



Newsletter
Number 157
Autumn 2004

Aux armes!

To APHA MEMBERS and all others who support printing history:

Americans have received a call for aid from our French counterparts. The *Imprimerie Nationale*, the repository of great French printing artifacts, is to be sold, and the historic workshops packed up and put into storage. The *Imprimerie* was founded in 1539. Its present home, a large and impressive building in the 15th arrondissement, has been sold. It will be emptied of its contents in 2005. Some will be transferred to a structure yet to be built, outside Paris, and that section will continue its commercial printing, judged profitable. But the artistic and historic heart of the institution, consisting of 500 years of collections, and composed of punches, types, machines and printing workshops, will be simply packed in containers and closed forever to the world. When I visited the *Imprimerie* a few years ago, I was struck by their hospitality to anyone interested in type; indeed, the punch cutter, Christian Paput, gave me a solo tour of his domain, and the director and assistant allowed me to look through old type books, and photocopied some pages for me. They have welcomed other APHA members, and would continue to do so. Now they need our support. By signing their petition online, we help to convince the French President to intervene and save the *Imprimerie*. The site of the petition is <<http://www.garamonpatrimoine.org/petition.html>> (yes, no "d" in "garamon") Let's give them a helping hand.

Virginia Smith

FOR MORE NEWS and information about this crisis (in French), go to <<http://www.garamonpatrimoine.org>>. The following is the English translation of the text of the petition:

"Save the French Imprimerie Nationale heritage

"Urgent action needed to save the heritage of the French government printing organization

"The French government is currently engaged in selling off various buildings and businesses of the Imprimerie Nationale Group, a commercial limited-liability company in which the French state is sole shareholder. This is being done with no thought to

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Printing Museums

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN of APHA, pause a moment to consider the troubled paths of printing museums.

Perhaps others, like me, were shaken from their innocence when the Director of the Gutenberg Museum said she was grateful to APHA for the Institutional Award we bestowed on that august institution in 2000, noting that the award would be of great service in their funding talks with the city of Mainz. If an old and distinguished printing museum in Europe (with its tradition of supporting cultural institutions), in Mainz (a city jealous of its connection with the father of Western printing), in the very year of Gutenberg's "Man of the Millennium" honor felt the need for support, my heavens! how much worse might it be for every other such museum.

In these trying modern times, in which libraries find themselves having to justify their physical existence and the financial resources devoted to printed books, the printing museums are having an even harder time justifying the need to preserve the artifacts used to produce those books, the often large and heavy machines which are the matter of technological printing history.

These somber thoughts have been prompted by the uncertain fate of the matériel of the Imprimerie Nationale. The IN's building in Paris (more precisely, the land under the building) has become so valuable that the owners, the French government, have decided to move the profitable modern printing establishment out of the city and to pack up and put into storage its "patrimoine typographique," including punches dating back to the sixteenth century, type, engraving plates, the 30,000-volume library, and the equipment for typesetting and printing. The Cabinet des Poinçons is described in the IN's own website (in their English translation): "The true artistic and historical heart of the Printing Office, it holds an engraved legacy of over 500,000 items, all of them classified as Historical Monuments." The IN's administration has formulated a plan to make this "typographic patrimony" a museum, but the plan so far appears to have neither funding, location, nor government backing.

A very disturbing aspect of the crating up of the material heritage of the Imprimerie Nationale until a museum can be formed is the question of what they plan to do with the skilled personnel who created and tended that heritage, passing skills from one generation to the next. The IN's staff includes the last professional punchcutters in the world, trained by their

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any separate solution to preserve its historic heritage – part of which is covered by a preservation requirement, being classified as a “historic monument” – other than to pack it into crates for permanent storage. This move is scheduled for the first half of 2005, destination unknown.

“The historic collection it holds – due to be so dispatched – is a unique, priceless testimony of the history of the written form, from the 16th century to the present. It includes the Cabinet des Poinçons, or Punch Room, holding hundreds of thousands of letterform and character punches for both western and oriental scripts; functional workshops – a foundry, presses for typography, lithography and copper-plate engraving work, stitching and binding – as well as a library with over 30,000 volumes, and the archives of the State printing works. Set up in 1539 by King Francis I, at the same time as the Collège de France, the national center of academic excellence, this collection stands as the memory of specialized know-how and expertise, and as a center for creation, now fated to disappear if its continued survival is not ensured.

“This whole must not be scattered or split up, as regards either its contents, or its functions: museum and conservation, typeface creation, publishing and research. It must be released from the oversight of a ministerial department driven by concerns of economic profitability. This heritage must be housed in Paris, held by an institution guaranteed adequate resources, having the capacity to further enlarge and expand it. Better still, it could be set up as a foundation – a controlled, non-profit organization – which would be a dedicated space for conservation, but equally of interfacing with outside elements, and for research. Concurrently, and as of now, measures should be taken to ensure that the transfer of equipment and expertise proceed speedily, using a transition formula, with no interruption to production, conservation, research or training activities.

“Priceless artifacts must be saved, but equally persons, skills, a store of knowledge must be safeguarded, that are at risk of being lost to all humankind.

“We demand that all possible action be taken to stop this vandalism. What is at stake are the very foundations of our own history, and of the dissemination of human thought, ideas and knowledge. We refuse to see them destroyed.

[This petition and all signatures will be sent to the President of the French Republic.]”

Translated from the French by Chris Durban & Jean-François Roberts

P.S. The Imprimerie Nationale is heir to the centuries-old tradition of French government printing, starting with the Imprimerie Royale, set up by Cardinal Richelieu under King Louis XIII, in the 17th century, with forerunners from the Renaissance. As such, it is broadly equivalent to the US Government Printing Office, or the UK Stationery office (HMSO). Aside from printing many government books and publications (until recently, the French phone books), it also has a specialized fiduciary business. Laws and decrees, and government appointments, decorations, etc. are handled by a separate organization, the Journaux Officiels (also publishers of parliamentary proceedings and papers). ☐

KAT:RAN EPHEMIE RACLU B

Small (often) & interesting (hopefully) bits (and pieces) carefully (in the best of all worlds) printed (letterpress) for only seventy-three members (and both of my parents) who send (or deliver) just \$60 (USD). Three pieces (at least) each year (roughly) are guaranteed (with your satisfaction). Please join (and tell friends).

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predecessors and sharing their skills with interested parties such as our own Stanley Nelson and Dan Carr. (See *Aux armes!* on page 1 of this Newsletter and sign the online petition.)

These events are even more dramatic than last year's news of the closure of the Smithsonian's Hall of Printing and Graphic Arts, victim of an administrative move to grand "thematic" exhibits, which might include graphic arts components. Stan Nelson dreams that the Institution will subsequently spend more time and funds on improving their storage location into a study area, as reported from the Annual Meeting in Newsletter 155.

On the other hand, the St Bride Printing Library, which was threatened with extinction many times over the years by public funding crises, has as of April 2004 finally been taken over from the Corporation of London by the St Bride Foundation. Nigel Roche remains as Chief Librarian, but many other changes are taking place to improve conditions and facilities. The Friends of the St Bride Printing Library are now part of the Foundation, which will be launching a fund drive any moment now.

Being private, however, is no assurance of success. Fallen on hard times in the wake of September 11th, the South Street Seaport Museum is laying off staff throughout its operations, which include Bowne & Co., Stationers, a nineteenth-century printing office which acts as both a living museum and a jobbing printer. The Museum is also considering the possibility of moving the shop to a less prominent location.

The International Printing Museum (Carson, CA) and the Museum of Printing (North Andover, MA) both independent museums, are faring better. Both museums have great collections, incredibly dedicated directors, and lots of activity. The IPM has this year announced the gift of a very large private collection of printing equipment and plans for a new Institute. The presses, equipment and printed material assembled by Jeff Craemer and known as the Mount Tam Press include an 1826 Union Hand Press which has been on exhibition at the Smithsonian. The "Book Arts Institute at the Printing Museum" will feature classes in letterpress printing, papermaking, bookbinding, and print making. The Museum of Printing in Massachusetts is discussing an offer from Hampshire College in Amherst to move their collections to that campus, which already houses the National Yiddish Book Center, the Massachusetts Center for the Book,

and the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. The only caveat is that Very Serious Money must be raised, although the College would help in the attempt.

The Type Museum in London (profiled here in Fall 2001) has similarly important collections, but is still trying to organize funds to arrange and display the collections and make them open to the public on a regular basis. We hope to include a report from the Museum in an upcoming issue of the Newsletter.

Even the printing museums which are successful have severe funding needs and a slim constituency from which to draw. It seems that Society, besotted with the freedom, versatility, and apparent March-of-Progressness of what I shall call simply "electronic stuff" has difficulty recognizing the importance of the physical artifacts like the printed book. But while there is a select group of our compatriots who are interested in the book as a physical object, there are far fewer who have climbed to the rarefied plateau that we of APHA have reached and think seriously about the technologies that created print. We have some cohorts in the overlapping memberships of groups such as the American Typecasting Fellowship, but there is no one for us to pass the buck to, if this legacy is to survive. It is up to us, up to you, to support these institutions.

--Jane Rodgers Siegel

The Friends of the St Bride Printing Library
www.stbride.org

Bowne & Co. Stationers
www.southstseaport.org/places/bowne.html

The International Printing Museum, CA
www.printmuseum.org

The Museum of Printing, MA
www.museumofprinting.org

The Type Museum, London
www.typemuseum.org

Read On!

The accessory of choice this Fall, at the Oak Knoll Fest and no doubt other gatherings of right-minded folk, was Theo Rehak's svelte new book, *The Fall of ATF: A Serio-Comedic Tragedy; being the selected memoirs of Theo Rehak, sometime employee of that legendary company, as revealed & compiled from his personal diaries* (Howell, NJ, 2004). It's not a fun read; this story of life at a dying company is too depressing for that, but the book is written with wry wisdom. Go to http://www.daleguild.com/ATF_book.html to get your own copy. ☐