

## Preserving, Repairing and Restoring Old Presses

One of APHA's stated aims at the time of its founding in 1975 was the preservation of the artifacts of printing. While it is no doubt true that APHA has helped focus some attention on these old objects and thus helped to preserve them, that seems to be about all that has been done. It has remained for the collector, the letterpress printer, and the museum curator to do the preservation and restoration.

That there is real interest in preservation across the country is a fact that I can vouch for, since I have received many requests for help and information. It seems appropriate, therefore, to use this space to suggest some approaches that I have found useful. They are based entirely on my own experience and they may not suit everyone's idea of what should be done.

The first matter to consider is this: what should be saved from the scrapyard, and what should be left to it? No individual or museum has unlimited space, time, or money and it is essential to make some choices early on. For a printing museum, this usually means a decision on the scope of its printing exhibit. Does the museum want to focus on a specific time, or cover the entire history of printing? Either of these is hard to accomplish, for different reasons; but sticking to a cut-off date is a bit easier. Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, for example, has a unified New England village dated 1840, and the printing shop must fit into this frame. Anything after 1840 would be an anachronism. Bowne & Co., Stationers, in New York has a somewhat looser time frame of the mid-1880s; and this later date makes life easier for the curator because there is much more equipment surviving from the 1880s.

This somewhat strict approach is suitable for some situations, but most collectors and many museums take what they find and cherish it. The Friends of the Museum of Printing in Boston, for instance, has among its hand presses and platen jobbers the complete, enormous, computer typesetter used a few years ago to set all the type for the *Boston Globe*. Moving it and keeping it in storage seems to me to divert much-needed funds from more deserving objects. Yet the question remains: is not this computer part of the history of printing and worth preserving? When does the printing technology of the present become part of the historical record? These are questions that are not always easy to answer, but I am convinced that many collectors and curators do not even ask them.

Most of the collectors I know are limited by the space they have available, what they can find, and their budgets.

Those with basements or spare rooms available can accommodate large platen jobbers and hand presses; those in city apartments are more likely to confine themselves to tabletop presses or a collection of 1880s rule bending machines.

In the end what one collects often comes down to a matter of individual taste, and what one has the luck to find. But it is useful to the collector and museum alike to give some thought to what is being collected, and why.

The next question is the matter of repairs. Before acquiring a press it is a good idea to make sure that it is repairable at a cost that is within reason. If you intend to print with it, make sure all the functioning parts are present: gears, shafts, etc. Broken gear teeth can be replaced and broken feed board brackets can be welded or brazed, provided you know someone who can do it. On the other hand, a missing gear can be a much more serious problem; there are very few used-parts stores for 19th century printing presses.

On old platen presses, the parts that are most often missing are rollers, roller trucks and treadles. The least serious to replace are the rollers, since there are many companies that will sell new composition or synthetic rollers complete on the proper-sized core. The main problem here is to know what the proper sizes are for the rollers and cores, so they can be ordered. (We will consider sources of information in a moment.) Roller trucks can be turned on a lathe, although here again one must know the correct dimensions. Steel is the material of choice, but I have seen somewhat less-authentic looking ones turned from Delrin plastic that work on the press just as well as steel.

A missing treadle is more difficult. Many job presses that were sold complete had their treadles discarded by printers who attached motors. A treadle discarded is a treadle lost; hence there are a lot more platen presses today than there are presses with treadles. A treadle can be fashioned from wood or other material that will work satisfactorily, but it will not look like much. And finding a replacement treadle is very, very unlikely.

The parts most likely to be missing from an iron hand press are the forestay, the tympan, and the frisket. The forestay (the outside support for the rails) can be easily made from wood, using an engraving of the press from a printers' manual or catalogue for reference. When Old Sturbridge Village made a replacement forestay for their Smith-Hoe Acorn press, they turned a replica of an old one on a lathe but the material used was aluminum, so it would be obvious to future curators that it was not an original part.

Tympans and friskets are very often missing from hand presses. Although they are needed for production printing, they were often discarded at the end of the last century when these presses were used almost exclusively for proofing photo-engravings. Once separated from the press, like the treadle, they seldom returned. Here there is no choice but

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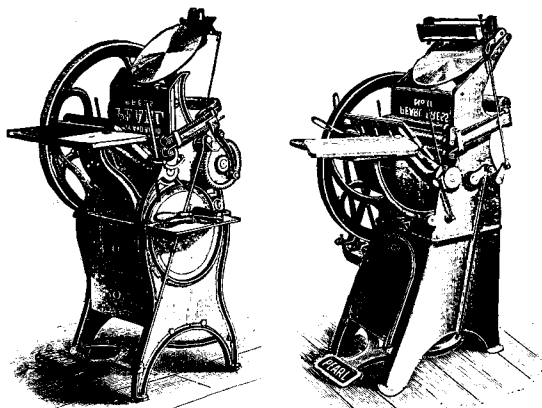
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to have a metal-worker make new ones. Ideally one can take measurements from those on another press by the same maker; but if not available, most iron hand press tympan and friskets are very similar, and can be used as models.

At this point we should consider where one can find the information needed to repair and restore a press. One of the best sources, and the most likely to be readily accessible, is the visual examination of another identical or at least similar press that is in good repair. Owners of presses can be located through amateur printing organizations and by placing classified ads in periodicals for letterpress printers. (See the list of sources below.) This approach is fine if you are working on a fairly common old press, like a C & P or a Golding Pearl. If you have a rare press, you may not find another to examine. In case of rare presses, a few sentences in the "Notes & Queries" column of this newsletter may bring some results, but please do not use this approach unless your press is rare or you have already tried other means of getting information.

The best source of general information that I can suggest is the trade catalogue. If you can locate a detailed catalogue description and wood engraving of your press, you may

PEARL PRESSES



Pearl Presses, Nos. 1, 3 and 5.

Pearl Presses, Nos. 11 and 14.

Catalogue wood-engravings

glean enough information to make or repair a part. These descriptions do not usually provide dimensions, though, and a certain amount of guesswork may be necessary. Trade catalogues by a press manufacturer are the best; slightly less helpful are the printing equipment sections in old type specimen books. At the very least these catalogue listings will help to identify the maker and the model of your press, and that is an absolutely necessary starting point. Library holdings of trade catalogues are listed in Romaine; see the bibliography below.

For old iron hand presses, a wood engraving in a printers' manual like Johnson's *Typographia* or a photograph in Moran's *Printing Presses* may be enough to provide the needed information. A trip to the Smithsonian's Hall of Graphic Arts might be even better. The Smithsonian's collection of hand presses is excellent; other large collections include those of the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, the Lindner Collection in Los Angeles, and the American Graphic Arts collection in Elizabeth, New Jersey. These collections also contain many platen jobbers of various manufacturers.

The actual restoration of any piece of machinery involves two stages: mechanical and cosmetic. The mechanical is usually self-evident and involves processes that remain much the same as they were in the nineteenth century. The cosmetic stage involves more thought and decision-making. I recently read of a machinery restorer (who does work for the Smithsonian among others) who sandblasts cast iron parts and then coats them with epoxy filler to achieve a smooth surface. Since epoxy is nearly impossible to remove, I believe it is not a material that should be used on a restoration. There is nothing wrong with attempting beautifully smoothed contours on castings, but do not irretrievably change the original.

Too many owners of old presses feel that black enamel is not attractive enough for their press. They superimpose twentieth century taste on nineteenth century equipment, with results that are often ludicrous. It is true that a small percentage of old presses might have been painted in some other color than black; but it was unusual and I would be against jumping to another color unless good reason exists to believe it is correct. As in old-house restorations, careful scraping and use of solvents can often reveal the original color of the object; but be careful not to imagine that a priming color was the true color. Black enamelled presses were often decorated by pin-stripping, the use of decalcomanias, and sometimes gold paint or leaf. If research reveals pinstripping ornamentation, be conservative. Sign painters' colors are appropriate for this kind of work, used with "dagger" brushes and a sure hand. Pinstripping was often in bright colors, like orange, and usually followed the edge lines and contours of the press.

One final caution: be humble. Understand that you may not know all the answers. Be ready to admit mistakes, and correct them. Do not do anything that cannot be corrected at a future date, when you may finally have a true knowledge of the press you own.

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### Sources

*The Inland Printer*, Vol. I No.1 (1883) - circa 1900. For numerous engraved illustrations of the most popular platen presses, as shown in advertisements.

Johnson, John. *Typographia, or the Printers' Instructor*, London, 1825. Engravings of the various hand presses, including views of disassembled parts. See also other nineteenth century printers' manuals.

Moran, James. *Printing Presses*. Berkeley, 1973. Photographs and engravings of many hand presses and platen jobbers.

*The Printer*. Published monthly at \$10 per annum by Michael and Sally Phillips, 337 Wilson Street, Findlay, OH 45840. Classified ads can be a good source of information for parts and supplies.

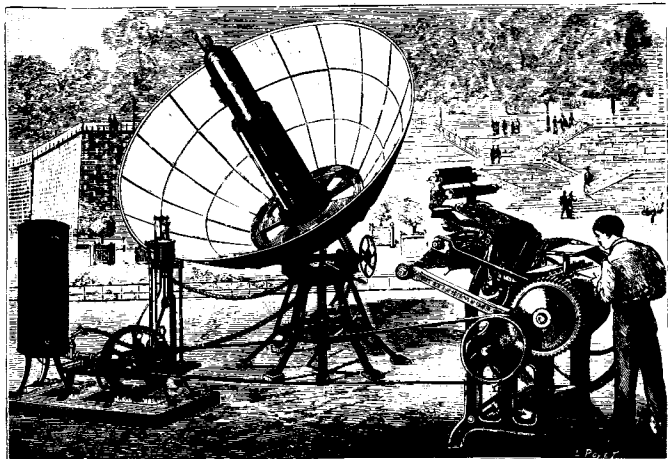
Romaine, Lawrence B. *A Guide to American Trade Catalogs, 1744-1900*. New York, 1960. Chapter 42 lists the library locations of catalogues of printing equipment before 1900.

Sterne, Harold E. *Catalogue of Nineteenth Century Printing Presses*. Cincinnati, 1978. Excellent collection of engraved views of all kinds of presses. Available from the author at 5815 Cherokee Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45243, for \$19.95 postpaid.

*Type & Press*. Published quarterly at \$2.50 per annum (\$3.50 overseas airmail) by Fred C. Williams, 24667 Heather Courte, Hayward, CA 94545. Excellent for classified ads and general information.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

Technology marches on – and has been doing so for a long time. The picture below shows a Gordon-style platen press in 1882 being driven by solar energy. M. Abel Pifre, a French engineer, demonstrated his solar engine in the garden of the Tuileries in Paris. A concave mirror 3.5 meters



in diameter focussed the sun's rays on a cylindrical steam boiler, which in turn ran a 2/5 h.p. engine which operated the press. Although the sky was overcast, the press operated continuously all afternoon, printing about 500 copies per hour of a journal called, appropriately, *Soleil-Journal*. In spite of its success, it does not appear that many of the world's printers embraced the new technology.

More recently (1987) I ran into the first computerized calligrapher. At the New York Stationery Show a Cambridge, Mass. company called InScribe demonstrated a computer-driven system using real calligrapher's pens (although not goose quills). InScribe comes with software to produce Italic, Script Celtic, Roundhand, Spencerian, Copperplate and Blackletter hands. If this thing had been around in 1440 or so, Gutenberg would not have had to bother about printing.



The second annual Lieberman Lecture, sponsored by APHA and the Friends of the Lilly Library, will be given on Thursday, November 5 at 5:30 at the Lilly Library, in Bloomington, Indiana. The speaker will be Paul Needham, Astor Curator of Printed Books and Bindings at the Pierpont Morgan Library. His subject is "Finding Books in Books." A reception will follow the talk. All APHA members and interested non-members are invited. For additional information, call 812-335-2452, or write to Marcia Morrison, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405.

The APHA Annual Conference, which takes place on September 26th at Columbia University, will be reported in the next issue of the *Newsletter*.

APHA New England Chapter meetings resume Oct. 6th and continue on the first Tuesday of the month (except

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January) at 6:30 p.m. at the European Restaurant, Boston. Speaker at the Fall Lecture (jointly sponsored by several other book arts groups) will be John Dreyfus on "Spectacular View of the Advent of Printing," Oct. 15, 8 p.m. in the lecture room of the Margaret Clapp Library, Wellesley College.

## BOOKS

The following books of interest to APHA Members have been received:

Cuchet, Pierre. *Etudes sur les Machines à Composer et l'Esthétique du Livre*. Paris, 1908; reprinted by Editions Jerome Million (134, chemin de l'Etoile, Montbonnot-Saint-Martin 38330, France.) Annotated by Alan Marshall. Paperbound, 127 pp., 8vo, 85 francs.

These studies first appeared in *La Fonderie Typographique*, a French typesetters' journal, in 1908. Cuchet, a printer, analysed in depth the arguments for and against the composing machine, which was then making its first inroads in France. His conclusion, that machine composition was not economic – may seem odd today, but had a certain validity at the time of writing. Nevertheless the text (in French) remains of interest because the questions raised in 1908 are still being raised as new forms of technology enter the field.

Romano, Frank J. *Machine Writing and Typesetting*. Salem, NH, 1986. (Published by GAMA, PO Box 170, Salem, NH 03079.) 4to, hardbound, 122 pp, illustrated.

Frank Romano, a well-known writer in the printing industry, has produced a brief but interesting history of the beginning of machine composition a century ago. His book connects the development of the typewriter with that of the Linotype. The relationship of these two inventions has not been detailed before, but those who know the history of the Linotype will recall that early attempts at a composing machine involved the use of the typewriter to produce a lithographic transfer. Romano confines himself to the typewriter and the Linotype, in spite of the broader implications of his title. The book is well-illustrated with photographs, but is not annotated.

Duncan, Harry. *Doors of Perception: Essays in Book Typography*. Austin, 1987, 8vo, 99 pp., paperbound. \$16.50 + shipping from W. Thomas Taylor, 1906 Miriam, Austin TX 78722.

These essays were originally printed by Carol Blinn at the

Warwick Press in a limited edition for W. Thomas Taylor that sold for \$150. Now Taylor has brought out an inexpensive but elegant edition printed offset by the Wind River Press, based on the Blinn edition. There are five excellent essays that will be of interest to the practical printer, the historian of printing, and the private press enthusiast. The titles of the essays are: "The Cummington Press," "The Technology of Hand Printing," "The Art of the Printed Book," "My master Victor Hammer," and "The Permanence of Books." All are thoughtful, literate, and full of common sense – as well as idealism. A book to be enjoyed both for content and form.

#### Brief Notices

Franklin, Collin. *The Ashdene Press*. Printed letterpress by W. Thomas Taylor for the Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University. Folio, 250 pp., illustrated, bound in decorated paper over boards. 750 copies, \$140 + shipping.

*A Goudy Memoir, Essays by and about Frederic W. Goudy*. Printed letterpress and published by Neil Shaver at his Yellow Barn Press (710 First Avenue, Council Bluffs, Iowa 51501.) Limited to 150 copies: 75 on dampened Rives mould-made paper (\$69 ppd.) and 75 on Mohawk letterpress paper (\$49 ppd.) Case bound, 4to, with a John DePol pattern paper over boards, xi + 45 pp., with 5 illustrations by John DePol, including one in two colors. Essays by Alexander Lawson, Arthur W. Rushmore, Howard Coggeshall, Richard Ellis, and Earl Emmons, as well as by Goudy himself.

Maud Cole has for sale a file of back issues of *Fine Print*, including the following: Vol. 1, Nos. 1 & 2; Vol. 4, Nos. 3 & 4; and Vols 5-10 complete; Vol. 11, No. 1. Contact her at 21-45 28th st., Astoria, NY 11105; tel. 718-274-8372.

Harvard's Houghton Library has received an important addition to its collection of William Morris material. A recent gift has included more than thirty proofs and two drawings for the Kelmscott Chaucer of 1896, with many of the proofs annotated by Sidney Cockerell, Morris' secretary. They include proofs of illustrations, initials, borders, and full letterpress pages. There are two drawings by Morris for borders in the *Romaunt of the Rose*, executed in graphite, India ink, and Chinese white.

## BRIEFLY NOTED

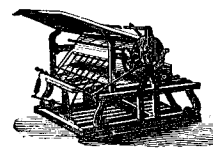
The fifth annual James Russell Wiggins Lecture in the History of the Book in American Culture will be given at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester on Wednesday, September 30th at 5:00 p.m. The speaker is leading French book historian Roger Charpentier of Paris, who will speak on "Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of Publishing to the History of Reading."

Quintessence Museum (356 Bunker Hill Mine Road, Amador City, CA 95601; tel. 209-267-5470 eves.) announces a series of two-day seminars teaching letterpress typesetting. Participants will learn the essentials of hand setting, Linotype, and Ludlow composition. Several kinds of presses are available for printing, including proof presses, platen

jobbers, a Heidelberg, and a Miehle Vertical. The seminars are \$85 per person for the two-day session.

In a surprising move, *The Economist* of London switched its typeface from Times Roman to Goudy Roman. *The Economist* changes its style about once a decade; this time they stated that "settled readers may object."

"A Look at the Book" is the title of a 4-day event scheduled for October 1-4 at the Firehouse Art Center, 444 S. Flood, Norman, Oklahoma. It will include an exhibition in the gallery, workshops and demonstrations, displays, lectures, and used and rare book sales – all devoted to the arts of the book, including printing, papermaking, binding, marbling, calligraphy, etc. Admission is free and a large crowd is anticipated. For details and further information call the Firehouse Art Center at 405-329-4523 or write.



## TYPE & PRESSES

Francis A. Croce (522 Madison Avenue, Albany, NY 12208) is selling his #4 Vandercook proof press and 14 cases of type. Contact Mr. Croce for additional information.

Print-Art Services, auctioneers, announces the sale of the type and cuts of an old New York commercial printer on Oct. 21st. A large quantity of type and antique commercial cuts will be sold. For details call 212-964-2350 or write Print-Art, 277 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10007.

## NOTES & QUERIES

Roger C. Frith (Tennessee State Museum, James K. Polk Building, 505 Deaderick St., Nashville, TN 37219) is seeking information that would help him restore a Prouty Ideal #24 platen jobber press. Drawings, roller truck diameters, and information about the Prouty company are all sought. [Note: Mr. Frith demonstrates an 18th century common press at the Tennessee State Museum, and will shortly be printing a facsimile of the 1796 Tennessee Constitution on it. The Prouty press restoration is his own project, not part of his Museum work.]

To the Editor:

A footnote to your response to Wilbur Doctor in *APHA Newsletter* 78: Devices to correct the reversal of the image in the daguerreotype process (most commonly some form of prism) were developed and widely in use within a few years of the introduction of the process, though there are enough instances of later reversed images that the dating of a daguerreotype can't depend on that factor alone. But chances are greater of a reversed image being made in the earlier years. Details should be available in any of the standard works on the history of daguerreotypes . . .

John Lancaster  
Amherst College Library