

The WAYZGOOSE GAZETTE

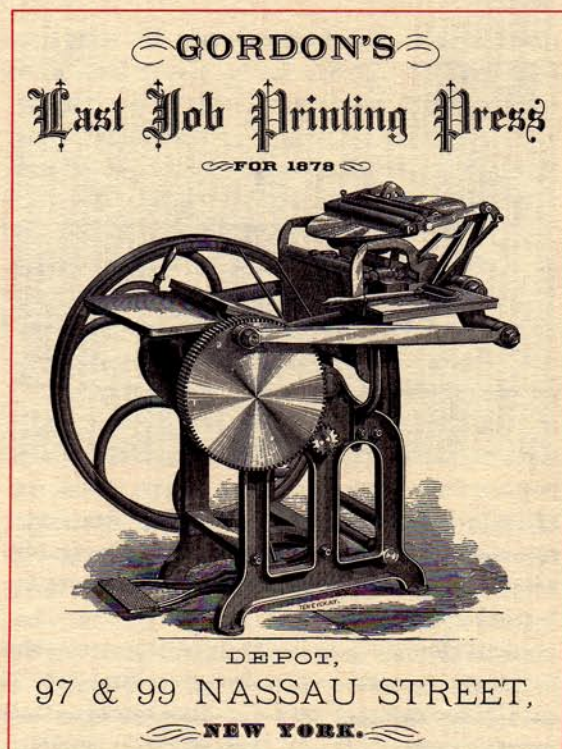
A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRINTING MUSEUM • BUENA PARK, CALIFORNIA

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

SPRING, 1994

The Dream That Produced a Legend

It is rare to find a printer these days over the age of 40 who has not had some exposure to a platen press, usually the well-known C & P. Many have spent a good portion of their earlier years as printers operating one of these venerable workhorses; others only came in contact with them through junior high and high school printing shop classes. The platen press could be seen in almost every job printing shop in the nation between the years 1870 and 1970, a century of dominance as the mechanical backbone of the printing industry.



The platen presses we are familiar with today descend from one that appeared in 1863, known as the Gordon Oldstyle. This press was the invention of George Phineas Gordon, a prolific inventor with a mechanical inclination. Gordon was consumed with the challenge of designing a press to fill the need of

job printing, which is the printing of items small in size and quantity. For thirty years prior to the introduction of his successful Oldstyle in 1863, Gordon was involved in a number of attempts at small press to meet this rising demand, each with varying levels of success.

Essentially what was available to the printer at this time were hand presses, whether iron or wood, or larger cylinder presses for newspaper and book work. With the rise of the industrial age, the demand increased for the printing of "less than a sheet," such as for bill heads, advertising, hand bills and business cards. Also to be considered was the improvement of the postal system and the invention of a manufactured envelope in 1840, which gave rise to a large demand for personal stationery. These items were tedious and laborious to print on the hand presses.

It was late in 1851 when Gordon had a dream in which Benjamin Franklin came to him and described the mechanisms of a new press. Gordon secured a patent on the basis of this dream, and in 1852 began to sell his "Turnover Press". The design and mechanisms for this press were to be the features of all the later Gordon's. He improved the press in 1858 and again in 1863, eliminating some extra cams and applying a rotating ink disc. Gordon's earlier presses used a flat or curved surface to draw the ink from, which gave inconsistent inking to the form. It is probable that Gordon saw the rotating ink disc on another press, that of Daniel Treadwell's from 1830, recognized its value and applied it to his own press. He realized, however, that the idea was not patentable so he "improved" the disc somewhat by designing it with both an inner disc and an outer ring, each rotating in opposite directions. Gordon named his improved Turnover Press the Franklin Gordon, later to be known simply as the Gordon.

The press became extremely popular across the country due to its efficiency of power, light weight and the fact that the platen moved to a near horizontal position after printing. This made it easier for the

pressman to feed the sheet of paper and to perform make-ready. Gordon's press controlled most of the market for jobbing platen presses until the turn-of-the-century, with many variations of it presented by other manufacturers.

To prevent losing his enviable share of the market after his patents expired around 1872, Gordon introduced a New Style press. This press maintained the same general appearance but used a different mechanism to move the bed and platen and incorporated an impression throw-off for the first time. However, this "Brass Arm Gordon," as it was called, didn't achieve the same popularity as the Oldstyle Franklin Gordon.

By 1890, over eleven companies were manufacturing the Oldstyle Gordon, with very little difference between them. Chandler & Price and the Challenge Manufacturing Company were the main manufacturers of the press during that period; Chandler & Price eventually purchased the Gordon Press Works

in 1901 along with the rights to use the name "Gordon." They discontinued the Oldstyle in 1911 and introduced the New Series press. This C & P press, whose origins come from Gordon's Oldstyle, has dominated the platen press market to this day. There are still a few old job printers that remember the original Franklin Press, as Gordon liked to call it. What began as a mystical dream for George Phineas Gordon produced a legacy in the printing industry that has lasted well over 125 years.

Gordon's press of 1863 can be seen by visitors to the Printing Museum, as well as over two dozen other models of platen presses from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Gordon's Brass Arm Gordon of 1872, given its name because of a brass nameplate on one of the arms, was recently acquired from the Printer's Row Museum in Chicago and now complements the museum's display. Enjoy an afternoon at the Printing Museum reminiscing about the stories and folklore of our wonderful industry.

Makers of Letters

In the middle of the 15th century in Mainz, Germany, a major revolution began which altered the course of history permanently. At the focal point of this cultural upheaval was an indefatigable entrepreneurial inventor who was probably unaware of the enormous impact of his endeavors. He was simply a man consumed both with the idea of "writing books faster" as well as making his fortune. To the benefit of the world, he achieved the former, but in the process failed to realize his own prosperity. Johann Gutenberg was a man of dreams, a man of tireless energy to create solutions to the problems he faced.

The problem of "writing books faster" required more than just the invention of a printing press, but the creation and adaptation of each element in a complicated technical process. Printing, paper, movable type, ink and presses each existed in some form prior to Gutenberg; but these various pieces of the complex puzzle, required to create the commercial industry of printing, were never fit together. This is the genius credited to Gutenberg—his ability to refine and adapt each of these pieces to work together with repeatable precision and quality.

Of all Gutenberg's contributions to the art of printing, his invention and perfection of the type mould surpasses the rest. The movable type produced in China and Korea centuries before Gutenberg were crude and for the most part unworkable in comparison. With his background in the jeweler's trade and his understanding of metallurgy, Guten-

berg was able to develop the process of casting large quantities of type accurately, giving birth to an industry which transformed civilization—Printing! The power of the press began with letters, many letters, painstakingly cast one at a time by craftsmen whose lives were dedicated to their creation.

The hand casting of type with a mould (the process used from Gutenberg's day until the late 19th century) is similar in principle to the casting of bullets or lead toy soldiers except requiring a great deal of precision. The hand mould essentially remained unchanged in design throughout its centuries of use. It consists of two halves, which when placed together create a cavity for the molten lead alloy to be poured into, forming the piece of type. On one end of the cavity a rectangular piece of brass with a letter recessed into it, known as a matrix, is held in place by a long curved wire spring; this spring also keeps the two halves together.

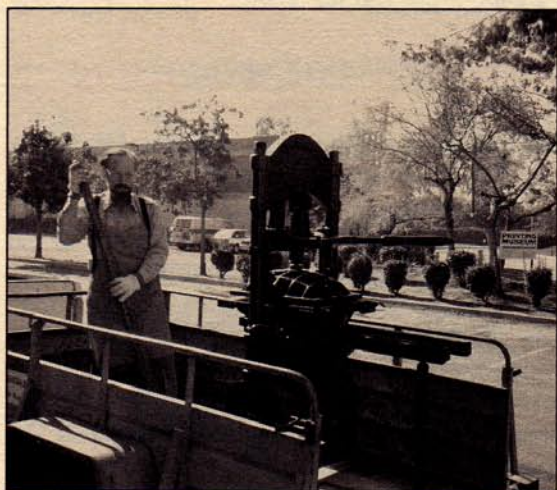
Letterfounding, as it was called, represents the beginning of precision manufacturing. The height of each letter cast had to be exact and consistent with all the other letters, with a tolerance in the thousands or tens of thousands of an inch. If this was not achieved the unevenness of the page of type would prevent an acceptable impression on the printing press. The mould also had to be adjustable for the varying widths of each letter in a font of type; for example, a capital "W" requires a wider casting cavity than a lowercase "i".

With computers setting our type these days, and even so many programs that design our own typefaces, an appreciation is lost for the skill and time required to produce a font of type during the first four centuries of our craft. For a shop in 1750 to have had one or two typefaces in six to ten sizes was impressive; this represented an investment of two to four years of a man's wages. A typesetting house today which does not have at least 1,000 faces at its disposal finds it difficult to compete.

Gutenberg was a man of letters. He spent countless years of his life perfecting their creation. His other efforts toward the development of the printing trade would have been in vain had he not solved the basic problem of casting accurate type; it was letters

Leland "Doc" Whitson Donates Press

Dr. Leland Whitson, a medical doctor from Manhattan Beach, CA, and proprietor of the Whitson Press, recently donated a Washington-style Reliance Hand Press, circa 1905, along with a Paragon hand lever



paper cutter from 1880. The donations were made through the museum's "Donor Sponsorship Program"; this is a program where individuals or companies make a tax-deductible financial contribution to the Printing Museum to be used in the acquisition of antique printing machinery. The acquisition is then made and exhibited in the name of the donor, as in this case with Dr. Whitson. This program allows individuals to actively participate in the preservation of printing history and express their support for the efforts of the Printing Museum.

The Reliance Press and Paragon Cutter were acquired from Mel Huber, proprietor of the Ghost Town Print Shop inside of Knott's Berry Farm in

cast in lead which gave strength to the printing press. There is a quote cast on a wall plaque hanging in the Printing Museum which reads, "Lead has changed the world more than gold, and more than the lead in the gun, the lead in the compositor's case." (maybe OSHA should read this quote and realize that a substance they so fear has done more good for the world than they will ever hope to!)

A visit to the Printing Museum in Buena Park will give a rare look at typesetting from Gutenberg's day up to the present; in particular, you will be able to view 18th century hand molds, punches and matrices. And, on occasion, one of the guides can be seen casting a piece of type in this traditional fashion for a visitor to take home.

Buena Park. By strange coincidence, Mel originally purchased the press over twenty years ago from Ernie Lindner, whose collection is featured at the Printing Museum. Mel was using the press along with two other hand presses to print "wanted posters" for visitors to Knott's, along with other nostalgic pieces.

Mel has operated the Ghost Town Print Shop for over 25 years, having been associated with Walter Knott back to the 1950's. During those early years, he managed Calico, a California ghost town which Knott had purchased and marketed as a tourist attraction. After the town was given back to the state, Mel continued operating the turn-of-the-century print shop at the ghost town Walter Knott had built at his boysenberry farm. Since that time, millions of visitors from around the world have stopped by the Ghost



Town Print Shop to see Mel pull an impression at a Washington press during their visit to Knott's.

As is always the case, finding and acquiring a piece is only one part of the process of collecting—

next comes hauling the 3/4-ton press and cutter back to the museum. Leland and I arrived at Knott's one morning, early enough to beat the onslaught of tourists at 10 am. I must admit there is a unique pleasure in driving around the backlot and the inside streets of an attraction where tourists and visitors are normally not allowed or can only walk along.

With rather narrow streets, it required creative and accurate reversing techniques to align the truck and trailer up to a wooden porch; this was outside one of the old buildings in the ghost town where the paper cutter was being stored. Every now and then, as machinery movers can testify, you experience one of those exceptional "moving days"—everything happens smoothly as planned (for us amateurs, this can be a very rare experience!). We backed the trailer up accurately on the first shot, having a tolerance left or right of only a few inches. Between the three of us and an equal number of pipes, the Paragon cutter rolled out that rickety old shack, across the wooden porch and onto the trailer in four minutes flat—definitely a record in amateur machinery moving!

Next came the press, located at a local storage

site, which also required some skillful trailer reversing. The tall cast iron beast was wrenched onto the trailer with the use of a come-along in about 25 minutes, also an impressive time. Both pieces were then unloaded at the Printing Museum where the restoration on them has begun. The Reliance Press will be featured in the museum's Gutenberg Festival exhibit, May 12th to 15th, printing wanted posters again for visitors. Stop by and see it when you come to the Festival.

The Printing Museum would like to thank Dr. Leland Whitson for his generosity in helping to acquire the press for the museum. He has also been one the museum's volunteers over the years, helping with tours and the restoration of a few old presses. In thanking Leland, I would also invite others to participate in our Donor Sponsorship Program. There are a number of important printing history artifacts that I have located as a curator but require a financial contribution of some sort. Help us to acquire them, and in so doing you will help to preserve printing history and enjoy seeing your name associated with the antique piece as the donor.

Printing Museum to Host Conference on Typesetting

The Int'l Printing Museum will be host to the upcoming American Typesetting Fellowship Conference, July 15th to the 17th. This biennial gathering brings together the various remaining experts, practitioners and enthusiasts of hot metal typesetting from around the world—from those who operate Monotype casters or Thompsons to Linotypes, even people who can still cut punches for hand casting.

Because of the location at the Printing Museum, which has a very strong collection of working antique linecasting machinery, this year's conference will emphasize Linotype's and other linecasting technology. But the program promises to have something of interest for all who attend.

Already scheduled to speak are Carl Schlesinger on the history of the Linotype; Bill Berkuda on linecasting maintenance and concerns; Bill Davis from Monotype Typography, Inc., on typography and type design; Pat Reagh on photopolymer plates; Mark Barbour on the Linotype Junior; Paul Duenning on Thompsons. Ernie Lindner, whose magnificent collection of antique printing equipment is on display at the Printing Museum, will give the keynote address during the Saturday evening banquet.

Throughout the conference there will be numerous equipment demonstrations throughout the museum's galleries including early Linotypes and

and various rare typesetting machines, such as a Linotype Junior and a Typograph.

The conference is open to all interested individuals, whether or not they are a member of the American Typesetting Fellowship. The \$150 conference fee covers all programs, continental breakfasts, lunches and the banquet. In addition to the formal conference, there will be a two-day technical session on the July 18th and 19th. The two concurrent sessions will be on operating and maintaining Thompson Typesetters as well as operation and maintenance of Linotypes and Intertypes. The fee for these additional sessions will be \$50.00.

For more information or to register, please call the Printing Museum (714) 523-2070.

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is issued quarterly for the Friends of the Int'l Printing Museum. Membership in the Friends begins with a \$25 annual donation. The Printing Museum was founded by David Jacobson in 1988 as a private, non-profit museum featuring the Lindner Collection of Printing Machinery.

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Mark Barbour, curator and editor
Printing donated by Darrell Blaisdell
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