

# The APHA Newsletter

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Stephen O. Saxe, Editor

## Captain Nichols' Octant-Wheel Lever-Power Printing Press

by Fredric Brewer

In the spring of 1878, at the age of 35 and in his nineteenth year at sea, a merchant mariner named Edward Payson Nichols developed the uncontrollable itch to print. We know his typographic compulsion overcame him at 35, and not only because of the date, June 12, 1878, of his first letterpress appearance — a four-page newsletter called *Pill Garlic* — but because he used his age as his newsletter's volume number. Over a period of 13 years Captain Nichols defeated shipboard boredom by type setting, stereotyping, and "body printing."

Captain Nichols was a native of Searsport, Maine, hard by Penobscot Bay, and went to sea in 1860. At some point in 1878, when he captained the bark *Clara*, he went ashore at Savannah, Georgia, and bought 60 pounds of old type "of different sizes and mixed." Shortly thereafter he built what he called "Nichols' Body Press."

Unfortunately, the captain has left us but a cryptic description of this press: "[It] is made up from a piece of an old door to a furnace, for a bed piece — or whatever it is called — set into a thing-er-ma-jig for the what-you-call-it to fit into," he explained. "The roller is one of DODGE, MEIGS & CO's sawmill rollers for rolling lumber about the mill ... The inkroller has been feasted on by cockroaches which make it rather uneven."

Impression obviously was obtained by Nichols sitting on the what-you-call-it, probably the platen, since the "weight which each impression gets, depends in part on the amount eaten about that time."

On November 6, 1880, the *Clara* broke from anchorage in Algoa Bay, South Africa, and was dashed against the shore. Nichols, his wife Mattie, and his daughters and the crew were rescued. Apparently the body press was in pieces but Nichols retrieved the two rollers and the type "thoroughly mixed with sand."

He washed the type and sorted it, and when he acquired his second captaincy, of a ship named *Frank Pendleton*, he built a new press, "The Octant-Wheel Lever-Power Printing Press." As to its exact nature, we have little to go on except for the two engravings Nichols made of it [see illustrations].

## PILL GARLIC.

PUBLISHED BY E. P. NICHOLS.

FOR FRIENDS, AND NOT FOR CRITICISM. ON BOARD, BARK CLARA. TERMS, ONE LETTER.

VOL 35.

JUNE 12, 1879.

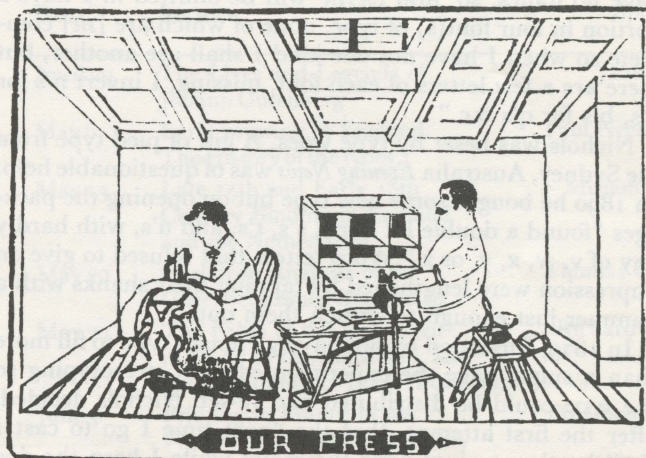
NUMBER 3.

Nameplate of *Pill Garlic*, which was changed to *Ocean Chronicle* under pressure from Mrs. Nichols. Capt. Nichols used his age, 35, as the volume number.

"We will not attempt to give a minute description," he wrote in 1884, "as the mechanism would not rank high, but no one could find what or where our press was when it is 'thrown out of gear.' There is one part in the lazaret [ship storage place usually between decks], another part in the locker, another in the cabin, and generally scattered about.

"Sometime[s] one part may be seen as a wash-bench, another part going overboard for 'soundings,' and every part has another use, except the roller — it was originally a saw-mill roller — which has the one use — for impression. The power applied is about 500 lbs." Nichols may have exaggerated a bit about the "power" although we know he was a large, heavy man from his occasional references to his size, and his engraving of himself at his press, with his patient wife Mattie at the sewing machine, portrays a man of powerful bulk.

*Pill Garlic*, a phrase which had lingering associations with venereal disease, was soon re-named *Ocean Chronicle* "to avoid family trouble." It served Nichols "for pastime only,

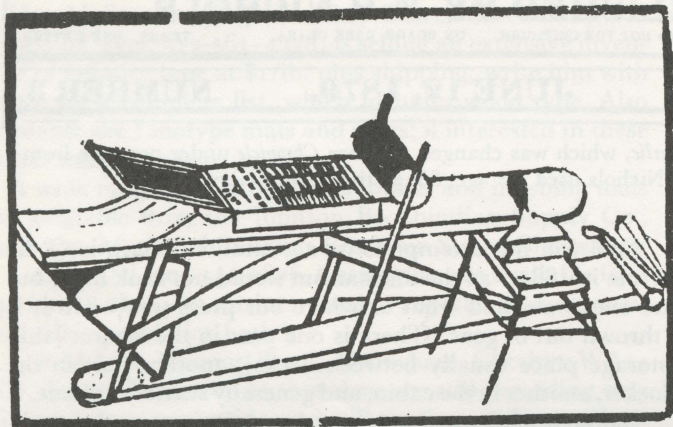


Capt. Nichols at the press and Mattie at the sewing machine, on board the bark *Frank Pendleton*. From *Ocean Chronicle*, 22 June 1886.



and [is] sent to friends as a letter." Nichols noted that nearly "every Capt. has something to do to pass away his spare time at sea. Some make ship models and rig them; some work with the scroll-saw; some make fancy mats; some spend their time in reading ... I enjoy working with type." And as to the letter, the small, neatly printed papers apprised friends and relatives of the Nichols family's well-being and whereabouts. Nichols also printed free advertisements for maritime businesses.

The Nichols were at sea for months at a time as the *Clara* and the *Frank Pendleton* carried such diverse cargoes as mules for Georgia from Uruguay and coal for Argentina from Wales.



A slightly more detailed view of the Octant-Wheel press.

Nichols wrote most of the material for his newsletters, but Mattie now-and-then contributed a column. Most of Nichols' columns contain shipboard chit-chat ("We eat potatoes today, which were raised on board"), shipboard tragedies ("The cook lost his parrot overboard when we were two days out ... and Dennis — the hog — was washed overboard"), and atrocious puns ("Why are the u's, inverted, like unmarried ladies? Because they are made n's.").

The inverted u pun needs some explanation. "My printing material ... is limited," Nichols wrote in his initial issue, "I have no italics; so 'HOG LATIN' will be omitted ... I have a portion in four font(s) of type, none of which are [sic] complete so when I have not one kind I shall use another, but there are a few letters of each font, missing, I invert n's for u's, b's for q's &c."

Nichols was beset by type woes. A gift of pied type from the Sydney, Australia *Evening News* was of questionable help. In 1890 he bought some new type but on opening the packages "found a double lot of r's, s's, t's, and u's, with hardly any of v, w, x, y, or z." Worn letters that refused to give an impression were lengthened by tapping their shanks with a hammer just enough to stretch them out.

In 1879, frustrated by not having enough type to fill more than a single page, he experimented with stereotyping so the type could be distributed and re-set. Nichols decided, after the first attempt, that the "next time I go to cast I shall let the steward pour the metal while I keep the dog out [of] the way."

Nichols also found that there "is something in the atmosphere near the equator that makes it hard to print well."

Wild seas interrupted his printing: "The *Clara* gave a jump and the bottom of a case that had contained about 20 lbs. of type was looking sky-ward." Once, Nichols noted, the sea was rolling so much that he had to hold on with both hands while making up a page, a remarkable compositional feat. As to his printing skills: "We never had any experience on type, and do not know the first rudiments of typography."

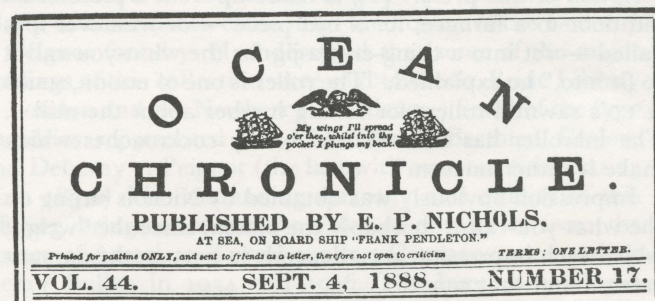
The captain was careful to note in his paper's nameplate that his productions were "not for criticism," and in 1885 commented in an essay, "Amateur Papers," that he had received 83 different amateur papers from Maine to California. "We notice most all the copies in our possession court friendly criticism; and we also note that a great deal of the criticism is *not* friendly, — apparently — and comes out in the form of spite, or jealousy ... Before sarcastic criticism should be used, one should look well to his own publication and see that it is in *perfect order*."

The papers were mailed from the various ports to which Nichols sailed. Some were put in bottles, corked up, and thrown overboard. An issue could bear as many different dates as pages, indicating expected port arrival dates. And as to where the issues were printed?

"This number is printed in so many different parts of the globe," wrote Nichols in an 1886 issue, "that it would be impossible to say just where it was printed; as one page is printed in the N. Pacific, one in S. Pacific, one in S. Atlantic, and one in N. Atlantic, and one would think such an office hard to beat ..." Once, one page was printed "nearer the South Pole than [any printing done by] any other person, having done it to 60°S."

Eventually, Nichols, his wife, and his three daughters wearied of sails and sea, and there were long discussions, dutifully recorded in *Ocean Chronicle*, of a return to land, perhaps to a farm.

The last newsletter Nichols published is dated June 10, 1891, which he completed in his 47th year. Shortly afterwards, he left the sea for good. Altogether, he printed some hundred pages, each approximately 6½" by 9". He died in 1899.



The revised nameplate for Captain Nichols' seagoing newspaper. It was remarkably well-printed, considering the nature of his press.

A full run of Captain Nichols' newsletters, many with tattered pages, are preserved at the Penobscot Marine Museum in Searsport, Maine. In 1941, the museum issued a limited printing of photocopies of the *Pill Garlic* and *Ocean Chronicle*, but the slim book is now difficult to find.

*Fredric Brewer is associate professor of Telecommunications at Indiana University. He has operated a private press since 1975.*



# APHA NEWS

APHA's annual awards for contributions to printing history were presented on January 24th in the panelled Trustees' Room of the New York Public Library. G. Thomas Tanselle, vice president of the Guggenheim Foundation and a noted scholar, was presented the Individual Award for 1987. His *Guide to the Study of United States Imprints* is a standard reference. Dr. Tanselle, in accepting, recalled Rollo Silver's landmark speech at the award ceremony ten years before, and he urged greater efforts to implement the goals outlined by Dr. Silver.

The Institutional Award was given to the American Antiquarian Association in Worcester, Mass., America's oldest historical society. Marcus McCorison, director of the Society, accepted the award and gave a sketch of its history as a center for the study of American printing history.

At the same meeting, three new APHA Trustees were elected: John Lancaster, Editor, Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America and Head of Special Collections at the Amherst College Library; Francis O. Mattson, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, New York Public Library; and Stan Nelson, Graphic Arts Division, The Smithsonian Institution.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

The Mark Hofmann case came to a sudden end on January 23rd when he pleaded guilty to two counts of second degree murder as well as to forging two documents about Mormon history, including the "White Salamander" letter. The murders which Hofmann admitted were two separate deaths by bombs of a man and a woman in Salt Lake City on Oct. 15, 1985. I understand that as part of the plea bargain, Hofmann will sit down with the authorities and describe his activities and forgeries in detail. Perhaps then we will know the facts concerning the *Oath of a Freeman*, which Hofmann claimed to have purchased in a New York bookshop for \$25. The Oath was said to be undergoing cyclotron testing, but it has been reported that Salt Lake City officials say that the printing plate used to make Hofmann's second copy of the Oath was also used to make the first.

It has also been reported that Salt Lake City police are hunting for a copy, or copies, of the first children's book printed in America, John Cotton's *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes*, dated 1643. This is much earlier than the accepted date of 1656, but Hofmann claims to have found and sold a copy with the earlier date. Apparently the Salt Lake City authorities have found a set of printing plates with the 1643 date.

And that's not all. The police are looking for a copy of the 1848 *The Latter-Day Saints' Emigrants' Guide*, by William Clayton. Presumably details of these books will be forthcoming in Hofmann's statement. At a preliminary hearing, police said Hofmann had sold scores of forged documents, and had earned more than \$2 million from their sale. His sentence, under Utah law, is an indeterminate one, but the judge said he would recommend that 32-year old Hofmann spend the rest of his life in the Utah State Prison. Stay tuned.

The *APHA Newsletter* is published six times yearly by the American Printing History Association. All letters, news items and other material for the *Newsletter* should be sent directly to the Editor: Stephen O. Saxe, 1100 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10028. Subscriptions are through membership in APHA, and include all publications. Personal memberships for the calendar year are \$20; \$25 for U.S. institutions. Membership and other correspondence should be sent to APHA, P.O. Box 4922, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163. Copyright © 1986 by the American Printing History Association. All rights reserved.

## BRIEFLY NOTED

**American Antiquarian Society** The AAS will sponsor a conference on "Teaching the History of the Book: Methods and Concepts" at Worcester, Mass. on June 12 and 13. The conference will deal with how the history of the book can be incorporated into the curricula of liberal arts programs and library science and journalism schools. Several scholars will present papers or lead workshop programs. Participation in the conference is limited and those interested are urged to apply as soon as possible before the deadline of May 1. Details and registration materials from John B. Hench, Associate Director for Research & Publications, American Antiquarian Society, 185 Salisbury St., Worcester, MA 01609, tel. 617-752-5813.

**John Carter Brown Library** Another conference, this one dealing with the book in colonial Latin American culture, will take place at the John Carter Brown Library, June 18-21. A score of noted scholars will deliver papers. For detailed program and registration information on the Book in The Americas Conference, write JCBL Conference, Box 1894, Providence, Rhode Island 02912, or tel. 401-863-2725.

**Pforzheimer Lectures** The New York Public Library has announced the Pforzheimer Lectures on Printing and the Book Arts. The schedule is given below. The cost is \$3 per lecture; send checks to NYPL Public Education Program, Room M-6, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St., New York NY 10018, and enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Information: tel. 212-930-0855.

Date	Lecture	Speaker
April 29	The Lives and Legends of Johann Gutenberg	Janet Ing
May 6	Early printing in England: The History of the types	Paul Needham
May 13	Late 15th and Early 16th Century Binding in England and the Netherlands	Mirjam Foot
May 20	Cyclotron Analysis of the Gutenberg Bible: Completed	Thomas Cahill
May 27	The Fable of the Sick Lion: A Study of the Blockbook and the Beginnings of Book Illustration	Richard Field
June 3	Printing in France in the First Half of the 16th Century	Fred Schreiber
June 10	The Study of Incunabula and Post Incunabula	Felix de Marez Oyens

All lectures are at 6 P.M. in the Trustees Room (206).



## TYPE & PRESSES

New foundry type from Haas, Deberny & Peignot, Olive, Nebiolo, and Stempel is available from a shop in Paris, Haas France, at 6 rue Elzevir, 75003 Paris; tel. 887-46-41. Well over 70 faces are available, and if specified can be supplied at U.S. type heights.

Tona Graphics (P.O. Box 58, Grand Island, NY 14072) has for sale type specimen books, small presses, composing sticks, etc. List available on request.

Jeff Craemer (35 Mill St., San Rafael, CA 94901; tel. 415-454-9763) is selling a 10 x 15 C&P New Series job press with motor, and a Hammond table top Trim-o-Saw on a stand.

Harold Sterne (5815 Cherokee Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45243; tel. eves. 513-561-4338) is selling an extensive inventory of foundry type at \$1/lb. plus shipping; write him with SASE for a complete list, which includes wood type. Also available are Linotype mats and parts; if interested in these please mention them.

A wide range of bookbinding supplies and finishing tools are available from the Johnson Bookbinding Supply Co., Suite 175, Memorial Building, 610 Main Street, Blacksburg, VA 24060; tel. 703-552-0876. Catalogues are available free; specify whether you are interested in supplies & equipment or finishing tools (or both.)

L & M Ltd., Norman Road, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 4ES, England informs us that they are still providing new Linotype mats worldwide, and will continue to do so. (*Newsletter* 73 reported that Linotype GmbH in Germany would discontinue them.) L & M Ltd. is the successor firm to the longtime Linotype company in Britain, Linotype & Machinery.

APHA member Leonard B. Schlosser has marked the 125th anniversary of his firm, Lindenmeyr Paper Corp., with the gift of a half-sized working model of the earliest papermaking machine to the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Museum. It is now on view in the Hall of Graphic Arts. The model was built from original drawings of the Fourdrinier machine acquired by Mr. Schlosser in 1978.

## BOOKS

Woolmer, J. Howard. *A Checklist of The Hogarth Press, 1917-1946*. Revere, PA: Woolmer/Brotherson Ltd. Octavo, cloth, 250 pp. (With a short history of the Press by Mary E. Gaither.) \$45.

In 1917 Virginia and Leonard Woolf applied to learn the printing trade at the St. Bride Foundation Institute. Because they did not intend to become members of the printers' trade union, they were turned down; but later they bought a small platen press at The Excelsior Printing Supply Co. along with an instruction booklet and a supply of "Old Face" type. They set up the press in the dining room of Hogarth House in Richmond, and that was the origin of The Hogarth Press.

With the hand press and with a subsequent Minerva treadle job press (now on view at Sissinghurst, Vita Sack-

ville-West's home) the Woolfs began printing and publishing a remarkable list of modern, significant writers. At this stage printing was for them a mixture of hobby, business, and therapy for Virginia. Although in a few years the importance of the press' output outstripped the home-based production ability of Virginia and Leonard, the standard had been set.

J. Howard Woolmer's checklist, first published in 1976, has been since then the standard of the Press' books up to 1938. In this new, revised and enlarged edition, the output of the press through 1946 has been added, making a total of 525 titles described. Detailed information has been provided, including number of copies printed, sales figures from Leonard Woolf's only surviving ledger, binding variants and dust jackets, and details of later editions. Appendices list all the Hogarth Press series books; books printed by hand by Leonard and Virginia Woolf from 1917 to 1932; a key to the other printers of Hogarth Press Books; and "ghost" titles: books announced but never actually published. Over fifty book covers or dust jackets are illustrated in the text.

*A Checklist of The Hogarth Press 1917-1946* is an attractive, complete and eminently useful book for the Hogarth Press book collector and for anyone interested in having accurate information about the productions of this important press.

*Histoire du Livre, Typographie, Bibliographie. Catalogue de livres anciens et modernes relatif à l'histoire du livre ...* Paris: la Librairie Paul Jammes. Quarto, wrappers, 104 pp. \$15 (check with order) to Librairie Paul Jammes, 3 Rue Gozlin, 75006 Paris.

For over 30 years Librairie Paul Jammes has specialized in books dealing with the history of printing, typefounding, and bibliography. The current sales catalogue of the firm, Catalogue 249, is an extraordinary volume. The first section contains 1,390 titles dealing with the history and art of the book. Among the books offered in this section are more than 25 printed by Bodoni, Plantin's 1571 Polyglot Bible (\$817) and Simon-Pierre Fournier's *Manuel Typographique* (\$898).

The second section, "Specimens de Caracteres, Prospectus de Fondateurs," contains over 400 type specimen books. Many of these books came from the library of the Deberny et Peignot foundry. (I understand that some of the major holdings of this collection were sold to the St. Bride Library in London and the Newberry in Chicago.) Some of the type foundries represented are ATF, Bauer, Berthier, Caslon, and Deberny et Peignot (the last with over 100 titles dating from 1832.) The astounding quantity and quality of this offering brings to mind the sales of duplicates from the library of American Type Founders Company arranged by Henry Bullen in 1934 and 1936. The Jammes catalogue offers specimens from the U.S., England, France, the Netherlands, Russia and Germany, with the preponderance being of French origin. The famous Caslon "1734" broadside specimen from Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* is offered in states B, G, and H, at a very expensive \$653 each. While single copies of this attractive specimen turn up from time to time, three copies at once is almost a surfeit of riches; but the usual booksellers' price is \$175-\$200.

This catalogue is a useful reference, especially for collectors of European books on the history of printing and of the specimens of continental type foundries. — S.O.S.