The Press In the Sky

When the movie "Rocky" opened, I'm sure the producers did not foresee that it would be the first of a series. Nor did I, when the first article about unexpected presses appeared last March. In the present case, the series is not so much the result of boxoffice demand as of new material supplied by readers. In other words, the file on these presses grows fatter, not leaner.

One of the most interesting of all the unexpected presses has been brought to my attention by APHA member August Brunsman of Kettering, Ohio. It concerns the first printing to be done above the earth — specifically, on the gas balloon Hoosier, June 29, 1909.

In 1909 Dayton, Ohio was "aeroplane" mad. Everyone wanted to fly, but two local boys, Orville and Wilbur Wright, had the only flying machine in town — or in any town. Several balloon flights had been in the news, and George McClellan, publisher of the Dayton Journal, thought of publishing a miniature edition of the newspaper in the air. He enlisted the aid of reporter Howard Burba, whose education in journalism had included learning to set type and print. Burba bought a 3 x 5 Baltimorean hand lever press from the local sporting goods store. "You may get a pretty fair idea of the size of it [he wrote in 1931] when I explain that it fit perfectly on top of an ordinary tomato box, or packing case, some 18 inches square. A hatchet and a few convenient nails soon converted the interior into a compartment for the miniature typecase, ink, composing stick, and a liberal supply of print-paper to fit the single three-by-five-inch type form." Soon after 9 o'clock on the morning of June 29, 1909, 90,000 cubic feet of gas filled the Hoosier and it rose to 4,000 feet over Dayton, moving in a southwesterly direction.

"Sitting on the tarpaulin in the bottom of the basket I drew forth the typecase and 'stick' and 'set' the first lines of type ever put together in a balloon . . . after a few lines were 'set' by hand they were assembled above enough machine-set slugs, prepared in advance, to fill the form and then copies were run off on the little press." The copies were placed in paper bags and dropped from the balloon as it moved at about 26 miles an hour and at a height of 6,700 feet.

The Hoosier moved in a southwest direction toward Indiana, passing over the towns of Franklin, Middletown, and Oxford, Ohio. At about 1 P.M. a farmer took a shot at the balloon, but fortunately missed. Late in the afternoon, after travelling some 160 miles (dropping freshly-printed sheets all the way,) the balloon was brought to earth in a cornfield just south of Butler, Indiana. The farmer later billed the publisher $25 for damage to his crop, and McClellan paid the bill.

Howard Burba's account of the flight, written 22 years later, reported that the Baltimorean press "became the property of the United States government, and today [1931] has a place in the Smithsonian Institute at Washington." On a recent visit to the Graphic Arts collection and storage facility at the Smithsonian, I didn't notice the historic little press (nor was I looking for it) but I have no doubt that it's there.

News photo from The Dayton Daily News, July 5, 1931, showing Howard Burba and the Baltimorean press just before lift-off.
In the earlier articles, presses on ships were described. To those accounts a few more interesting sea-presseyes should be added. Rollo Silver has written about sea-presseyes during the American Revolution in his article “Aprons Instead of Uniforms: The Practice of Printing 1776-1787” in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, Vol. 87 (1977.) He refers to the Virginia Gazette published by John Holt. After printing “some opinions about Lord Dunsmore’s ancestors,” the press was seized by Dunsmore, and on board his flotilla off Norfolk he issued a loyalist Virginia Gazette in late 1775 and early 1776. In another incident mentioned in the article, a press on board the British ship Phoenix in New York harbor in 1776 printed counterfeit Continental currency for distribution to British agents.

Although sea-presseyes before the 19th century seem fairly scarce, they become relatively common after that. Most modern ocean liners have had them, not to mention naval vessels. An interesting mid-nineteenth century sea-press was on board the Great Eastern, the ship that laid the Atlantic telegraph cable in 1865. In keeping with the high-tech nature of the undertaking, the Atlantic Telegraph Journal was printed lithographically. The eleven leaves have the imprint, “Printed on board the Great Eastern July, Aug. 1865.”

Printing on the frozen Thames was described in the first article last March. Renée Weber, editor of Printing History, has called my attention to some printing under the Thames. An 1865 book, Origin, Progress and Completion of the Thames Tunnel, has an imprint, “Printed by Azulay, in the Thames Tunnel.” The printer, Bondy Azulay, seems to have made a sound business decision to have his pressroom there, although at first glance it may seem an odd place for a press. There were a reported 100,000 visitors per month to the tunnel.

As addenda to the account of printing on the Thames in the March Newsletter, I am happy to reproduce copies of keepsakes printed at the Frost Fairs of 1684 and 1740. They are reproduced from material supplied to me by Robert Richter, President of the Friends of the Museum of Printing in Boston. The 1684 keepsake was printed by George Croom for King Charles II and his family. It should be noted that the Merry Monarch’s sense of humor is seen in the last name, “Hans in Kelder,” or “Jack in the Cellar.” Princess Ann was pregnant at the time of the visit. The 1740 keepsake was printed for the artist William Hogarth, who visited the fair with his favorite bull-terrier, Trump. It was Trump’s name that Hogarth had imprinted on the souvenir.

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Thanks to August E. Brunsman for information about the Hoosier balloon press; to Rollo G. Silver for sea-presseyes during the American Revolution; Renée Weber for the press in the Thames Tunnel; Robert Richter for the Frost Fair keepsakes.

Howard Burba’s account of the balloon press appeared on p. 1 of the magazine section of The Dayton Daily News on Sunday, July 5, 1931.

Readers are once again encouraged to write the author if they can add to the examples of unexpected presses. Still to come is an account of the “Press on Wheels” in the Rocky Mountains, as well as descriptions of some very peculiar presses.
EDITOR'S NOTES

At the start of my second year editing the Newsletter, I would like to thank the readers who have helped make the first year so rewarding. One part of the job that I did not anticipate was the volume of mail that has to be – or ought to be – answered. To those who haven’t received prompt replies, I ask pardon.

Please forgive, also, occasional typographical errors or misspellings. I here present my own favorite, from the Fourth Folio of Shakespeare (1685.) In the original, the subtitle type measures nearly 20 points high.

THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK.

Beginning with this issue, pages will be numbered one through four in each issue, instead of continuously for the whole year.

APHA NEWS

APHA’s Annual Meeting will take place at 2 P.M. January 24th, in the Trustees Room of the New York Public Library. The agenda includes reports of the officers; election of three Trustees (see the last Newsletter) and presentation of the APHA Awards for 1987. The recipients are: Individual Award, G. Thomas Tanselle, a noted scholar and long-time supporter of APHA; and Institutional Award, the American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, Mass. The Director of the AAS, Marcus McCorison, will accept the Award.

The first Ben Lieberman Lecture, held at Mills College, Oakland, California, on November 6th, was a great success. Attending were APHA’s Pat Taylor (Treasurer and former President) and Renée Weber (Editor of Printing History.) A talk by Claire van Vliet about her thirty years as a printer and publisher at her Janus Press was attended by over 250 people from the Bay area. Adrian Wilson called it the largest gathering of book arts people in the Bay area in a long time. APHA extends its thanks and congratulations to Kathy Walkup and Martin Antonetti for their efforts in making the event such a success, and for arranging the workshops and exhibitions that accompanied the lecture.

Roderick Stinehour, the esteemed printer, was the speaker at the October 28th meeting of the New England Chapter of APHA. At the dinner meeting held September 29th, new officers of the Chapter were confirmed: Roberta Zonghi (Rare Books, Boston Public Library,) President; and Anne

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Anninger (Special Collections, Wellesley College Library,) Treasurer. (The New York Chapter election will be reported in the next issue of the Newsletter.)

BRIEFLY NOTED


Early printing A session on early printing will be part of the International Congress on Medieval Studies to be held May 7-10, at the University of Western Michigan. The session, arranged by Prof. Martha Driver and chaired by Miriam Mandelbaum, will include talks by Hope Mayo on incunables from Dürenstein; Cynthia Brown on Jean Lemaire de Belges; and Carol Meale on Wynkyn de Worde’s prologues and epilogues. Information from Prof. Otto Gründler, Director, The Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.

Papermaking rarities APHA member Leonard B. Schlosser has donated his collection on the History of Papermaking to the New York Public Library. The Schlosser Collection comprises over 3,000 rare volumes dating from 770 A.D. to the present, including early descriptions of the art of papermaking, technical works, and the search for raw materials. The Collection will be housed in the Print Room, and the NYPL will publish an annotated bibliography by Mr. Schlosser.

Obituaries Vrest Orton, founder of The Colophon, died December 2 in Vermont at the age of 89. The Colophon was one of the best-known and longest-running publications for bibliophiles in this country.

APHA notes with sadness the death of member Alan Asaf at the age of 28. Mr. Asaf, a graduate of the Columbia School of Library Service, was the cataloguer for the Grolier Club, and compiler of the list of the Club’s publications and exhibitions that appeared in the Grolier Club’s Centennial Book. He planned and arranged the exhibition of the Club’s incunabula a few years ago.
Harold Bacon (82 Edmunds Road, Framingham, MA 01701; tel. 617-877-1376) has for sale an Adams hand press similar to the one shown at right. The press, ca. 1850, has a cracked frame that has been repaired. Mr. Bacon also has for sale a 12 x 18 Golding jobber.

David M. Norton (976 Westmoreland Ave., Syracuse, NY 13210; tel. 315-474-8338) is selling about 150 fonts of type, mostly foundry, including a few antique faces.

James A. Evans (P.O. Box 21280, Fort Worth, TX 76121; tel. 817-738-9068) has for sale a rebuilt 18½ x 14½ Morgans & Wilcox Washington hand press.

J.F. Killie (P.O. Box 66105 AMF ORD, Chicago, IL 60666) is selling a large inventory of classic and modern type faces including Caslon, Helvetica, Optima, etc. in cases, in packages, and galleys. Also offered are two C&P platen presses, Nolan, Hacker and Universal proof presses, and much more equipment for the printer. Also for sale: 3 Monotype casters. Write Mr. Killie for the full list.

To mark the 100th anniversary of the Linotype, three historic Mergenthaler machines were officially presented to the Smithsonian Institution on November 24th. The three machines have long been on loan, twice since 1917. Included are the 1879 Mergenthaler Rotary Impression machine, which impressed letters into papier-maché, and the "Blower" Linotype. The Blower, generally considered the first successful Linotype, has been at the Smithsonian since 1969 but has been fully reconditioned and put into working order by Stan Nelson.

Robert Haas, master printer and proprietor of the celebrated Ram Press, is selling the equipment of the Press. Included are three cases of Hammer Uncial, handmade paper, a 26 x 40 Hoe Washington Press, a Vandercook 00 proof press. Also, books on the history of printing and a collection of incunabula leaves. Mr. Haas can be reached at 15 Blenis Place, Valhalla, NY 10595, tel. 914-948-4278.

Some New Books (& a Video)


A Checklist of the Hogarth Press by J. Howard Woolmer. 288 pp., 6 x 9, 60 photos, cloth. $45 + $1.50 postage from Woolmer/Brotherhood Ltd., Revere, MA 02151.

