

The APHA Newsletter

Nov./Dec.

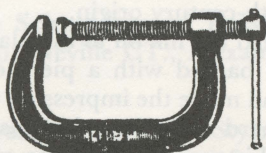
1987

80

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Stephen O. Saxe, Editor

How Hofmann Forged The Oath of a Freeman



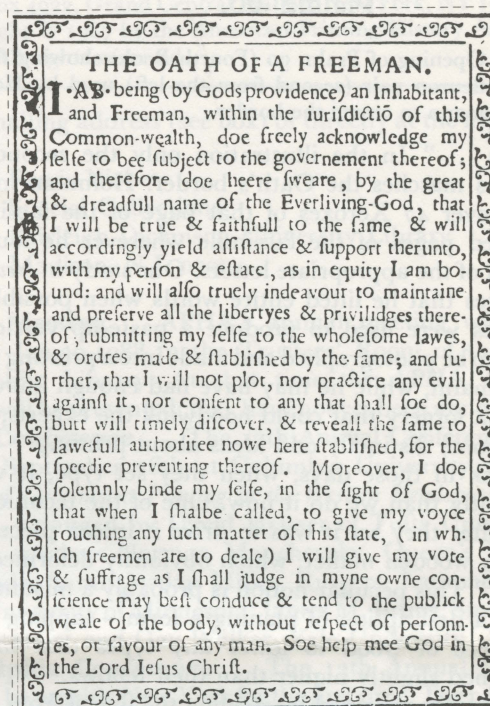
Mark Hofmann's confessions about his forging of Mormon documents and *The Oath of a Freeman* have clarified a great many things about his *modus operandi* and make fascinating reading. Among other things, for example, we learn that he used a carpenter's C-clamp to make the copy of the *Oath* that he tried to sell for \$1,500,000. The man would have been positively dangerous if he had had access to a printing press!

The facts have come out in a 600-page transcript of an interrogation of Hofmann by his former prosecutors. His frank answers to this interrogation were a condition of his plea bargain, which saved him from the death penalty for the murder by bombs of two people in Salt Lake City.

Hofmann forged written and printed documents, especially Mormon documents, and sold them at very high prices. By and large they do not seem to have been challenged by the experts. A factor in the acceptance of the Mormon documents was that the most expensive items were often sold to members of the Church of Latter Day Saints. Since the documents were often at variance with the accepted Mormon version of things, they were usually hidden away in vaults and not subjected to critical scrutiny. Not so with *The Oath of a Freeman*, however.

Early in 1985, with a series of successful high-priced fakes behind him already, Hofmann began to think about something even bigger. He knew that no copy of the Freeman's Oath was recorded, although it is known to be the first thing printed on the Stephen Daye press in Cambridge in late 1638 or early 1639, and its full text was reprinted within a few years of that date. Like T.J. Wise's fakes of non-existent first editions of Victorian poets, it was an ideal situation for a forger because there was no authentic copy of the original to compare with the forgery. But where Wise was content with modest profits spread out over many years, Hofmann was ready to take a far riskier course, although he knew that *The Oath of a Freeman* would be subjected to the most intense scrutiny with the most advanced scientific techniques.

Hofmann knew that copies of the earliest extant printing in the English colonies, *The Bay Psalm Book*, sold for over a



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The Oath of a Freeman (reduced.) The original is 4" x 6".

million dollars, and only eleven copies are in existence.

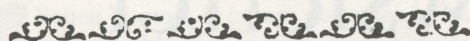
"I felt it would be damn valuable. Yes, I had a good idea of what *The Bay Psalm Book* was selling for . . . my belief was that it would be more valuable than *The Bay Psalm Book*."

Hofmann drew on his experience in creating other faked documents to produce the Oath. He proceeded along the lines suggested in APHA *Newsletter* 70 in March, 1986. He obtained a copy of a facsimile edition of *The Bay Psalm Book*. (Editions were published in 1903 and in 1956.) Hofmann studied the printed facsimile as well as microfilms of various copies of the book in the University of Utah Library.

"It was a simple matter of Xeroxing from the facsimile of *The Bay Psalm Book* several . . . of the pages which I wanted to copy . . . this is the page of the 30th Psalm and it has the same typeface as what I used in creating the border."

It is gratifying that we hit the nail on the head on that one. Quoting from the APHA *Newsletter* 69 (March, 1986):

"The fleurons used to form the border of the oath are smaller than those on the title page of the Bay Psalm Book, but match those used to introduce the separate Books of the Psalms. Only a single pair of fleurons in the psalm book exactly match the way the pairs were made up to form the border of the oath; the rest show other configurations. The matching pair are in the opening of the Fourth Book of the



THE FOURTH BOOKE

Psalm 90.

Opening of Psalm 90 (Fourth Book) showing the fleuron pair (second from the left) used by Hofmann to create the border.

psalms . . .” In the illustration only the second pair of fleurons matches the Oath’s border. Hofmann must have made over 47 Xeroxes of that page of the facsimile. He Xeroxed pages of the facsimile wherever he found clear images of the appropriate letters. Our study in *Newsletter* 69 indicates that he lifted entire words when possible. These Xeroxes were used to produce a paste-up version of the Oath, to be photographed and made into a printing plate.

Hofmann, while he may have had enough knowledge to create a forgery that could hoodwink the experts, also displays some distinctly odd ideas about printing:

“Back in those days, when they set type, it was done differently than we do it now. One of the techniques they used after they set it was to drive it into a piece of wood using a wooden mallet, which obviously deformed a lot of letters.” This peculiar notion is probably a misunderstanding of a description of planing a form – tapping it with a flat piece of wood to lower any types that have been positioned slightly higher than their fellows.

Paper was obtained by stealing the flyleaf from a book of the right period in the Brigham Young University Library. Hofmann had determined from the *Bay Psalm Book* the distance apart of the chain lines on the paper, and he was careful to match them.

Ink, which to my mind is certainly the weakest link in the chain, he concocted himself.

“I knew that this document would be scrutinized, so I took pains to assure that the ink would not differ from the 17th century printing ink. I manufactured the ink.

“I obtained some paper from the same period . . . from the Brigham Young University Library. The paper did not have printing on it, which I guess they’ll be happy to hear. That paper I burnt in an apparatus to make carbon black. The reason I went through this trouble is because I thought that there was a possibility that a carbon 14 test would be performed on the ink.

“The apparatus that I used had a glass tube chimney which caught the carbon and that’s how I accumulated it. It was mixed with a linseed oil . . . heavily boiled which thickens it and then it was burned . . . I was basically following a . . . 17th-century ink-making recipe . . . I also added some tannic acid or at least a solution of tannic acid, which had dried. It was made from a leather binding of that same period that had been boiled in distilled water until it turned a nice brown color. There’s also some beeswax added, just ordinary beeswax, nothing special to it.

“ . . . I made a lacquer that was included in the ink . . . It’s a boiled turpentine and linseed oil combination.”

Hofmann took his paste-up of the Oath, assembled from assorted Xeroxes, to DeBouzek Engraving Company in Salt

Lake City. DeBouzek made a negative of the paste-up and from that a photo-engraved letterpress plate. When Hofmann came to pick up the plate, the bill was \$47 and he only had \$45 in cash on him. He wrote a check for the difference, signed it “Mike Harris,” and thus linked himself to the crime.

When he had his relief plate at home, he used “iron wool” (steel wool?) to round the corners of the letters. He used a fine abrasive stone in an electric drill to grind down the edges of some letters. “This was the first attempt by the Daye print shop to make an impression, and if it was crude or didn’t look quite right, I didn’t think it would be too great of a concern.” He was right; the Library of Congress experts who examined the result could find nothing inconsistent with a 17th-century origin.

Finally, he rolled the ink on to the plate, and laid over it his stolen paper backed with a piece of felt and a thick copper plate – and made the impression using a carpenter’s C-clamp! It is hard to believe, but his first attempt was successful, and this copy was the one offered to the world as the first printing in North America.

Hofmann wrote the words “Oath of a Freeman” on the back of the paper, knowing that the writing would also be tested and having confidence in his proven ability to fake old writing. He aged the writing ink with ammonia or an ozone treatment.

In March of 1985 Hofmann turned over his forgery to the unsuspecting principals of Schiller-Wapner Galleries in New York. He owed them a lot of money on previous transactions, and the sale of the Oath would help square accounts. He retained the printing plate in his home and used it about October 8th to make another copy of the Oath, after which he burned it.

The method of providing a false receipt from the Argosy Book Store in New York has been described in *Newsletter* 72, and involved planting a print with the title “The Oath of a Freeman” on it and purchasing it from the bookstore, making sure that the title was noted on the receipt.

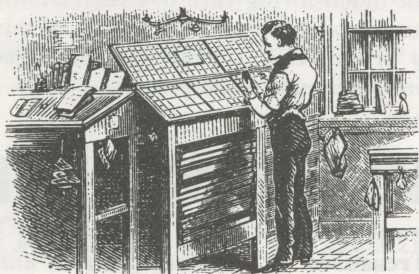
The subsequent history of this 4” x 6” scrap of paper is generally known. Schiller-Wapner loaned it to the Library of Congress, where it passed all tests regarding text, paper, ink, and chemistry. But it was returned by the LC because of the enormous asking price of \$1.5 million and because of doubts about provenance. As a frequenter of the Argosy Book Store, I too would be suspicious if I ran across a copy of the Freeman’s Oath – but I keep hoping.

The fake then went to the American Antiquarian Society, where it was under serious consideration at a much-reduced price of \$250,000. It has been reported that it was to have been voted on at the AAS on the same day that the first of Hofmann’s bombs went off in Salt Lake City.

This C-clamp-printed scrap of paper has been subjected to every known test and not failed any of them. Even ion bombardment tests of the ink, performed at the Crocker Nuclear Laboratory at the University of California, Davis, were inconclusive. One nationally-known expert claimed that the ink and paper appeared to have been bonded together “for the past 300+ years.” Perhaps the experience of *The Oath of a Freeman* may result in better tests, and will thus be of service in the search for truth.

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TYPE & PRESSES



Washington-style Schniedewend Press for sale by Nancy Reinke, 5301 Neville CT., Alexandria, VA 22310; tel. 703-971-4095.

Golding Pearl Press 7x11 Old Style, No. 3, in good operating condition, complete except for missing the two wooden drawers in the base. For sale by Joe Nicola, Sr., 313 South LBJ Drive, San Marcos, TX 78667-0665; tel. 512-392-3951.

Bookbinders' Supplies The Bookbinder's Warehouse, Inc., 45 Division St., Keyport, NJ 07735 (tel. 201-264-0306) has taken over the distribution of leathers from Hewit's Tannery of Scotland. A wide variety of leathers and binding supplies for hand binding are available. For information, write or phone.

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 © 1987 by the American Printing History Association. All rights reserved.

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Madison, N.J. 07904

Annual Meeting APHA's annual meeting will take place on Jan. 30, 1988 in the Trustees' Room of the New York Public Library. At that time the APHA Annual Awards will be presented; they have not yet been announced.

APHA Conference The 12th Annual Conference was held on September 26th at Columbia University, on the subject of *Government Printing in the Western Hemisphere*. The program, arranged by David Heisser of Tufts University, included speakers Norman Manchevsky, Queen's Printer for Canada; Sarah Jordan Miller, Rutgers; Laurence Hallowell, University of Minnesota; James M. Bruns, Smithsonian Institution; and Gay Walker, Yale University.

Philadelphia Conference The 13th Annual Conference will be outside New York for the first time. The program will take place in Philadelphia next September and will be held in conjunction with a grand exhibition of treasures from eleven Philadelphia libraries. The program, which is being arranged by James Green of The Library Company, Philadelphia, is on the subject of *The Book Arts in Philadelphia, 1790-1830*. Speakers so far include Edwin Wolf, 2nd, Kenneth Finkel and William Spawn. The program will be held at the Philadelphia Historical Society and will be followed by an afternoon reception at The Library Company.

APHA NEWS

The following slate has been presented by the Nominating Committee of APHA, for terms beginning in January, 1988:

For President: James Green
Vice-President, Publications: Jeffrey Kalmowitz
Vice-President, Programs: John Lancaster
Vice-President, Membership: Edward Colker
Treasurer: E.H. Pat Taylor
Secretary: Michael Hentges
Trustee (to 1991): Barbara Paulson
Martin Hutner
Calvin Otto
Trustee (to 1990): Virginia Smith

The Nominating Committee consisted of Morris Gelfand (Chair,) Joan Friedman, Elizabeth Harris, John Hench, and Abe Lerner.



Executive Secretary APHA's Board has approved a new, paid position, that of Executive Secretary. Renée Weber, the Editor of *Printing History*, has been appointed to the position. Among her new responsibilities will be maintaining the APHA membership list, handling membership inquiries, processing orders for back issues of our publications and our mailing list, etc. She can be contacted at the

BOOKS

Craig, James and Bruce Barton. *Thirty Centuries of Graphic Design: an Illustrated Survey*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications. 4to, 224 pages, 400 illustrations, paperbound. \$24.95 in U.S. (quantity discounts available.)

With the arrival of "desk-top publishing," there are a lot of people setting type and designing publications who have no idea at all of the history and background of typography and printing, and even less of typesetting and design. *Thirty Centuries of Graphic Design* is meant for them, and I hope that it reaches every one of them — quickly. This attractively designed and knowledgeably written book is the equivalent of a college survey course. It is intended to give to the beginner a wide-ranging, basic knowledge of the entire field. It succeeds admirably.

Clearly and succinctly written by James Craig and APHA member Bruce Barton, it covers every major event and development in graphic arts history, beginning with the Cro-Magnon Man at about 30,000 B.C. It hardly need be mentioned that covering everything in 224 pages means that nothing is described in depth. That is not the purpose of this book. It whets the appetite, provides a starting-point for further reading.

The 400 illustrations are well-chosen and nicely printed on good paper. Photographs of printed works intermingle with maps, works of art from each period, pictures of presses and other related objects. For each time period, a succinct list of cultural events is given, which may help the historically hazy current generation of designers to orient themselves in time. The list mixes art and industry:

1851 Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* not well received.

Isaac Singer manufactures first practical sewing machine.

Verdi composes *Rigoletto*.

There are also useful alphabetical lists of designers, writers, composers, etc. at the end of each section, with their dates.

Although not intended as a design manual, the book may well function in that capacity by simply showing the best graphic design of every epoch. This book will probably end up in a lot of graphic designers' Christmas stockings and it may be the only history-oriented book in their possession. It is a very welcome as a straightforward, uncomplicated, but responsible, presentation of the development of the graphic arts. —S.O.S.

A Goudy Memoir, Essays by and about Frederic W. Goudy. Council Bluffs: The Yellow Barn Press (710 First Ave., Council Bluffs, Iowa 51501.) Limited to 150 copies. Casebound (printed boards,) 4to, xi + 45 pages. Illustrated with wood engravings by John DePol. Printed by hand; on Rives mouldmade paper, \$69 ppd.; on Mohawk, \$49 ppd.

It has never been the intent of this *Newsletter* to delve very deeply into the realm of private and fine press printing, which are the province of publications like *Fine Print*. It is only when they concern actual printing history that they find a place in these columns. *A Goudy Memoir* is one of these. The essays in this volume were written by some of the most illustrious of recent American printers, and are concerned with thoughts of Goudy, his types, his personality, and his continuing influence.

The longest essay, "Anatomy of a Type," by Alexander Lawson, describes the genesis and development of Goudy Thirty, Goudy's last typeface. Although the design has never been commercially successful (and, may I add, with good reason,) it is a fascinating story of the interaction of aesthetics and the marketplace. Some of the other essays are more in the nature of tributes to Goudy, and some are short and interesting pieces on subjects like hand-press printing by Goudy himself.

Each essay is set in a different Goudy typeface, which gives the book a certain interest as a living type specimen, although at the same time it does not serve to unify the book. John DePol's marvelous wood engravings do help in that regard. They have been beautifully printed by Neil Shaver, the proprietor of The Yellow Barn Press, and show

how a masterfully-cut engraving, well-printed, can enliven the printed page.

In fact, the book is a delightful work, one on which it is obvious that much loving care has been bestowed by authors, illustrator, and printer. For a book of this quality, it is modestly priced. It is warmly recommended for those interested in Goudy and good printing. —S.O.S.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Chicago Treasures To mark the 10th anniversary of The Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, the Library's Special Collections Division will present a major exhibition of treasures gathered by the Library during its 115-year history. The exhibition will be on display from October 8 through January 30, 1988 in the G.A.R. Memorial Museum, 78 Washington Street. Among the items on exhibit will be incunabula, historic books, broadsides and photographs of Chicago, and Civil War artifacts. In connection with the exhibition there will be a program of seven talks on aspects of collecting for the public. For information about the talks, phone 312-269-2926.

Matheson Retires William Matheson, chief of the Rare Book and Special Collections Divisions of the Library of Congress, retired on August 28 after 19 years of service at the LC. He became chief of the Rare Book Division in 1972. During his years in that post he directed the transfer of the Lessing J. Rosenwald collection to the LC. Mr. Matheson is a long-time member of APHA.

Ticknor Imprints Bromer Booksellers of Boston has announced the sale of the John William Pye Collection of Ticknor & Fields imprints to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The collection includes over 3000 books from the noted 19th-century Boston publisher, printed between 1830 and 1880. It includes first editions of many noted New England writers, including Thoreau, Hawthorne, Emerson, Holmes, Stowe, and Longfellow.

Doc Leslie Memorial *Newsletter* 78 erred in saying that the May 29th memorial program for Dr. Bob Leslie was arranged by Herb Johnson. The program was actually arranged by a committee consisting of George Laws, Alice Koeth, Michael Hentges, Carl Schlesinger and Catherine Brody. Herb Johnson conducted the program and produced a 10-minute videotape on Doc Leslie for the memorial.

Goudy Award The annual Frederic W. Goudy Award will be presented on November 6 to Charles Bigelow. Mr. Bigelow is a well-known type designer and is professor of digital typography at Stanford University. His achievement has been the merging of the history and aesthetics of traditional type design with modern computer technology.

DePol Exhibition Mills College, Oakland CA, will hold an exhibition of wood engravings by the noted engraver John DePol. The exhibit, scheduled for November and December, will feature prints and illustrated books, along with woodblocks and tools. DePol will give an evening lecture on making wood engravings on November 19th, with a reception following, and will hold a workshop for students (open to the public) on November 21 and 22. For details call Mills College at 415-430-3302.