

Observations

☞ A REPORT TO THE AMERICAN TYPECASTING FELLOWSHIP
CONFERENCE, MEETING IN WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA, JULY, 1992

*Old News from the
Heartland of America*

THE HOUSE THAT EGGS BUILT

*A Brief History of the
Sterling Typefoundry*

DAVE CHURCHMAN
Indianapolis, Indiana

IN 1892, FACING RUINOUS competition, 23 U. S. type foundries formed a bloated Act in Restraint of Trade known as ATF. Additional foundries were absorbed over time, and by the end of World War I there was only one giant concern.

In 1922, O. E. McLaughlin of Vermontville, Michigan, got fed up with this monopoly and gave birth to the Sterling Type Foundry. His premise was, with cheaper matrices, he could offer hard metal (14% tin, 24% antimony) type in a range of useful sizes and faces. For literally pennies-per-mat, he purchased single Linotype sorts, locked them in his Thompson or NR "Universal" and made type fonts . . . very cheap type fonts!

Six and 12 pt. "Plate Gothics" were priced at \$1.35 per font (and a font weighed two lbs.) with the 18 pt. fonts selling for \$1.65.

Other faces included: NRA Black (a/k/a

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*New News from the
Fast-Lane West Coast*

ELECTRONICS AND THE LETTERPRESS PRINTER

BRUCE WASHBISH
Petaluma, California

WE ARE TOLD that no respectable resident of Marin County, California, can maintain a decent lifestyle without a fax machine, answering machine, VCR, microwave oven, pager, food processor, 5kw stereo, cellular telephone, personal computer, and wrap-around CD disk and tape players in an automobile capable of speeds exceeding 150 miles per hour.

Sonoma County borders the northern edge of Marin County, and its residents (including this writer) are thought to be less sophisticated, less liberal, and generally of a more rural persuasion. It is certainly true that Sonomans need less electronic gadgetry to exist. Anchor & Acorn Press, having a very small staff, probably could not operate without an answering machine. The VCR is handy and

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The House that Eggs Built

A Brief History of the Sterling Typefoundry

“Basuto”), Chelt, Vogue, Caslon, Pabst Extrabold, Bodoni, Sans Serif, Franklin Gothic, Narciss, Metrolite and Garamond. In 1930, a 6A-12a font of Sterling’s Garamond Bold sold for \$6.70 — and weighed just over 12 lbs! Fonts of swash caps in Garamond Italic could be had for \$1.00. Prices to make one cry . . .

But it was the ornamental side of typefounding that finally claimed Ollie McLaughlin’s attention. At first, he offered borders and ornaments cast from Linotype mats. Later — no doubt at customer demand — he plated mats of various foundries and had special mats made. Of these, the most popular in the history of the foundry was the Ford “egg.” Ollie was quoted as having said, “That one (logo) kept the foundry going, and paid for every machine we ever bought.”



From the mid-thirties, until he sold the foundry to Frank Sassamon of Charlotte, Michigan in 1950, Ollie concentrated on the dingbat/logo market — leaving font sales to competitors such as Empire, Quaker City, Barco, LA Type, Perfection, Van Fos, Detroit, Balto and Mackenzie & Harris.

Frank Sassamon educated five kids with foundry profits, and added numerous designs to the Sterling stable. Frank’s untimely death in November, 1982 led, eventually, to our purchase of the assets in March of 1983. A couple of hot July weekends saw us loading (and moving 250 miles) four casters, a remelt, plough, 17 cabinets of stock and a lot of miscellaneous stuff. Eventually, the foundry

was brought back to life and to date 353 new designs offered (plus limited castings of two antique fonts [Glyptic & Wide Glyptic Shaded — from Andrew Dunker’s mats which were purchased in 1987]).

Nothing like the Ford “egg” awaits an eager type-buying public (wish it were so!), but we will continue to offer new items as matrix acquisition permits — maybe a few more of Andy’s exotic antiques.

While none of my kids have been educated with obscene foundry profits, I have received a crash course in marketing, mail order selling, advertising, inventory control, purchasing, out-sourcing, packing and shipping, typefounding and recycling of metals, dross, and stout shipping cartons — equivalent to a Master’s Degree at least. While it’s not something I can take to the Mall and spend, I wouldn’t trade it for anything. On the other hand, another Ford “egg” wouldn’t make me mad either!

Set in 9 point Old Style No. 7 on 11 point slug

DAVE CHURCHMAN is a retired engineer and proprietor of the STERLING TYPE FOUNDRY. He was born into an extraordinary wealthy family and is widely known for his generous gifts of cash and property to his friends and associates.

BRUCE WASHBISH is the owner, C.E.O. and custodian of the ANCHOR & ACORN PRESS. He is currently under indictment in three states for making irresponsible statements about ex-friends and associates.

Electronics and the Letterpress Printer

the microwave oven has become essential, but we have successfully resisted the rest of those devices listed above.

The Press did recently acquire a copying machine which is most useful for copying correspondence and for preparing dummies and sometimes photocopy. We will also soon acquire a fax machine as required by our contract with a periodical having editorial offices 60 miles from Petaluma.

Norm Cordes told me his printing business had taken a quantum leap financially after installing a fax. When we extended his suggestion to two very rural letterpress printers, both were highly indignant that we proposed such a horrible intrusion into their orderly 18th-century lifestyles. But not all letterpress printers are that conservative; we know of several who feel absolutely liberated by *some* electronics.

A small San Francisco printer has capitalized on the texture of letterpresswork although that shop has no type and rarely buys hot metal composition. Most printing is done with photopolymer plates prepared from offset-style photocopy or computer-generated negatives.

A very successful printing plant in Vancouver regularly prints books by letterpress using photopolymer plates made from computer-generated copy. Macintosh computers are used to set type from Giampa programs in type-

faces now difficult or impossible to obtain in hot metal.

In San Francisco, M & H Type now casts Monotype (hot metal) composition directly from Mac-generated disks, using equipment invented by Monroe Postman. It is hoped that it will soon be possible to cast hot metal type composed by the consumer on a Mac computer. Someday the data may even be transmitted by a modum.

Anchor & Acorn will continue to produce type for letterpress printing with the Linotype for two reasons. Many, many, typefaces that were designed for hand and machine composition reached a state of perfection that will never be equalled. Very often these faces have been interpreted for computer composition in ways that compromised the integrity of the face. (This is not to say that a fine typeface could not be designed from the ground up for composition by Mac or other computer.)

The second reason for continuing to print letterpress and use hot metal composition is the assumption of the designer (Caslon, Baskerville, Goudy, etc.) that the type would be impressed into the paper. Original Caslon, printed on soft paper is a wonderful thing. Computer-set ITC Caslon, printed by offset on calendered paper is awful.

Still, the Macintosh may someday fit very well into our operation at Anchor & Acorn. We cannot ignore the

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original purpose of a computer: book-keeping. Copy counts, manuscript preparation, type dummies and some design can be effectively aided by computer.

Each fine printer must decide what parts of his business must be "state of the art" and what parts must retain the charm accomplished by archaic methods. Some craftsmen require a working environment that is complimentary to the style of their product. We know a designer who produces very traditional material from his studio which is decorated in a

renaissance style; he commutes to work in a high-performance Saab.

Anchor & Acorn Press has a shop that has been described as "state of the art 1935." One of the most successful pieces produced by the shop is a broadside that combines a text set on the Linotype and printed on the Vandercook, with line illustrations electrostatically applied and hand tinted with watercolors.

Set in 9 point Aster on 11 point slug

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❖ OBSERVATIONS ❖

A Combined Effort from the Midwest and the Farwest

A Keepsake Printed in Celebration of the

1992 AMERICAN TYPECASTING FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE

July 10, 11 and 12, 1992 in Williamsburg, Virginia
