

# My Favorite Hobby

by David C. Churchman

**M**y favorite hobby? No, it isn't stamp collecting, although philately runs it a close second and has some intimate connections to its use. My number one avocation is hobby printing — to be more specific, **Letterpress Hobby Printing** (as opposed to Xerography intaglio, offset, or stone lithography).

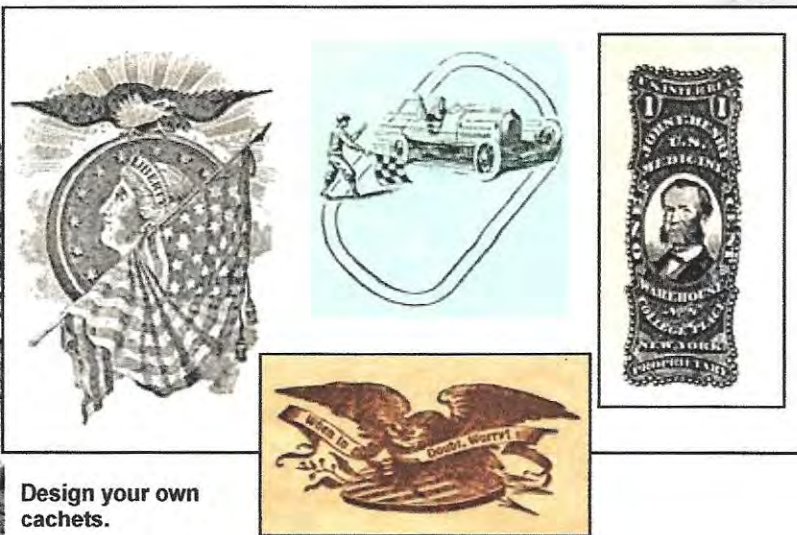
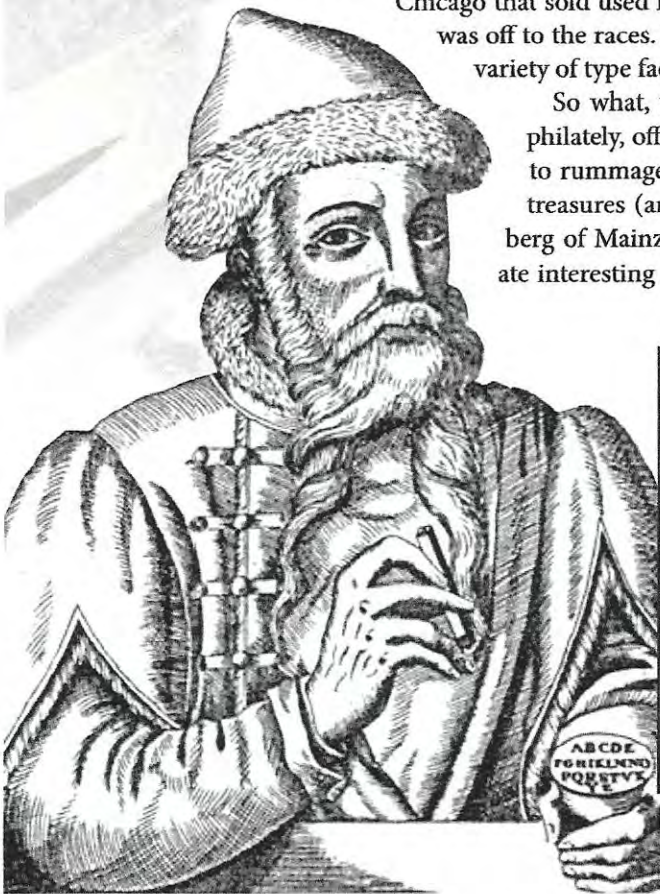
My first exposure to letterpress (or what Scott calls "Typo" or "Typographed") was in grade school, way back in 1946. Unruly boys had to take wood shop, metal shop, and printing back in those segregated days (girls were shunted off into home economics), and the printing part consisted of learning to use handset type and running a floor-model platen letterpress. Even though I knew nothing of this ancient craft, I was instantly smitten by the process of assembling individual pieces (each piece had a letter cast into the top end) of metal type into readable (mostly!) forms, and seeing them printed on the large Chandler & Price press in the shop anteroom.

My parents, obviously stunned by my sudden interest in a school class, found a small tabletop press at a church bazaar and presented it to me for Christmas that same year. I played with it for a couple of years and then lost interest after matriculating to high school. Later, after college and two years in the Army, I retrieved the press and type from my parent's basement and stored it in my own basement until 1963 when I had a chance to buy a much bigger press from the widow of a stamp club member.

After that, and with the discovery of a company in Chicago that sold used letterpress ephemera, it was off to the races. Bigger and better presses followed, along with a bewildering variety of type faces and ancillary accouterments.

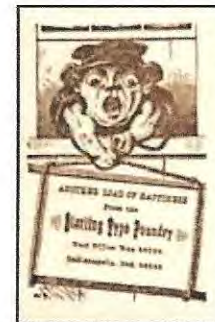
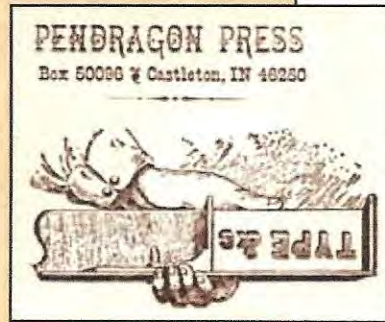
So what, you ask, is the big deal? Hobby printing, unlike traditional philately, offers a third dimension to the collecting urge. You not only get to rummage through old warehouses unearthing historically interesting treasures (and, remember, the letterpress goes back to Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany, circa 1440!), but you can then use them to create interesting and useful objets d'art. Stamp collecting lets you collect, ar-

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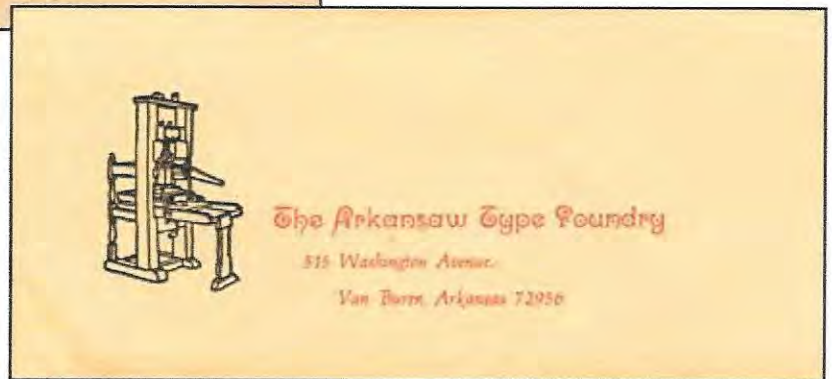
Design your own cachets.





Make reply envelopes.

Create corner cards.



Don't forget the stationery.



First Day Covers are a great project.

range and exhibit, but you're never going to use that 90-cent 1869 series mint stamp on an overweight letter!

Hobby printing goes that extra step. With minimal training, you can print cachets, corner cards, reply envelopes, stationery, note pads, posters (if your press is large enough), business cards, and all manner of what printers call "run-of-the hook-jobs."

While smaller tabletop presses are no longer being manufactured, there are plenty of used ones around (look under "Graphic Essentials" in the Business section of eBay). Larger floor model presses (Chandler & Price being the ones most frequently encountered) also are readily available at prices ranging from \$500 to \$1,500. These are serious commercial machines capable of excellent work, with speeds of 1,000–1,500 impressions per hour and driven by fractional horsepower electric motors.

Type fonts are still being cast, although the number of firms offering handset type has shrunk in the past few years. Things like ink, paper, press accouterments, type cases, pica rulers, and miscellaneous tools can be bought at places like Avery Paper Company and from a few firms that specialize in keeping a 575-year-old craft alive.

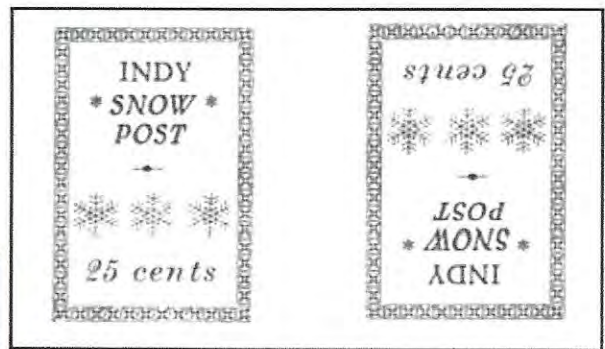
The philatelic aspects of hobby printing are many. Probably the most obvious being First Day Cover cachets. All you need (after suitable artwork has been created) is an engraving or two (available from photoengraving firms at modest cost), a supply of ink and envelopes, and you're on your way! These days, the type and artwork can be created on a computer and a photopolymer plate can be made from your file. You lose some of the fun of hand-setting the individual let-

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**Freedom of the press and a slightly skewed view of the world offer unlimited possibilities for Philatelic Phoolishness, and a small printing press is all you need to turn brain waves into reality.**





Cinderella postal cards.



Local post label created by the author.



Bogus overprint series for a fantasy takeover of Ethiopia by Danzig!



Made-up Civil War postmaster provisional.



ters, but make up for it in speed.

Besides the usual commercial job work used in my business, I have created oddball pseudo-philatelic items — not for profit, but for my own amusement — such as a local “Snow Post,” a cinderella Hawaiian postal card, an entirely bogus Canadian Souvenir Sheet, a wholly made up Civil War postmaster provisional, a New Brunswick revenue (“Licence to Hunt Seals”), and a series of occupation stamps (the “infamous takeover” of Ethiopia by Danzig in 1920), which have very Germanic-looking overprints on Ethiopia Scott 120–134. The stamps themselves are cheap (especially the reprints) and colorful, and the overprint is designed to show off various fraktur type fonts from my basement printshop. Somehow the temptation to have a 58-square-mile enclave (Danzig) conquer and occupy a country the size of Texas and Arkansas put together was more than I could resist.

In the planning works I have a postal card from the Kahualui Railroad on Maui, further incursions by those rascal-



Imaginary 1931–32 New Brunswick revenue, “Licence To Hunt Seals.”

ly Danziggers (the island of Reunion being a prime candidate for the rapacious Huns), and whatever else pops into my head.

Another joy of this hobby is No Rules! Freedom of the press and a slightly skewed view of the world offer unlimited possibilities for Philatelic Phoolishness, and a small printing press is all you need to turn brain waves into reality.

Want to know more? Intrigued with the thought of printing an upside down airplane? Don't mind getting ink on your best blue serge? Want to learn to print, perforate, roulette, blind emboss and rubricate? Sign up today for this June's “APS Summer Seminar” class in Letterpress Printing and go home with a smile on your face ... and a blue serge with accent colors!

## The Author

Dave Churchman is a Civil Engineer, APS Lifer, and a longtime student of The Black Art of Letterpress with a basement full of printing “junque” and some spillover in two barns and a garage!