seemingly deep pocketed newbies has made eBay prices skyrocket. \$150 to 250 for a single font of wood type? Good grief. There are sellers who thrive on this market, and sell literally anything to the unsuspecting at high prices. Magnesium cuts have been selling for as much as zinc, which at least is a stable material.

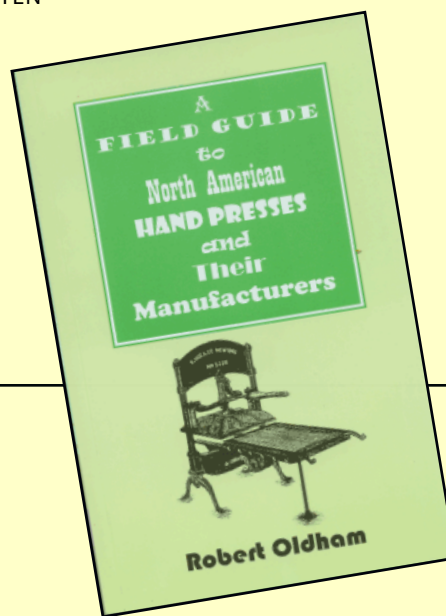
Five years ago eBay was a happy hunting ground. Now, you have to be really stealthy and very lucky to get anything at a reasonable price.

If I were on the selling end, I suspect I would be happier with eBay. But so many downsizing printers seem to be unloading stuff on eBay before they give the rest of us a chance at it. They probably make more money, but far fewer printers of the hobby persuasion can afford their prices. So in that respect, eBay has been bad for letterpress – at least the letterpress hobby.

Caveat emptor. Definitely a mixed review!

—Marjorie Wilser, Goleta, CA

BOOK REVIEW



A Field Guide to North American Hand Presses and Their Manufacturers by Robert Oldham, published by Ad Lib Press, 12276 Welling Hall Rd, Doswell VA 23047.

By MIKE ANDERSON

Bob Oldham, a long-time hobby printer and collector of printing equipment, has gathered an extensive database of over 800 Hand Presses in North America. He has carefully researched the origin of the presses, gathering information relating to their histories, last known location and physical attributes. In addition, he has traveled throughout the U.S. collecting photographs of many the presses.

As Bob says in the introduction, "This Field Guide has been created to help owners, enthusiasts, and casual observers correctly identify and understand the history of the dozens of different examples of hand press technology..." And with 48 full-page color photographs of the various presses and two detailed drawings, the Field Guide does exactly that.

Beginning with wooden hand presses built in the United States starting around 1750, the Field Guide then covers the evolution of the iron hand

press in detail. The color photographs provide readers with a clear visual aid to help identify presses and their manufacturers. In addition to the photographs, Bob provides a detailed narrative on the inventors of the presses and the different technologies used in their design. The information on the manufacturers and the changing technologies that occurred during their period of manufacturing add to the understanding of the evolution and use of the hand press in North America. Bob also included a small section on European hand presses used in North America.

Anyone who has a hand press manufactured in North America and wishes to have the information entered into Bob's database should [contact him](#) and provide the manufacturer, serial number if any, platen and bed dimensions, toggle type, any unusual marking and a photo if available. Books are also available from Bob.

Anyone interested in hand presses will find this book an interesting and welcome addition to their library.

If you wish to see more information on Bob and his work, or wish to purchase the book, check out his [web site](#).



KELSEY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KELSEY & CO.

IN THE EARLY 1860S, printing for amateurs was in the air. One of the first boys to buy a press, print a paper, and sell it was an enterprising newsboy and “candy butcher” on a train in Michigan in 1861 and 1862. Since he was friendly with the telegraphers along the railway line, they often gave him news flashes direct from Civil War battlefields to print in his paper. Passengers, of course, snapped them up. He had to be enterprising back then just to find a suitable printing press, because there were very few available. In later years he sketched the press he had bought from a Detroit newspaper; it was a Hoe galley press. The boy was Thomas Alva Edison. 🖐️

By STEPHEN O. SAXE

The first small press to become available in America for use outside of printing offices was the Lowe press, some of which still survive. It was introduced at the 1857 Crystal Palace Exhibition in New York. The press was ingenious, consisting of a cone that pivoted over the form, with a hinged tympan. Of course it was hand-inked with a brayer. The advertising in *Harper's Weekly* for the Lowe press set the tone for Kelsey's later ads. Although the press was ingenious, the results it turned out were only passable.

When the Civil War began in 1862, there were only three presses available for use in the field. Along with the Lowe press, there was the Adams Cottage Press (which also was sold to civilians with




The Lowe press.

liam Tuttle, a Boston druggist, to print labels. In 1867 Tuttle and his partner, Benjamin O. Woods, patented it and in 1899 started manufacturing. It is the first platen press made for amateurs, and was beautiful and sturdy, but expensive and not self-inking. I have several catalogues of the Benjamin O. Woods company, but I only know of about three Novelty presses that have survived.

Portable Printing Offices.

For the Army and Navy Hospitals, Merchants, Druggists, and all who wish to print neatly, cheaply, and expeditiously. Circular sent free. Sheets of Type, Cuts, &c., six cents. Adams Press Co., No. 26 Ann St., N. Y., and 35 Lincoln St., Boston.



Ad for Adams Cottage Press

the "Every Man His Own Printer" headline.) This press was patented by Albert Adams in 1861, and patent rights were assigned to Joseph Watson, of Boston, who began manufacturing and selling the press. It was very similar to an amateur press in England called a "parlour press."

The Army Press was also similar to the Adams Cottage Press; it was manufactured by the Cincinnati Type Foundry and was used extensively in the field throughout the Civil War.

The press that most resembles what amateurs use now was the Novelty Press, invented by Wil-

Instruction. Pleasure. Profit.



BOYS! Send plain directions for circular with specimens of work done on the **Novelty Job Printing Press**, to **BENJ. O. WOODS, Proprietor, 351 Federal St., Boston**, and you will learn that you can buy a **First Class Printing Press** for a few dollars, which will enable you to do all the printing required in your father's business, and all the printing of your neighborhood.

Ad for the Novelty Press.

William Andrews Kelsey

William Andrews Kelsey was born in Meriden, Connecticut 1851, the son of Ephraim A. and Catherine Andrews Kelsey. He was a go-getter from the start. He was drawn to printing, and had tried out the Lowe, Adams Cottage, and Novelty presses while he was still in his teens. He printed an amateur paper called *The Kelsey Reporter*, had a stamp business, and by twenty was the editor of a periodical issued by the Parker Gun Co. of Meriden which eventually became *Forest and Stream*.

At this point Kelsey had an idea that he could make and sell a press at a low price that the average boy could afford. Starting out with \$1300 of savings, with the help of some friends at Parker, he worked out drawings. Gamaliel Snow made patterns for the press. It had a 3 x 5 chase, and was intended to sell for \$5, which was cheaper than anything else on the market. The name of the company was W. A. Kelsey & Co.

He had a precocious merchandising instinct, and published his first ad in *Youth's Companion* on December 19, 1872, before his press was actually

\$5

Printing Press!

A perfect Press at the right price.

Business Men save expense and increase business by doing their own printing and advertising. **For BOYS** delightful, money making amusement. Send stamp for circulars of Press, Types, etc., and specimens of printing, to the Manufacturers, Feb—21.

KELSEY & CO., Meriden, Conn.

Kelsey's first ad.

tested. Before he knew it he had lots of orders – and a press that couldn't print. He later wrote:

So hopeful was I of success, and so in haste to start advertising, that I had cuts made and issued catalogs before any presses were ready. Orders piled in. An order to *Youth's Companion* for advertising costing \$200 netted me \$7,000 profit in a few months. But, alas the machine was an utter failure. It would not print. In my dilemma I fell back on my own resources. I had never made a drawing or designed any machinery, but driven by necessity, I created in a few days a simple, practical press that worked.

No examples of the first, unworkable Kelsey press are known.

Kelsey worked feverishly to produce a press that would print, and was able to patent it in 1873. The December 1872 ad was continued in *Youth's Companion*, *Oliver Optic's Magazine*, and *The Little Corporal* as late as April of 1873. In all of them the unworkable press was shown. However, by October of 1873 Kelsey's ads showed a new press, named the Excelsior, which did work. It had a pair of wheels, or trunnions, on the handle, which traveled down the frame of the press. It was a hand-inking machine, and it had a bottom plate on the chase, to prevent inexperienced printers from pieing the



Early Kelsey Excelsior.

form. In his first year Kelsey sold 800 of them. But by 1872 William H. Golding of Boston had entered the amateur market and was selling the first self-inking press on the market for amateurs.

\$125 A WEEK! Best Cheap Shuttle Sewing Machine in the World. J. S. HAYES, Glenn's Falls, N. Y.

USEFUL PRESENTS.

Beautiful inventions for marking Clothing and Printing Cards, &c. One will do for a whole family. Movable Type. Profitable, amusing and instructive for the young. **JET PRINTER** \$1, **SILVER** \$1.25, with Ink, Type and neat Case, delivered by mail, anywhere. 3 Alphabets extra, 60 cents.

Agents wanted. **GOLDING & CO., 14 Kilby St., Boston.**



PRINTING.

SELF-INKING PEARL PRESS. New and Valuable Invention. Every business man should have one. Presses and Outfits from \$10 upwards. Send stamp for Catalogue of Presses, Type, Cuts, &c.

GOLDING & CO., 14 Kilby St., Boston.

Golding Pearl ad, 1873.

That was clearly the way of the future. Meanwhile Kelsey was advertising his press everywhere, from small Southern religious publications to the program for Barnum and Bailey's Circus.

By 1875 Kelsey had abandoned the trunnions on the handle, and had adapted his hand-inker into a self-inker. He advertised the press to girls as well as boys.

In 1876 Kelsey was doing so well that he bought an \$11,000 plot of land for a factory. The factory was built and Kelsey left his leased space in 1877. The first floor was occupied by a machinist named E.M. Lockwood, who had been making Kelsey's presses on contract; Kelsey occupied the upper floors. When Lockwood died in 1878, Kelsey bought his shop, and continued Lockwood's sideline business of sharpening lawn mower blades – every Spring, the lawnmowers were stacked up at the Kelsey factory, waiting their turn at the sharpeners.

By 1875 Kelsey had a line of five presses:

- 2½ x 3½ - \$3
- 3½ x 5½ - \$5
- 4½ x 7½ - \$15
- 7 x 11 - \$30
- 10½ x 15 - \$50

Except for the smallest of these, for an extra \$3 they could be furnished with a treadle and wooden

stand. The treadle, by the way, was not connected to a flywheel.

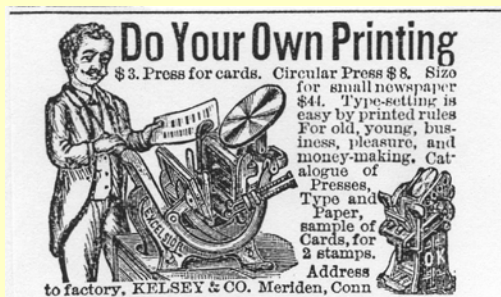
Promoting the press

The key to Kelsey's quick success from the very start was advertising. The magazines of the 1870s that he always used were *Youth's Companion*, *Our Young Folks*, *St. Nicholas*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Leslie's*, *Scientific American*, *Lippincott's*, *Scribner's*, and *Century*. In addition, he advertised extensively in the two major classes of publications of that time – religious and agricultural periodicals. Within a few years he was advertising in 180 different publications.

The first Kelsey ads showed only the press, but



1880 ad



1888 ad



1929 ad

from about 1879 on there was usually a boy or man shown using the press. The faces and figures are so strange and badly drawn, that one wonders if it was not a deliberate calculation on William Kelsey's part.

Amazingly, until 1916, Kelsey never "keyed" his ads – that is, added to the reply address an indication of what publication the ad was in. The result was that he had to guess which publications were pulling the most replies.

William Kelsey wrote all his own advertising copy, which we have to say made extremely forceful and effective reading. He did sometimes overindulge in capital letters, underlining, and boldface, but no one can argue with his success. Kelsey did not hesitate to disparage his competition with statements like:

[our press] does not injure type or become weak like the various INCOMPLETE machines that are sold as good presses.

Or,

Our patent covers two improvements which enable us to make a PERFECT PRESS at the lowest POSSIBLE price. No other maker can use the improvements, and hence cannot by ANY POSSIBILITY build AS GOOD a portable press at ANY price. With these facts in mind no wise person can be tempted to invest in any other press, or any weak imitations which the success of the Excelsior has induced to appear.

The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 was the first and probably the only world's fair to pay its exhibitors. Kelsey was among them, as was Golding & Co. Both companies' presses won medals and made the most of them in advertising. But by the time of the St. Louis fair in 1904, Kelsey had decided that the cost of exhibiting at these fairs was too high.

Kelsey's mail order ads appeared in so many magazines that it was probably inevitable that the idea would be picked up.

In 1876 after Kelsey had moved into his own factory building, his former landlord, James Cook, decided that Kelsey was doing so well in the mail-



The Kelsey factory

order business that he would enter it himself. The cover of the Cook catalogue showed the Victor press (which Kelsey later made.) Another of his presses was called the Enterprise, a name no doubt chosen to be easily confused with the Excelsior. They were pretty good presses – they included a self-inking press – and gave Kelsey some competition. In 1877 Kelsey wrote in an ad:

It having come to our notice that J. Cook & Co., envious of the business success of our establishment, and aping its mode of business, has endeavored to steal some of our customers by offering certain ar-

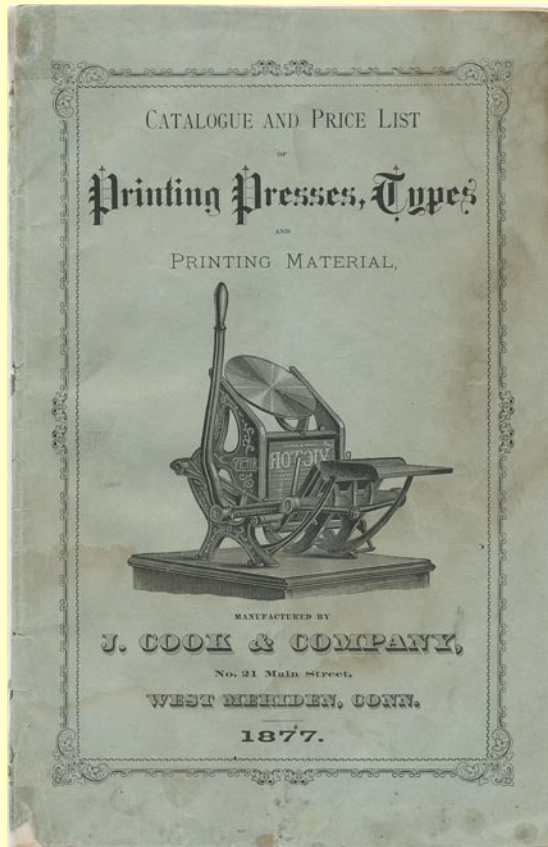
ticles, purporting to be put up like ours, at a price less than ours. Lest some be misled we give notice that we will fill orders for anything this party offers, or ever may offer or advertise, at five percent less than his prices...we make this offer because of the despicable character of the competition we propose to kill. Healthy competition we welcome, but the other kind we mean to fight till a different course is adopted than aping our plans entirely.

The bitter tone of this ad is no doubt due to Cook's having formerly been Kelsey's landlord. Kelsey was successful; by 1883 his catalogues carried the announcement:

DEAD. Competitors of this establishment do not seem to prosper. We have bought out B. O. Woods & Co., Novelty Presses, started in Boston in 1864. J. Cook & Co., after spending \$20,000 in attempting to compete with our excellent presses, have sold out to us at great sacrifice. Our machines are too good to allow much chance for competition. We shall meet all rivals with cut prices!

Kelsey bought out Cook for \$10,000 cash.

Other competition included the Centennial, the Young America, and the Lightning presses, all made by Joseph Watson of New York. Watson had earlier been in Boston, selling the Lowe and Adams Cottage presses. He eventually sold out to Kelsey for \$3,500 in 1896. His Lightning Press reappeared much later in Kelsey's catalogue of 1935 as the Watson Side-Lever Press. The same happened with Cook's Victor Press, which was still being sold by Kelsey into fairly recent times.



Cook Company catalog, 1877



The Enterprise press in the Cook catalog,

Daughaday of Philadelphia was the publisher of *Schoolday Magazine* and had been an agent for Kelsey's presses, but in 1874 he brought out a very nice press called The Model. It was popular in this country, and was also made and sold in Britain un-

USE THE MODEL Printing PRESS
BEST IN THE WORLD.
 Cheap, Fast, Reliable. \$10 up. Warranted. Capable of doing every kind of Card and Business Printing. Thousands in use; everybody delighted. Don't buy a Printing Press until you have seen and read "How to Print," a handsome 56 page book, nicely illustrated, which tells you all about the Model Press, besides being a complete Printers' Guide, and invaluable to Business Men and young printers. Sent upon receipt of two green postage stamps. J.W. Daughaday & Co., Manufacturers, and Dealers in Type, Ink, Bronzes, Cards, and every description of Printing Material, Nos. 434 and 436 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

til after World War II. Other competing presses were the Golding Pearl and Official presses; Baltimorean presses made in Baltimore; a lot of lesser-known presses like the Gem and the Uncle Sam;

and later, the Golding-inspired presses made by Sigwalt of Chicago.

Kelsey's Excelsior presses take two forms: the early "rounded bottom" that is very similar to Cook's Enterprise; and the more characteristic "square bottom" which continued to be produced until the very end. The round bottom machines disappeared in the 1890s. After World War II, the press was redesigned by Norman Bel Geddes, a

Printing Presses. The Best
 \$6 Size for cards, labels, env. &c. \$11 Size for circulars, etc.
 Business Men do their own printing. For Boys, Amateurs, amusement and money making. Send stamp for circular. Kelsey & Co. Meriden Conn.

EXCELSIOR "Lowest Priced and BEST!"
Do Your Own Printing!
 \$3 Press for cards, labels, envelopes, etc. Larger sizes for larger work.
 Business Men do their printing and advertising, save money and increase trade. Pleasure and profit in Amateur Printing. The Girls or Boys Printing. Send two stamps for full catalogue of presses, type, etc., to the Manufacturers, KELSEY & CO., Meriden, Conn.



PRICES, Hand-Inkers.

NO. 1	Chase 31x31 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 16 lbs.	\$3.00
NO. 2	31x31 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 20 lbs.	5.00
NO. 2 1/2	41x37 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 30 lbs.	8.00
NO. 3 1/2	51x39 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 100 lbs.	14.00
NO. 4 1/2	71x39 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 175 lbs.	25.00
NO. 5	101x39 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 250 lbs.	44.00

12" Doing for shipment, free. 1 Chase, 1 Ink Table, 1 Feed Table, with every press.



PRICES, Self-Inkers.

NO. 1	Chase 31x31 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 20 lbs.	\$4.00
NO. 2	31x31 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 25 lbs.	8.00
NO. 2 1/2	41x37 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 35 lbs.	14.00
NO. 3 1/2	51x39 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 110 lbs.	22.00
NO. 4 1/2	71x39 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 200 lbs.	44.00
NO. 5	101x39 1/2 inches, weight boxed about 250 lbs.	75.00

12" Doing for shipment, free. 1 Chase, 1 Ink Table, 1 Feed Table, 1 Roller, with every press.

Foot Treadles, complete for either size press, hand or self-inker, \$3.00. They are sometimes convenient but seldom necessary.

noted industrial product designer and himself a Kelsey press user. Unfortunately, the new design by Bel Geddes did not look significantly better than the old.

Surviving business ups and downs

The factory in Meriden prospered and was added to over the years, as Kelsey continued to sell his presses all over the world, with a new catalogue every year and scores of ads in boy's and men's magazines.

Among those who owned Kelsey presses was Rudyard Kipling. He used the name "Meriden" in one of his stories – a name no doubt subliminally picked up from the side of his Excelsior press.

In 1883 Kelsey's sales totaled \$37,000; in 1887, \$61,000; and in 1890, \$48,000. But during the 1890s the amateur press market was hit hard twice. First, there was a business recession that cut down on sales of discretionary items like boys' presses; and



when that was barely over, a new fad – bicycling – spread like wildfire. Boys who used to spend their afternoons in basements, printing, were now bicycling on the streets. Thus was the biggest boom period of amateur printing brought to an end. In the next century, from 1904 to 1916, sales fluctuated between \$30,000 and \$44,000.

Kelsey weathered this period mainly by selling printing supplies to owners of his presses – fancy calling cards, announcements, envelopes, stationery, inks, and so on. Other press makers did not have that kind of business to lean on, and many of them failed.

Kelsey got type from various foundries, including the old New England Type Foundry of Boston, until that firm failed in 1888. In 1895 Kelsey was negotiating to buy the Lindsay Type Foundry of New York, but the asking price was \$60,000, and eventually it was sold to ATF. By that time most, but not all of Kelsey's foundry type came from ATF. Foundry fonts were split into small fonts with the label Connecticut Type Foundry. When the Damon & Peets foundry went bust, Kelsey bought all of their stock of type and some tools. Kelsey also sold Monotype made for it by Missouri-Central in Wichita, Kansas. In later years Kelsey ran its own small foundry with old pivotal casters, and used the name New England Type Foundry for its products. This helped to avoid being squeezed by ATF. Type names were changed – DeVinne became Saunders, for example. Saunders was the man who ran the casters. Kelsey also advertised “nickel alloy type,” and, as Kelsey wrote to Snow, “to be technically truthful [I] ordered a nickel dropped into the melting pot.” I suspect that after the casting was done Mr. Kelsey was able to retrieve his unmelted nickel. Eventually the old pivotal machines were replaced by a Thompson caster.

W. A. Kelsey & Co. continued and prospered, with Mr. Kelsey occasionally taking a flyer into some other promising line. Some of them included King Pianos and Organs, Swiss watches sold by mail order at \$3.50 each, and Dr. Baker's Grape

Cure. The Grape Cure venture started in December of 1892, with headquarters, of course, in Kelsey's factory building. An elaborate but totally fictional origin of the Grape Cure in Germany was invented. Kelsey's own doctor, Dr. Paul Baker, was supposed to have bought the patent and at last made it available for the yearning American public. Advertising included a testimonial from “a Meriden man,” namely Charles H. Warner, foreman of Kelsey's machine shop.

Kelsey sank \$20,000 into the Grape Cure, but it didn't take off, and 20 years later Kelsey was still paying off the original debt. And 90 years later there were still bottles of the Grape Cure on the Kelsey premises. Gene Mosher, the last owner of Kelsey & Co., gave me a bottle of the stuff in an elaborately printed wrapper. I have never unwrapped it, but I can hear the liquid Grape Cure sloshing about in the bottle inside the package.

The Grape Cure contained sherry or port, glycerine, ipecac, oil of wintergreen, herbal bitters, and acetanilid, the main ingredient in Anacin, dissolved in an ounce of alcohol. Except for the sherry, there were no grapes. The factory back lot had grape vines, and perhaps Mr. Kelsey would drop in a grape or two to make the advertising “truthful.”



In any case, Mr. Kelsey was a firm believer in his product, and advised his successor, Glover Snow, to take the stuff any time he felt "run down" or felt a cold coming on. Snow wrote, in the privacy of his notebooks that "I only take the stuff when I want to irritate my wife with its overpowering aromatic smell." Frugal Yankee that he was, he added "I hate to throw it away. There is something about opening a package and bottle of this venerable stuff, packed long years ago, which gives me a thrill probably comparative to that experienced by one opening a bottle of hundred year old liquor – in fact, the grape cure has such a high alcoholic content that it would be quite a drink if it were not for some of the bitter herbs used in its making. Anyway, these bottles represent \$20,000 and as such they command my respect."

The Kelsey line of presses included, on and off, treadle platen presses, including this Excelsior Jobber. Other presses sold by Kelsey over the years were the O.K. Jobber and the Union Jobber in the 1890s, and the Star Jobber, circa 1900. The Star, and the King Jobber of 1911 had more than a slight resemblance to the Prouty jobber, for the very good reason is that they were both designed for Kelsey by George W. Prouty.

In 1905 the privately-held company was incorporated under the name of "Kelsey Press Co," with William Kelsey taking 500 of the 750 shares. Four years later the Directors voted to equip the factory with electricity. In 1923 Kelsey retired after running

the company for 51 years and the management was taken over by 26-year old Glover Snow, grandson of the Gamaliel Snow who had made Kelsey's original press patterns. Kelsey was a rich man, with property holdings in Meriden and Fall River, and part ownerships in the *Meriden Republican* and the *Los Angeles Express*.

The Glover Snow years

Glover Snow had been an amateur printer who had used a Kelsey press, and he was well-suited to run the company. His great interest in the history of Kelsey & Co. resulted in copious notebooks that reveal much about the company. I am indebted to them for most of the material in this article. After he took over from Mr. Kelsey, Glover Snow started *The Printer's Helper*, which, because it went to so many inexperienced printers, had to cover many basics over and over again. Snow wrote the copy and the type was set and the forms made up in-house, but it was sent out for printing. In 1934 the company got a Miehle vertical and began printing it in-house.

Glover Snow realized that the instructional material for Kelsey presses was woefully inadequate, considering that many of the presses were being sold to people with no previous experience at printing. In his notebooks, Snow wrote, "Watson's instruction book was far superior to Kelsey's, whose *Printer's Guide*, for years appeared to be printed from battered plates, and with scant information.

Keep this for Reference

• The Printer's Helper •

Issued occasionally in the interests of both those who print for others and those who print for themselves.

Number 1—1929.

Published by The Kelsey Press Co., Meriden, Conn.

12 issues, 30 cents postpaid

A Helper for You

Many times have we been asked if there were not some publication devoted to the interests of the medium and small size printer—both the man who

How to Get Good Even Inking on Jobs With Rule or Fancy Borders

When printing a job with rule or border all around it, if the

This Is Your Paper

We want *The Printer's Helper* to be of real value to you, and the surest way of making it of service is to have you ask us questions, or request a discussion in these columns on any phase

The Model people likewise gave much better instruction. The wonder is that Kelsey, rather than Watson, survived." The *Printer's Guide*, one of Kelsey's longtime publications, was probably taken over from J. Cook & Co. when that firm sold out to Kelsey. It was expanded under Glover Snow.

In his notebooks, Snow noted that the normal work week in 1924 was 55 hours – 7 a.m. to noon, 1 p.m. to 6, and Saturdays 7 a.m. to noon. In slack periods the hours dropped to 50 a week. In 1933 the company went to a 40-hour week. It was the only company in Meriden not to make a general pay cut during the great Depression, and by 1936 the company was surpassing previous high sales.

Occasionally over the years the Excelsior press has been copied. William Kelsey found copies of his press in Japan in 1909, on one of his many trips. I have found this unabashed imitation in the 1934 catalogue of P. Peiffer & Co. of Newark, New Jersey.

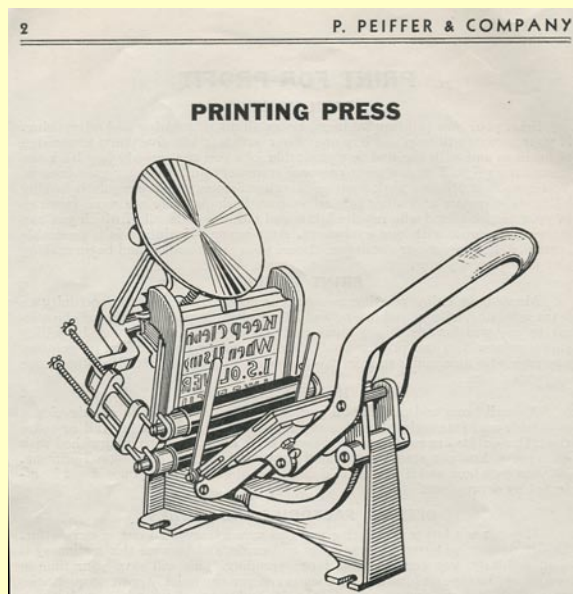
Then, during World War II, the oss decided to obtain some aluminum presses, pack them into

City. This shop then had to contact Kelsey with a request for help in making something they had never seen before.

Glover Snow ran the company until 1960, when he passed it along to his son-in-law, Gene Mosher. The business started to get a bit rocky in the 1970s and 1980s. Schools, which were always major customers of Kelsey, were ending letterpress instruction. The final blow came after Chandler & Price got OSHA to recommend that all old platen presses be scrapped because they were allegedly "dangerous." C&P wanted to get out from under having to support their platen presses and to avoid being sued for accidents with them.

Kelsey made an attempt to diversify into the hot-stamping business with an attachment for the Excelsior press, but it was expensive and cumbersome, and went nowhere. Eventually, by 1990, the company went out of business; some of its mats and other material was bought by Rich Hopkins and Dave Peat, but the 118-year history of Kelsey & Co. was at an end. But it is remembered with affection by many amateur printers all over the country, including many who as youngsters first pressed inked type to paper in a Kelsey press, for "the thrill that comes once in a lifetime."

Note: Only one photo was found of William Kelsey – it appeared in Gordon Rouze's 1999 booklet on Kelsey. Thanks to John Horn for the scan of *The Printer's Helper*.



pasteboard suitcases for camouflage, and provide them to agents working behind the lines in Nazi-occupied Europe. Although the oss made contact with the Kelsey Company, the contract for the presses went to a machine shop in New York

Stephen O. Saxe (A.B. Harvard, M.F.A Yale) designed scenery for television, the New York City Opera, and for Mme. Tussaud's, London. He went on to design books for Harcourt Brace in New York, and then became interested in the history of printing.

He edited the *Newsletter* of the American Printing History Association for five years, writing for each issue an essay on a wide range of printing subjects. He is the author of *American Iron Hand Presses*, and edited and brought up to date a new edition of *Annenberg's Type Foundries of America and their Catalogs*, the standard bibliography of American type specimen books.

(This article was adapted from a talk given by the author, to the APA Wayzgoose, Hartford, Conn., June 10, 2000)

HAPPENINGS

Travelers passing through SeaTac Airport (Seattle-Tacoma) can get a quick introduction to the art of letterpress printing in Concourse A. The exhibition's name: "Hot Off the Press: Prints and Other Texts." Though the venue seems unlikely, Seattle's airport is full of both permanent and rotating art exhibitions that often include unusual mediums. Curator Otto Youngers contacted the School of Visual Concepts in Seattle and worked with letterpress instructor and shop manager Jenny Wilkson to put together the exhibit. Besides showing artist books and broadsides

from the school's students and instructors, the exhibit also gives some history of the craft. Along with brief explanatory text, visitors can see several tools of the trade: a small platen press, wood cuts and type, ink and brayers, plus a large wooden composing stick. The exhibit is on display through 2007.

PHOTOS: AMY REDMOND



LETTERPRESS

SEND IN YOURS *Tips* WRITE THE EDITOR

Got a round hole perforator? Want to lubricate it without staining your paper stock? Take several sheets of your wives' "Cut-Rite" waxed paper and punch a bunch of holes. The thin film of wax left on the pins will lubricate them without staining your sheets of faux postage stamps.

– Dave Churchman

A manicurist's orange stick makes a good bodkin. It will not scratch type. Pushing the tapered end between type makes it easy to insert spacing. If it loses the point, the orange stick can be sharpened in a pencil sharpener.

– Leland Whitson

The below two tips are from *Type & Press* which was published by Fred Williams – the last issue coming out the summer of 2000.

Cheap drug and dime store as well as printers' tweezers are too stiff & pointed for easy use. Instead get genuine surgical forceps from any surgical supply firm. With them it's easy to pick up a hairspace off the stone or to lift more than five picas of type.

Never scrub type with the fine wire brushes often advertised for that purpose. These wires may deface the delicate face of the type. A soft cloth with solvent is much safer.