

# The APHA Newsletter

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Stephen O. Saxe, Editor

## American Army Field Presses

In 1777, writing to a committee of Congress, George Washington wrote that

... a small traveling Press to follow head Quarters would be productive of many eminent advantages. It would enable us to give speedy and exact information of any Military transactions that take place with proper comments upon them. . . It would also be very useful to dispatch business in Camp, being the most expeditious means of taking Copies of any orders or other matters that require to be dispersed and would save a great deal in returns and other papers we are often Obligated to get Printed in Philadelphia. . . .

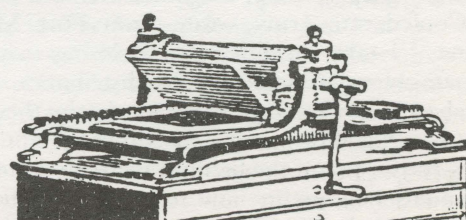
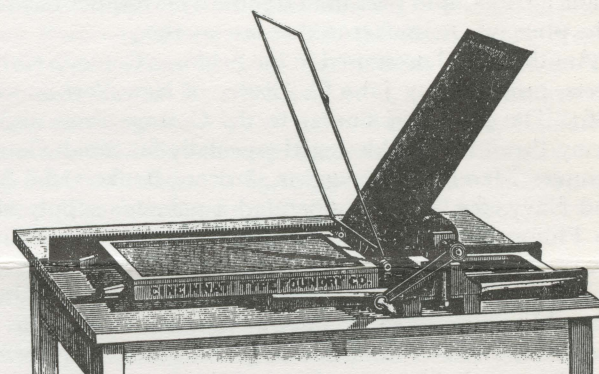
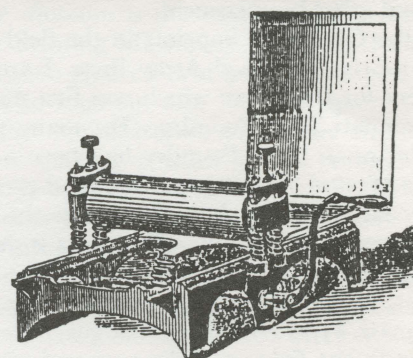
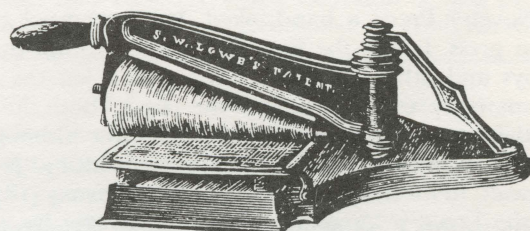
According to historian Edwin H. Carpenter, Jr., the committee recommended that the Quartermaster General be ordered to furnish such a press, but the recommendation was tabled by Congress.

This is apparently the first reference in this country to a military field press. No such press is known to have been used during the Revolution. Simon Bolivar brought a press with him in 1816 when he attempted to establish a beachhead on the island of Margarita off the Venezuelan coast during his invasion of northern South America.

By the time of the Civil War in America, the army field press was an accepted if not always requisite part of the military. This is probably due to the availability of small, portable iron presses in this country. Before this, the most portable was the small Ramage proof press, a wooden press with a screw that was essentially an improvement on the common press.

The first of the portable iron presses was the Lowe press, invented by Samuel W. Lowe of Philadelphia and patented July 29, 1856 (U.S. Patent No. 15,428.) This unusual press consisted of an iron bed with a pivot post at one end. To the pivot post was connected a tympan and above that a conical roller. When the form lying on the bed was inked and paper placed on it, the conical roller swung around in an arc, depressing the tympan and making the impression. There are a few of these unusual presses surviving, in sizes ranging from 5x6 up to 19x23 inches. The first models had a wooden conical roller, which was later replaced with one of iron.

Probably next after the Lowe press was the Adams Cottage Press. This press was first put on the market in 1860 and was very similar to Berri's "New Patent People's Printing-Press" that was marketed in England for amateur printing.



From top: Lowe Press (later form), engraved by John DePol for *A Brief Account of the Between-Hours Press* (Privy Council Press, 1952); Adams Cottage Press; Army Press; and Cooley's Cabinet Press.



James Moran believed that the Berri press may have been copied from the Cottage Press.

The Adams Cottage Press had a cylinder that was placed above a moving bed containing the type form. The cylinder was not geared to the bed. The press was available in sizes from 5x8 to 12x18 inches.

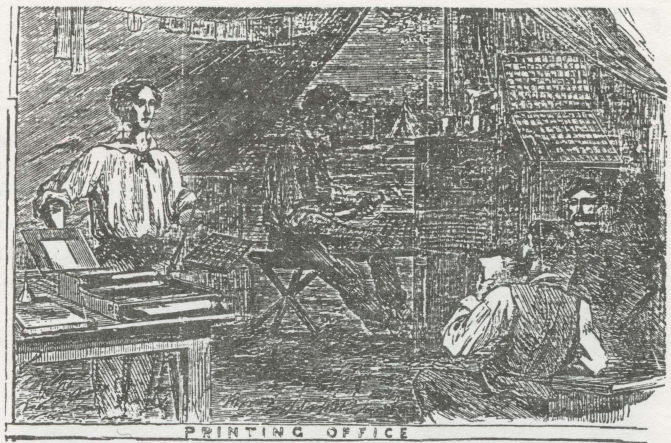
Soon after the introduction of the Lowe Press and the Adams Cottage Press, manufacture of both was taken over by Joseph Watson of Boston and later of New York. (Not long after this, Benjamin O. Woods of Boston introduced the Novelty Press, a hand-inked, lever-operated tabletop platen press. It was the first platen press within the reach of boys and other amateur printers, and led the way to the amateur press movement of the 1870s.) Both the Adams and the Lowe were also used by amateurs, although they were not so convenient for that kind of printing. J. Luther Ringwalt, in his *American Encyclopaedia of Printing* (1871) says that the Lowe is "a small press, used chiefly by amateur printers." The Cottage Press was advertised in terms of "Every Man His Own Printer," and was sold to merchants, druggists, and other businessmen.

Most of the Civil War imprints in the field were made on the appropriately-named Army Press. I am not aware of any patent for this press, which was first manufactured by the Cincinnati Type Foundry. (For many years before that the Cincinnati Type Foundry had been a major producer in the West of Washington iron hand presses.) It was invented by Henry Barth, later famous as the inventor of the Barth typesetting machine. This press is similar to the Adams Cottage, but the bed is geared to the cylinder, it has a frisket, and it is superior mechanically. According to a Cincinnati Type Foundry catalogue, it was made in 1862 for use in the field, and discontinued after the war. But demand for a cheap newspaper press caused it to be made again, but in sizes to fit standard newspaper measures. The press was manufactured as late as 1909.

Another small press used in the field was Cooley's Cabinet Press, produced by John G. Cooley of New York in about 1861. The press was similar to the Cottage Press and the Army Press. It was "designed especially for Small Country Printers, Merchants, Druggists, Grocers, Bankers, the Army and Navy, &c." Cooley operated a printer's supply house on Fulton Street in New York and became important in the production of wood type after the Civil War.

Field presses were first employed during the war in the trans-Mississippi theatre, in Arkansas and Oklahoma. The earliest known is a Confederate general order of November 29, 1861, probably printed on a field press at Pocahontas, Arkansas. By July 3, 1862, Brigadier General Albert Pike of the Confederate army wrote from Fort McCulloch, Oklahoma, "I take the liberty of inclosing to you copies of two pamphlets printed here for distribution to officers without charge. I will send you others as I print them. Having purchased a press, I print my own blanks. . . ."

Among the output of the field presses were orders, broadsides, manuals, newspapers, and even verse. The newspaper imprints included *The Frontier Scout* (Fort Rice, North Dakota, 1864-5); *Pennsylvania 13th and Haversack* (Tennallytown, Pennsylvania); and the *Reveille* (New Albany, Indiana.) The *Pennsylvania 13th* and *Haversack* were printed on an Adams Cottage Press, as the accompanying illustration shows; the *Reveille* was printed first on a Lowe Press and then on an Adams.



Civil War field printing office. From LaBree, *Pictorial Battles of the Civil War*, vol II, (New York, 1885).

At the end of the Civil War, an army field press at Appomattox played a role in Lee's surrender. He had asked for parole forms for his officers, and Grant agreed to try to procure them. John Gibbon, Commanding General of the XXIV Corps, said "I thought that could be arranged, as I had a small printing press, and could have the blank forms struck off." Gibbons was able to print the forms, and they are very respectable pieces of job printing.

After the war, army field presses continued to be used, with imprints of Santa Fe, Fort Leavenworth, Omaha, and many other outposts. The publications were orders, circulars, programs and small books. One book believed to have been printed on an army field press was *Dictionary of the Sioux Language* by Joseph K. Hyer and William J. Starring, published at Fort Laramie in 1866. Of course, in established military positions like this, the press might well have been a Washington hand press rather than a portable press. An enduring book published by an army press is Henry S. Robert's *Rules of Order*, published at Head Quarters, Military Division of the Pacific, San Francisco, in 1869.

The Smithsonian has a Lowe Press as well as an Adams Cottage Press with an accompanying cabinet of type. The National Park Service recently acquired an identical type cabinet with "Headquarters Army of Potomac Printing Department" hand lettered on it. It will be used as part of the Park Service's interpretation of the surrender at Appomattox.

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### Further Reading

Two excellent articles by Edwin H. Carpenter Jr. discuss the role of the army field press, and I have used them for much of the material in this article. They are "Army Field Presses in the 1860s and '70s" (*Military Collector and Historian*, Spring 1956) and "Army Field Printing in the New World" (*Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 50, Second Quarter, 1956). The small portable presses are discussed by James Moran in his *Printing Presses* (1973), although not in detail. (N.B. I have just heard of another possible source of information: Lutz, Earle. *Soldier Newspapers of the Civil War*. I have not seen it.) I am indebted to Stan Nelson for technical information and to Penny Speckter for providing material from the Martin Speckter printing collection.



# APHA NEWS

The 1989 Lieberman Lecture, sponsored by APHA, will be at the J. Carter Brown Library, Providence, R.I. on November 3. The subject will be the 450th anniversary of printing in the Americas (the first press was established in Mexico City in 1539.) The speaker will be Clive Griffin, vice-president of Trinity College, Oxford. (A reminder: the APHA Annual Conference takes place at Harvard on Oct. 6 and 7, on the 350th anniversary of printing in the United States. For details, see *Newsletter* 89.)

## BRIEFLY NOTED

**Kemble Collection Closes** One of the most notable printing collections in the United States, the Kemble Collections on Western Printing and Publishing of the California Historical Society, has abruptly closed its doors to the public because of financial problems. The collection has strong collections of printers' manuals, type specimen books, press and equipment catalogues, printing periodicals, as well as printers' diaries and other material. It was established through gifts by George Laban Harding to the Society. It was named for Edward Cleveland Kemble, a pioneer California printer, publisher, and newspaper historian. Since 1964 the Kemble Collections has published *The Kemble Occasional*, mainly dealing with early California printing, publishing, type founding, etc. In 1988 The Kemble Collections was awarded APHA's Institutional Award for contributions to the history of printing.

**Thorniley Collection Closed** On the heels of the Kemble's closing, we have word that the Thorniley Collection of antique type at the West Coast Paper Company in Seattle has closed its doors to the public. Bill Thorniley was an avid collector of 19th-century American metal type and an amateur printer of some distinction. In 1967 he printed a specimen book of his types; eventually the collection was put on display at the West Coast Paper Company. Now a disagreement between the owners and the curator has led to the latter's resignation and the closing of the collection.

**Cary Collection Expands** On a happier note, the Rochester Institute of Technology has begun work on an expansion of the Wallace Library, which houses the Melbert B. Cary, Jr. Graphic Arts Collection. The Cary Collection was established at RIT in 1969, and is one of the major libraries concerned with the history and practice of printing. The Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust has announced a \$1.3 million endowment to support the Cary programs at RIT, and has made a "substantial" commitment toward the expansion program.

When completed in 1990, the new Cary Library will be nearly four times its present size and will include reading room, conservation and exhibition preparation rooms, stacks, exhibition area, and a special reading room for the

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Middleton bookbinding collection. Although construction has begun, the fund is still some \$300,000 short of its goal.

### International Museum of Graphic Communication

In Buena Park, California, the International Museum of Graphic Communication is now open to the public. The core of the museum is the Earnest A. Lindner Collection of Antique Printing Machinery, collected during a span of 30 years. 25,000 square feet of space is available in a modern building. The museum also has 400 square feet of space available for manufacturers to display their latest technology, thus making a much-needed connection with the income-producing printing industry of the present.

The Lindner Collection, long a leading collection of 19th-century printing equipment, includes the only Stanhope Press in the United States, as well as Columbians, Albions, Washingtons, and many platen jobbers and cylinder presses. The motion picture industry in nearby Hollywood has often rented these antique presses for productions.

In addition to the machinery on display, the Museum has a small library, 100-seat auditorium, and meeting rooms. Mark Barbour, former curator of the Shakespeare Press at California Polytechnic, is the IMOGC curator. The Museum's address is 8469 Kass Drive, near the intersection of interstate highways 5 and 91, in Buena Park, California. Hours are Thursday through Saturday, 11-6; Sunday, noon to 5 P.M. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children and retirees. The telephone number is 714/523-2070.

**Adobe Goes to Metal Type** In the last issue we noted that American Type Founders has joined the computer age by supplying digitized versions of its classic typefaces for desktop publishing with the computer. Now we are even happier to note an item in the newspaper devoted to letterpress, *The Printer* (Box 1402, Findlay, OH 45840.) According to *The Printer*, designer Jim Rimmer of the Pie Tree Press, 328 Eleventh St., New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada, has redrawn and cast in metal a typeface originally intended for computer use. The face is Stone, designed for Adobe Systems, Inc. The icing on the story is that Adobe's president was so intrigued that he sent Rimmer a \$5000 check for several fonts, and is now trying to locate a press!

In addition, Mr. Rimmer has redrawn for desktop publishing Fred Goudy's Kaatskill type. Kaatskill, according to Mac McGrew's *American Metal Typefaces of the Twentieth Century*, was designed by Goudy for an edition of *Rip Van Winkle* published by the Limited Editions Club in 1929. The type was private, and never released for sale to printers.



## NOTES & QUERIES

To the Editor:

I'm interested in knowing the age of my Vandercook 4 proofing press, serial number 99-12036. I'm hoping you can give me a clue about how to determine the year of manufacture.

Thank you for your excellent work on the *Newsletter*.

Richard B. Mathews  
Associate Professor of English  
Editor, *Tampa Review*  
The University of Tampa  
Tampa, FL 33606-1490

The age of a Vandercook has me stumped; perhaps one of our readers can help Prof. Mathews. Information might be obtained from Vandercook's successors, Vanderson's, 216 Devon Avenue, Bensenville, IL 60106; telephone 312/766-2455. Incidentally, the editor can usually give dates for the following presses, if given the serial number and other information:

Hoe Washington hand presses  
Golding & Co. presses (Pearl, Official, Jobber)  
Chandler & Price

In addition, the editor will undertake to identify any platen job press, especially table top presses, which the owner cannot identify. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope with all requests, and a photo in the case of a press identification, to

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## BOOKS

Richard J. Hoffman: Printer, 5732 Buffalo Avenue, Van Nuys, CA 91401, has issued a handsome letter-press printed catalogue of books about printing. The books are printed by letterpress in limited editions, and priced accordingly. Some of the titles are:

*When a Printer Plays*, 1987. A showing of fleurons arranged in various patterns, with notes from classic sources and by Mr. Hoffman. 55 pages, bound by Bela Blau, small folio (12½ x 9¼), 200 copies, \$200.

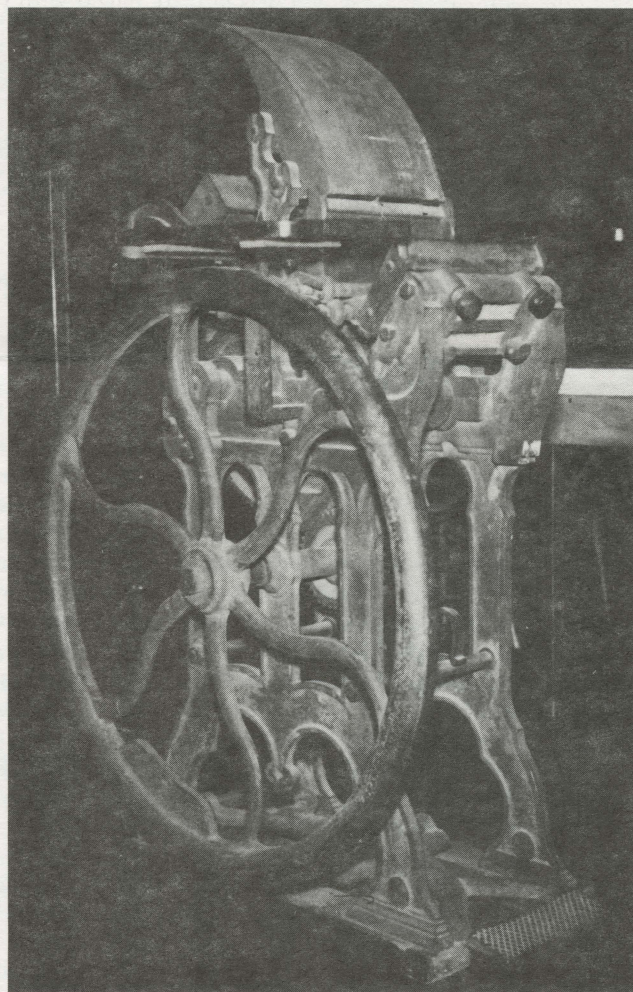
*ABCD: Initials and Display Alphabets*, 1989. A workbook of large sizes from traditional fonts, collected over 50 years. 190 pages, 8½ x 5½, 200 copies, bound in boards, 2 colors on 34 pages, \$75.

Ege, Otto F. *The Story of the Alphabet*. 1988 Distinguished Book Award from the Miniature Book Society. Bound by Bela Blau, 2-3/4" x 2-3/4", two or three colors of ink on most pages, 80 pages, \$30.

For these and many other titles on printing, including Western Printing, write to Mr. Hoffman.

## ◀SURVIVALS▶

### Gordon "Alligator Press" of 1851



Nebraska State Historical Society

This is apparently the only surviving "Alligator Press." It was brought out by George Phineas Gordon in 1851, but does not seem to be covered by a patent. The platen was stationary and set at a 45 degree angle. At the moment of impression, the bed tilted forward to meet the platen. "Probably a more dangerous piece of apparatus was never built," according to Ralph Green.

This press was used by printer Henry Allen Brainerd, who worked in Lincoln, Nebraska in the early 1880s. He gave the press to the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1911. The press has not been on display for many years, and is now missing its flywheel. The NSHS is seeking a replacement flywheel; any APHA member who can help is urged to contact Robert C. Pettit, Curator of Museum Collections, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1500 R St., Box 82554, Lincoln, NE 68501.