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# The APHA Newsletter

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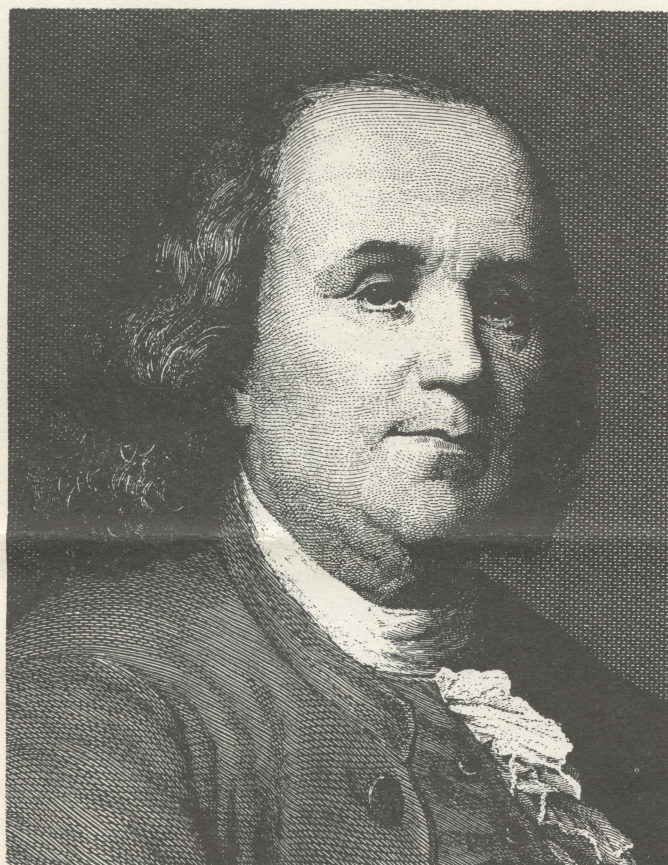
Stephen O. Saxe, Editor

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## Benjamin Franklin: Innovator—and Typographical Conservative

On this, the 200th anniversary of Benjamin Franklin's death, his name is much in the news. Printers have always felt great affinity for this member of their trade who still stands high in the regard of his countrymen so many years after his death.

In a codicil of his will dated June 23, 1789, Franklin left £1000 sterling each to Boston (his birthplace) and Philadelphia (where he settled). He requested that the money



*Benjamin Franklin*

be divided between the cities and their states 200 years later. The Philadelphia portion has grown to \$2 million, while the Boston bequest is worth about \$5 million. When the latter is divided in the spring of 1991, Boston will receive about \$1.5 million, and Massachusetts the remaining \$3.5 million. The Massachusetts portion is without strings attached, but the Boston part is probably to be used for projects related to printing. The Friends of the Museum of Printing in Boston is a prime candidate for some of this money, which they would use to found a National Museum of Printing. We think that Ben Franklin would approve.

Franklin embodied many of the traits Americans have admired over the years, including innovation and business acumen. His innovations were many, including bifocal eyeglasses, the lightning rod, and the Franklin stove. He clearly had the ability to look at things as they were and think of improvements. We know that he thought well of Baskerville's types at a time when only Caslon's types enjoyed general approval. And yet—in the field of printing this was not quite the full picture. It is a bit of shock to read the following letter from Franklin, published soon after his death, in *The Massachusetts Magazine*, vol. II, No. VI (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, June, 1790.)

The look of printing in the English language was changing dramatically around 1790. Before then all substantives—i.e. nouns—were capitalized (or to use the printer's term, set in upper case). The use of the long s was falling out of favor as well.

Mr. Webster was Noah Webster, Jr. the compiler of the first great American dictionary. The letter was originally written in Philadelphia on December 26, 1789, and did not reach Noah Webster until a few days before Franklin's death on April 17, 1790. Rollo Silver has observed that "The dread of change from the bread-and-butter pattern of his printing career hit Benjamin Franklin hard in his old age." (*The American Printer, 1787 - 1825*, p. 146.) It is interesting to note that the letter was published without most of the upper case substantives so much preferred by Dr. Franklin; I do not know if that was how it was originally written.

### Letter from Dr. Franklin to Mr. Webster

... If therefore we would have the benefit of seeing our language more generally known among mankind, we should endeavor to remove all the difficulties, however small, that discourage the learning of it. But I am sorry to observe that, of late years, those difficulties, instead of being diminished, have been augmented. In examining the English books that were printed between the restoration and the accession of George the 2d. we may observe that all



substantives were begun with a capital, in which we imitated our mother tongue, the German. This was more particularly useful to those who were not well acquainted with the English, there being such a prodigious number of our words, that are both verbs and substantives, and spelt in the same manner, tho' often accented differently in pronunciation. This method has, by the fancy of printers, of late years, been laid aside; from an idea, that suppressing the capitals shews the character to greater advantage; those letters, prominent above the line, disturbing its even, regular appearance. The effect of this change is so considerable that a learned man of France, who used to read our Books, tho' not perfectly acquainted with our Language, in conversation with me on the subject of our authors, attributed the greater obscurity he found in our modern books, compared with the period abovementioned, to a change of style, for the worse, in our writers; of which mistake I convinced him by marking for him each substantive with a capital, in a paragraph, which he then easily understood, tho' before he could not comprehend it. This shews the inconvenience of that pretended improvement. . . . From the same fondness for an even and uniform appearance of characters in the line, the Printers have of late banished also the Italick Types in which words of importance to be attended to in the sense of the sentence, and words on which an emphasis should be put in reading, used to be printed. And lately another fancy has induced some Printers to use the short round *s* instead of the long one, which formerly served well to distinguish a word readily by its varied appearance. Certainly the omitting of this prominent letter makes the line appear more even; but renders it less immediately legible; as the paring of all Mens' Noses might smoothe and level their Faces, but would render their Physiognomies less distinguishable. Add to all these improvements backwards, another modern fancy, that *grey* printing is more beautiful than *black*; hence the English new Books are printed in so dim a character as to be read with difficulty by old Eyes, unless in a very strong light and with good Glasses. Whoever compares a Volume of the Gentleman's Magazine, printed between the years 1731 and 1740, with one of those printed in the last 10 years, will be convinced of the much greater degree of perspicuity given by black Ink than by the grey. Lord Chesterfield pleasantly remarked this difference to Faulkener, the printer of the Dublin Journal, who was vainly making encomiums on his own Paper, as the most complete of any in the World; "but, Mr. Faulkener," says my Lord, "don't you think it might be still farther improved by using Paper and Ink not quite so near of a colour." For all these reasons I cannot but wish that our American Printers would in their Editions avoid these fancied improvements, and thereby render their works more agreeable to Foreigners in Europe, to the great advantage of our Bookselling Commerce.

Farther, to be more sensible of the advantage of clear and distinct Printing, let us consider the assistance it affords in reading well aloud to an Auditory. In so doing the eye generally slides forward three or four words before the Voice. If the sight clearly distinguishes what the coming words are, it gives time to order the modulation of the Voice to express them properly. But if they are obscurely printed, or disguised by omitting the Capitals and long *s*'s or otherwise, the reader is apt to modulate wrong, and finding he has done so he is obliged to go back and begin the sentence



*Noah Webster.*

again; which lessens the pleasure of the hearers. This leads me to mention an old error in our mode of printing. We are sensible that when a Question is met with in reading, there is a proper variation to be used in the management of the Voice. We have therefore a point, called an Interrogation, affixed to the question in order to distinguish it. But this is absurdly placed at its end, so that the reader does not discover it till he finds he has wrongly modulated his voice and is therefore obliged to begin again the sentence. To prevent this the Spanish printers, more sensibly, place an Interrogation at the beginning as well as at the end of a question. We have another error of the same kind in printing plays, where something often occurs that is marked as spoken *aside*. But the word *aside* is placed at the end of the speech, when it ought to precede it, as a direction to the reader that he may Govern his Voice accordingly. The practice of our Ladies in meeting five or six together to form little busy parties where each is employed in some useful work, while one reads to them, is so commendable in itself, that it deserves the attention of Authors and Printers to make it as pleasing as possible, both to the reader and hearers. My best wishes attend you, being, with sincere esteem, Sir, your most obedient and very humble Servant,

B. FRANKLIN

*The long s was used at the beginning and in the middle of words, but never at the end. Ames' Typographical Antiquities (1749) was the first book to dispense with the long s, but "this was regarded as an eccentricity... The effective introduction of the reform has been credited to John Bell who in his British Theatre of 1791 used s throughout..." (McKerrow, Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students, p. 309.) Before 1791, however, Ambroise Didot discarded the long s in 1784, and John Bell had also in 1785 and 1787. Bell was striving for a more open page, which this reform furthered. The dropping of capitals for substantives seems to have occurred gradually over time; I cannot find a reference to a specific occasion or reform.* Copyright © 1990 Stephen O. Saxe



# APHA NEWS

## Summary of the 1989 Annual Report of outgoing President James Green

At year's end, APHA membership was holding steady around the one thousand mark, while our balance sheet shows a deficit of only about \$300 on a total budget of just over \$40,000. About 70% of our income was from membership dues, while production costs for *Printing History* and *The APHA Newsletter* accounted for 67% of our expenditures. The other main items in the budget were the annual conference in Cambridge, which broke even on registration fees, the Lieberman Lecture at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, which is paid for out of an endowment, and the salary of our Executive Secretary, which was just about balanced by the income she generated in publication and advertising sales. Our finances are simple, and our membership gets maximum value for dues paid. This has been our successful formula for years.

The APHA Board's decision to establish a publication fund in memory of Stephen Harvard was the most noteworthy new development in our Association this past year. The income from the fund might be used to support new or existing APHA publications, or it might be used to "make possible" other publications, or, as the endowment and its income grow it might be used to award grants to practitioners of the book arts or for research in printing history. . . it will give us new ways to further the goal of our association, which is to encourage the study of the history of printing and its allied arts. . . Financially speaking, the fund will give APHA a little space in the annual balance sheet to be creative and innovative in carrying out our mission. Presently our income from dues only just covers our basic activities. . . The money for the fund will come from those of our members who are willing and able to support a broader range of activities not directly membership-related, and it will also come from. . . corporations and foundations sympathetic to our purpose. Contributions have already been received for the fund, including pledges from every member of the Board. . .

At the annual meeting, most of our officers' terms expired (including my own) and a new slate was elected. In the process we passed something of a milestone: after four years as Treasurer E.H. Pat Taylor is retiring from the Board. Pat has served continuously on the Board since 1978, longer than anyone in our history. There is simply not space here adequately to thank Pat for his many important contributions to APHA, not to mention the other retiring Board

### APHA Calendar

October 6. APHA Annual Conference, at Columbia University, New York. Topic: Newspaper printing technology of the 19th and 20th centuries. Speakers include Richard Schwarzlose, John Levine, Bill Rhinehart, and Prescott Low.

January 26, 1991 APHA Annual Meeting and Awards presentation, in Trustees' Room, New York Public Library.

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members and the many other members who worked on our meetings, publications, and awards. This was a good year for APHA, largely because we had an exceptionally energetic and able Board. It was a real pleasure to serve with them.

## NOTES & QUERIES

Several readers, including Regis M. Graden and Alan Dietch, have written to say that the E.L. Megill Company, maker of Megill's Gauge Pins, has been sold to the American Printing Equipment and Supply Co., but continues to do business under the old name. The address is 42-25 9th St., Long Island City, NY 11101. The company was founded in 1870 and still continues to make the original product, as described in *Newsletter* 93.

To the Editor:

About a year ago I sent an order to E.L. Megill Company for a large order of gauge pins. I had decided it was time to preserve that rich part of printing history. . . the lowly gauge pin. I ordered several dozen of the old standby "Adjustable Spring Tongue Gauge Pins" and at the same time some of *all* of the others including the fantastic (but not too well known) Automatic Register Gauge Pin that was patented by them in about 1880. That Automatic Register pin alone cost \$40, but what a great item just to hold and examine! What an ingenious apparatus! . . .

My favorite period of printing history is the nineteenth century. I find, though, through my study, that it is a wonderful place to visit but surely not to have lived in.

Regis M. Graden  
Castaia, CA

To the Editor:

. . . Your article on Compositors' tool is interesting. For your information, I have been able to fill out the gaps in both my sets of composing and make-up rules within the past few years by getting the missing lengths from Stephenson, Blake in Britain. . .

R.S. MacCollister  
San Francisco, CA

To the Editor:

I read with interest your article on the tools of the trade in the last issue of the *Newsletter*. Your point about wood quoins is well taken except for the fact that one can still buy them brand new from Thompson Cabinet Co. They are made in four sizes. I use them on our Common Press



and find that they work fine. I'm enclosing a Xerox of the page from the Thompson price list. . .

Roger Frith  
The Tennessee State Museum  
Nashville, TN

The address of Thompson Cabinet Co., Inc. is P.O. Box 607, Ludington, MI 49431. A box of 100 hardwood maple quoins in assorted sizes is \$40. The Thompson Co. also sells many other letterpress items including planers, cabinets, furniture, etc.

Philip J. Weimerskirch is seeking information about the noted printer, writer and book designer Paul Johnston. Johnston, a founding member of The Typophiles, was the author of *Biblio-Typographica*, a review of modern fine printing. Mr. Weimerskirch would also like to track down Bruce Rogers' annotated copy of this book. The Providence Public Library has some of Johnston's correspondence with Fred Goudy and Stanley Morison, and Mr. Weimerskirch would like to publish it, but needs to get the proper permission first. Contact Philip J. Weimerskirch, Special Collections, Providence Public Library, 225 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903; tel. 401/455-8000.

## BRIEFLY NOTED

The bankruptcy sale of the assets of ATF-Davidson took place in Massachusetts in April. This was the press manufacturing division of ATF. The typesetting division, Kingsley/ATF, continues to operate in Elizabeth, NJ. ATF is the oldest American type foundry, the successor of many foundries including Binny and Ronaldson of Philadelphia, founded in 1796.

The March 27th auction sale of the contents of the Cockerell Bindery marked the end of almost a century of the Cockerell family's work as England's best known binders and restorers. Sydney Cockerell was William Morris' secretary at the Kelmscott Press. His brother Douglas bound books for Morris and for Cobden-Sanderson, and was the author of the classic *Bookbinding and the Care of Books*. Douglas' son Sandy took over the bindery in 1945; his death in 1987 at the age of 81 made the end of the bindery a necessity. Items in the sale, in St. Ives, Cambridgeshire, included finishing tools, marbled paper, and an Albion press.

The Monotype Corporation, Falfords, England has been sold to Pointplus PLC, a UK-based company formed by an American investment firm. Monotype typesetting technology was a leader during the letterpress era from the 1890s on, and many Monotype casting machines still continue to cast type in the U.S., Europe and Asia. Interestingly, the company originated in the U.S. and part of it was sold off to a group of British investors, under whose management it prospered more than the American branch.

The Annual meeting of the Typocrafters, an important letterpress organization, will take place in Chicago, October 4-7. The work of several important presses will be featured, including material from the R. Hunter Middleton Design and Printing Collection at the University of Illinois Chicago. There will be two major exhibits at the Newberry Library. For information, write Typocrafters 90, 1215 Greenwood St., Evanston, IL 60201-4123, or telephone 708/869-7103.

## TYPE & PRESSES

A. Kenneth Yost, the Two Ys Press, 671 Country Club Drive, Carmel Valley, CA 93924, is in the process of selling his very complete 19th century printing shop. For a complete list write him at the above address or call 408/659-4892.

A complete printing shop in Timblin, PA, which has been operated by one family continuously since the 19th century, is available for sale. Contact Gerald D. Watkins, Timblin, PA 15778, or call him at 814/256-3498.

## BOOKS

APHA member Emerson Wulling's library is being sold by Rulon-Miller Books, 400 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55102. The library is being sold in five parts, each with its own catalogue. They are: I, Early Printing; II, History of Printing; III, Small & Private Presses; IV, Craft & Design; and V, D.B. Updike, Parts I and II are available now; the others will follow. \$7.50 per catalogue (each with a letterpress cover by a noted printer), \$35 for all five.

Chiswick Book Shop, Inc. has issued the latest in its long series of catalogues of books on printing. The current catalogue lists over 100 items, including Ashendene, Dover, and Kelmscott Press prospectuses, and books on printing, papermaking, etc. Available from Chiswick Book Shop, Inc., 1G Professional Building, Heritage Village, Southbury, CT 06488.

The current exhibition (through November, 1990) in the Hall of Graphic Arts, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, is "The Art of the Nature Print." Dr. Elizabeth Harris, Curator of Graphic Arts, has provided a very interesting 16-page catalogue of the exhibition, with numerous illustrations of the history and technique of printing from natural objects. The earliest leaf prints were made in 1425 by Conrad von Butzbach, a German physician; Leonardo described a new method in his notebooks, 1490-1519. Copies of the catalogue are available from Division of Graphic Arts, NMAH 5703, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC 20560, for \$3 postpaid.

### New Books of Interest to APHA Members

Lawson, Alexander. *Anatomy of a Typeface*. Boston: David R. Godine, 1990. Octavo, 420 pages. \$40. Definitive study of the evolution and classification of typefaces, from black letter to sans serif. Available from Oak Knoll Books, 414 Delaware St., New Castle, DE 19720 and from The Colophon Book Shop, 117 Water St., Exeter, NH 03833. Shipping is additional from both.

*Bibliography of the History of Printing in the Library of Congress*, Vol. II. Springwater, NY: Horace Hart, 1990. 8½ x 11, 432 pages. \$210 plus shipping. Vol. I is available at \$139; both volumes at \$349. Vol. II contains over 5000 titles and an index of over 6000 subjects. Available from Horace Hart, Publisher, 6219 Canadice Hill Road, Springwater, NY 14560; tel. 716/367-2851.