

APHA NorCal's field trip *A Day of Oakland Printing* was fun, informative, and surprising. Twenty of us met up at the Horwinski Printing shop at 11am on Saturday, June 13<sup>th</sup>, to meet with James Lang, the owner. He showed us around his wondrous shop full of stuff which is full of big, old, machines and a fantastic assortment of wood type.

The 1907 and 1908 Oakland City Directories\* lists the Horwinski Company, Inc. at 3708 San Pablo Avenue in Oakland; by 1928 Horwinski Company, Inc. is listed at 1537 Webster Street in Oakland; and it appears they moved in 1960 to the 958 87<sup>th</sup> Avenue address where they still are today.

The 1904 San Francisco City Directory lists both Max and Max Jr. Horwinski working for the Morton L. Cook Company which did printing, engraving, and advertising in San Francisco. In 1905 Edward and Max Horwinski were still working for Morton L. Cook. By the next year, Horwinski Company Inc. is in the Oakland City Directory, and by 1909 (and later) Morton L. Cook had dropped the printing and engraving from his business. My guess is that Horwinski bought the printing business from Morton L. Cook and brought it to Oakland after the fire and earthquake in 1906.

James started sweeping the floors at Horwinski's at age six. He inherited the business from his Dad (who inherited it from his Grandfather) and he's been printing ever since. His Dad taught him to "keep everything because you never know when you might have a use for it" and he obeyed orders. With the advent of offset printing, their business declined, but James has persevered printing posters, show card, t-shirts...anything that needs printing. It's hard to make enough money to afford hiring staff. And customers never want "to pay me for disassembling the job" because, presumably, they have no idea how time-intensive the hand-set printing process really is.

A large assortment of wood type fills the cases. Much of it probably came from the Hamilton Wood Type Company over 100 years ago. He has a beautiful wooden "E" which is over 16" tall (and probably made by Hamilton.) Some of it is handmade and lots would have been hand-repaired. Horwinski Printing at one time employed over 30 people. They did

commercial work which included newspaper printing. He showed us a fabulous group photo of the staff from the early days at the downtown Oakland shop.

### The Machines

He has a Dexter Cutter which requires two hands and one foot to operate. Quite a formidable behemoth which he used in an impressive demonstration for us. The Heidelberg Windmill Press with its shiny sign proclaiming “Original Heidelberg” was lovely to see.

He has two Miehle printing presses. One is medium-sized. But the other one is a “monster.” Only one of the two “monster” presses made the move from downtown Oakland to 87<sup>th</sup> Avenue. And if you ever visit, you will understand why. Its bed can accommodate pieces up to 44”x30”. It truly deserves the adjective “awesome.” He feeds each piece by hand. But he told us that originally there was an auto-feed attachment one could purchase: it would blow air to separate the pages as they were automatically fed into the machine. The original patent date on the machine’s tiny plaque reads 14 July 1885 and the latest patent date listed was 6 November 1900. There is a delightful, small, brass “American Counting Machine” attached to the Miehle — its plaque reads “Keep Well Oiled,” 16 November 1897. Wise words.

Our next stop after lunch was to the Material Print Machine space at the Omni Commons at 4799 Shattuck Avenue. This idealistic young group of print-loving people have ambitious ideals and a unique, historic, and nonstandard space to work within. The collaborative is just starting out with the goal of creating “a space full of print, book-making, and zine resources.” They’ve mostly been moving in, organizing the space, and de-rusting the printing equipment. But they do have a wish list of equipment needs if you want to donate to a good cause. We look forward to seeing their success in spreading the word about the black arts.

How are we going to top this field trip? Join us and become a member to see what we plan next.

\*If you want to have fun with City Directories click here.

[<http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000540401>] and [<http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=0200001001>]