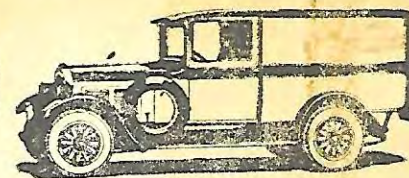
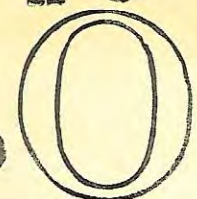




FULL MOON





Dr. Hawley T. Tompkins

CHURCH MAN

Narrative of a Visit to a Letterpress
Repository in the Heartland, With
Rude Commentary, Enhanced
With Original Photographs
of the *Boutique de Junque*
by Noel Hawley

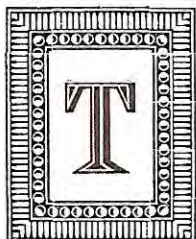
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CHURCH MAN

THE APPROACH



HE TRIP INTO INDIANAPOLIS RUNS SOUTH down Meridian. Everything in Indianapolis relates either to Meridian or Washington—everything. It's like High Street in Columbus or Peachtree in Atlanta. All roads lead to Meridian, and Meridian leads to all roads.

First I pass the mansions. There are some beautiful homes and then there are the mansions—real god-hell palaces! Some of these houses are outrageous. Why should anybody be rich enough to live this way? Do they deserve it? Why? Don't give me that bullshit about The American Dream—this is just wrong, man!

So anyhow, first I pass the mansions. Next I come to the big old apartment buildings that are steadily turning into expensive condos. Eventually I hit the commercial and industrial section, and then some pretty down-on-their-luck

blocks, and finally the government buildings. By the time I've come to Michigan Street, I feel like I've just re-lived the final chapter in Stephen Crane's *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*.

So I turn right on Michigan and head west. Soon I come to the campus of I.U.P.U.I. I'm not sure what the letters stand for, but I think it has something to do with urine—I P, U P, we all P. I see a group of students scurrying along the sidewalk, probably late for class. Just for fun, I swerve my '89 Lincoln Town Car up over the curb and barrel down the sidewalk towards them, laughing like a crazed baboon as they scatter. "What're you doing, you lunatic bastard?" one of them yells as he dives out of the way. "Ah, bite me!" I yell back, although he can't hear me since he's digging grass out of his ear. I pull back onto the road and keep driving—across a bridge or two and then into another run-down neighborhood until I come to Warman, a cross-street to the south. My destination sits on the corner.

THE BOUTIQUE

Dave Churchman's *Boutique de Junque* of letterpress equipment and supplies has been in this location for over twenty



years. It's a one-story building with a small room sitting on the flat roof. Overall, the building has about 7200 square feet, and it is crammed—I mean *crammed*—with stuff. I pull onto a little gravel parking area in front and go in through the heavy screened security door, the padlock hanging forlornly on the hasp. As soon as I step into the little ante-room inside, I'm hit by that smell. You know it—ink, oil, solvents, assorted indefinable filth smells. I love it. It's that printshop fragrance that all typestickers cherish.

I swagger into the next room, which is probably twenty-five feet wide and stretches all the way back to a big overhead door that opens onto the alley—ninety feet or more. This room is overwhelming—so much stuff, stacked all over the place. I immediately start wondering if I should have gotten a tetanus booster shot before I ventured in. I call out, “Anybody here?” A voice about halfway down answers, “Back here.” I squeeze down the narrow aisle between presses, various type cabinets, shelves, tables covered with paper and ink and assorted printing effluvia to find The Church Man and his wife, standing in the nave of their cathedral.

THE CHURCH MAN

Dave is a tall man, somewhat Mephistophelian in appearance, whose strength and energy makes me feel a bit humble—he's older than I am, and obviously stronger and in much better shape. When he starts talking about his regular tennis games, I want to go sign myself into a nursing home. He used to wear a moustache and goatee that gave him a particularly satanic look, oxymoronic in conjunction with his name, but now he's clean-shaven and he appears downright angelic. Well, no—he doesn't look angelic. He looks like what he is—a type nut, a letterpress lunatic, a printing press practitioner. He gives the TLC to the C & P. Yo, dog! Ain't nothin' but a P thang, you dig?

(Which brings up a question I've had for a long time: when's the last time you went to a letterpress event and saw any black faces? What's up with that? Why is this *Cosa Nostra Libro*—this book thing of ours, this bibliophilic mafia—a white folks' club? And increasingly, a white *gals'* club, if you're paying any attention at all. I'm puzzled. But then again, I'm usually under the influence of illicit substances, so pretty much everything puzzles me to one degree or another, you know?)



Dave first got involved in printing as did so many other boys in America during the middle of the twentieth century. At about age twelve, in the seventh grade at P.S. 84 in Indianapolis, Dave took a class in printing, which piqued his interest. His parents, thrilled that *anything* had piqued his interest, since twelve year old boys are notoriously blasé about all things academic, went out and bought Dave his first printing press and a small amount of type at a rummage sale being held at a local Unitarian Church. It was a Sigwalt Chicago No. 11 press, and had only a two and one-half by four inch chase. It was, however, the deluxe model, since it had two rollers instead of the single roller included with the Chicago No. 10 model.

Needless to say, Dave wasn't able to do much with this tiny press, and he left it behind when he went off to Purdue University to earn a degree in Civil Engineering. It was years later, in the early 1960s, that his mother demanded that he remove the old press from her house. This event coincided fortuitously with his meeting up with a rabid letterpress enthusiast in the person of Dave Peat. Peat was passionately devoted to type and printing (they are still fast friends these forty plus years later), and he encouraged Churchman to become newly infected with the type bug.

Churchman was able to buy a 5 by 8 Daughaday Model No. 1 Improved table-top platen press from the widow of a hobby printer, and he started printing again.

Printing ballooned into buying and selling a few years later when Dave had the opportunity to buy some electroplated cuts from the daughter of a deceased printers supply salesman. He bought a few things, and in passing made an offer to purchase everything she had—eight years later, she accepted the offer, and he hauled three truckloads of stuff from her home. At about this same time, the Indianapolis public school system began auctioning off the type and printing equipment that it was now no longer using, and Dave purchased a huge quantity of type.

Dave had been running his family business, specializing in steel fabricating, sales of structural steel, sales and rental of construction equipment, and the marketing of a patented elevator-like portable device. He found some spare space in his business location and moved all of the newly-acquired printing equipment into it. In the early 1980s he sold his company and began focusing exclusively on his printing equipment avocation, which had now become his vocation.

THE STUFF

As I approach, I find Dave working on building a crate for shipping a Chandler and Price New Style Pilot press to a woman in California. "It's unbelievable," he comments as he works. "Ever since David Rose suggested on his website that a good first press is a Pilot, I've been selling these things like hotcakes—I charge more for crating them up than I used to sell the Pilots for!"

"How much are you getting for this one?" I ask.

Well, believe it or not, I charged her \$980 for it, plus \$240 to crate it up—which takes me the better part of a whole day—and then she'll have to pay the shipping cost."

"Good God!" I exclaim. "I could have a pretty fancy weekend in Las Vegas for that!"

"Tell me," he agrees.

"Yes," Dave's wife Charlene interjects. "But what a lot of people really want now is a Vandercook. All these kids have learned to print on Vandercooks at school, and they want one for themselves."

"Yeah," I say. "Paul Moxon told me that he saw where an SP20 had recently sold at auction for \$12,000! Damn! I think mine might be for sale for that kind of money!" I

paid \$500 for mine—I wouldn't sell it, though. I can remember when people were giving Vandercooks away to anyone who'd come pick them up—these were usually the gigantic ones you could print highway billboards on, so dismantling and reconstructing the building to get them out was typically part of the deal.

Charlene says earnestly, "I don't understand why they don't realize that they'd be so much better off with a good floor-model platen press. You can do just as good quality work, printing goes so much faster, and the presses are so cheap! But David Rose calls the Vandercook 'The Gold Standard' for letterpress printing, and kids today accept nothing but the best."

"Well, go ahead and look around—call me if you need anything," Dave tells me. But where do I start? *How* do I start? This is just so overwhelming. There is this maze of rooms, each with a unique designation, although only one—the Main Type Room—is devoted exclusively to the material in the name. There is the Saw Room, that contains working printers' saws, the Steel Room, which is full of chopped up pieces of steel, and the Furniture Room, that is overflowing with boxes, cabinets, and piles of wood furniture and reglet. The Main Type Room, stuck in the far back



corner of the rambling building, presents an interesting challenge. It's not the only room containing type—far from it—but it's the only room devoted exclusively to type. The cabinets are stacked two high, meaning that each stack of two cabinets contains about 40-50 typecases. Attempting to count the cabinets is puzzlingly confusing, but I'm thinking that there are about 75 cabinets, or around 1500 cases, more or less—probably more. Dave says that there are about 3600 cases of type in total scattered throughout the building. Many of the cases aren't labeled, and since they extend up over your head, pulling them out to see what's in them involves considerable risk—a case-full of 8-point Franklin Gothic bashing you in the face would not be pleasant. And God help you if you tip one of these stacks over—you'd end up looking like a squashed pile of chitlins in an abattoir. They'd have to squeegee you up off the floor.

Despite the danger, I find a sweet case of 72-point Legend—foundry cast by Bauer and in near-mint condition.

There's a lot of great type in here, but not too much of interest to book printers like me. So many undistinguished sans serif faces, undistinguished blackletter faces, undistinguished egyptians—finding the treasures amidst the drek is a challenge, although one man's drek is another man's trea-

sure, I suppose. I've been coming here now for over twenty-five years, and I've sure gotten some great type in that time, including a nice run of Stephenson Blake Perpetua, a good run of Post Medieval, and various desirable display faces—it has a lot to do with being here when the good stuff has just arrived. Back in the good old days of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Dave was selling type for a dollar a pound or less—now the price is a good deal higher, with quality foundry type being considerably more. But it's still a lot less than you'd pay for new foundry type from somebody like the Dale Guild Typefoundry. You can't realistically expect to get body type (ie. 10 to 14 point type) in any quantity from Dave—he rarely gets it, and if he does it's usually too worn to be of much use. I'm mostly on the lookout for display sizes, borders and ornaments. For instance, I once found some 120-point Huxley Vertical that I then put to good use in an amusing fashion.

One room has shelving filled with slug cutters and hand mitering machines. There are countless cabinets with drawers of varying sizes containing an astonishing cornucopia of stuff—press parts, screws and nuts and bolts, quoins and quoin keys; you name it, there's a drawer full of it. There are shelves filled with slugs and leads—thousands of pounds



of it, in all sizes. I tell you what—if Superman's ever after me, I know where to hide! Just try to use your x-ray vision to find me behind all this lead, dipshit! Hah!

Hundreds of galleys in racks are filled with type, with steel furniture, linotype and monotype and ludlow mats, fancy linotype-cast rule—it just goes on and on. There are saws, stacks of chases of all sizes, empty typesets by the score, sign presses—an amazing amalgamation of stuff.

Borders, ornaments and dingbats are like muscatel to a wino for printers, but locating the good stuff here is *really* like finding a needle in a haystack. And when you *do* find something good, there often isn't enough quantity to do anything with it. I buy it anyway, of course, which is why I've got galleys and cases filled with borders and ornaments that I'll probably never use. The odd dingbat here, six or eight inches of a border there—what am I *thinking*? Oh well, I can't resist.

It's this treasure hunt mentality, you see? Like when there's a midnight madness sale at the Wal-Mart, and everybody stands in line for hours hoping that they'll get a bargain on something that they don't need, but it's like discovering buried treasure so they can't help themselves. Gotta get it, gotta have it. I just *know* that there's a hidden

treasure waiting for me, and I just have to get in the old diving bell and search this shipwreck of a warehouse to find it. Typefaces like doubloons, composing sticks like pieces of eight, typographic riches like that of the Inca and Aztec. It's sitting there somewhere under the grime and the flotsam. It's there somewhere, I just know it. *I know it's there, god damn it! Search, for fuck's sake! Oh, the horror, the horror!*

Did I mention that Churchman's building has no heat and no running water? Dave did have, at one time, an old wood-burning stove, but I think that several customers were asphyxiated by the fumes—they're buried under the stuff around here somewhere, the stench of their decomposing bodies camouflaged by more potent pressroom smells (so, I guess that makes this a *decomposing room?*). The stove was hastily removed, so it's not too toasty in here during the winter, believe me. And the electricity is a bit dicey as well. If you want to turn on the lights in the main type room, you have to turn off the lights in the adjacent room or the fuse blows. Can you say *electrocution?!?* There is a toilet, but with no running water you have to hope that Dave has a couple of buckets of water around to flush it with, or things can get nasty *real* fast. Pressroom smells, good; pressroom smells plus shit smells, not so good.

But for authentic typoholics and letterpress nut-jobs, all these minor annoyances become completely irrelevant. Once you've gotten over the shock of confronting all this stuff and begin some systematic exploration, you find that you can hold your piss for a long time indeed. It may be cold, or hot and humid enough in the summer to poach you, but you quickly find that a little physical discomfort is well worth enduring. *Blue Light Special in the type aisle!!*

There aren't that many presses around, though—the odd Kluge or C & P floor model, but little else.

"I do have some pretty nice smaller presses on hand," Dave tells me. "I've got a 9 by 13 Kelsey that's kind of interesting, some 3 by 5 and 5 by 8 Kelseys, a Curtis and Mitchell 6 by 9 'Columbian' and a 6 by 9 'Baltimorean'. And I've still got that nice treadle-operated 8 by 12 C & P that I bought from you over twenty years ago just sitting over there. Nobody wants it. I offered it for free to a school if they'd just come pick it up, but they passed on it—I'd at least have gotten a tax write-off."

I stare at my old press, now unceremoniously shoved into a space between two timeworn cabinets, the ink disk set on the feed board at a precarious angle. What memories that beautiful press evokes in me. I bought it from a cranky su-

perannuated printing press mechanic in St. Louis back in 1979. For \$100 he agreed to dismantle it and reassemble it in my basement. God, what a job! In the process of putting it back together, he bashed his hand with a hammer, opening up an artery that spurted blood like a geyser—he just wrapped a filthy rag around the wound and kept working. I vomited. He disdainfully said that I was a pussy, which was oh so true.

I taught myself to print on that wonderful old pile of iron and steel—a New Style press from about 1925—trial and error learning about make-ready, registration, and all the tiny details of letterpress. I printed my first hardbound book on that press, as well as a lot of pamphlets and ephemera that ranged in quality from horrible to not too bad. Many's the sleepless night I spent feeding that press, listening to Jack Carney, Jack Buck and all the other legendary voices on KMOX radio as I kicked that treadle and the fly-wheel turned, the press clanking away in sweet harmony.

Now here it sits, cast off and unwanted. It's sad, really. It sort of makes personal to me the general loss of interest in letterpress, the long slow decline that seems to be leading inevitably to the end of the practice of the craft. Even the Smithsonian has mothballed its collection of letterpress arti-



facts, so little interest is left amongst its visitors who'd much rather see Dorothy's emerald slippers and other such pop culture schlock. Phooey on them all, the stupid bastards!

THE CUSTOMERS

"Who are your main customers?" I ask after having recovered from my descent into nostalgic self-pity.

"It's mostly hobby printers—probably ninety percent of my business is with them," Dave answers. "People in the Amalgamated Printers Association, who know me pretty well. Also, like Charlene says, a lot of young folks are learning printing in colleges and universities these days, and they come looking for stuff."

Hobby printers are a hardy bunch. Organizations of hobby printers in America date back to 1876 when the National Amateur Press Association (NAPA) was founded. Printing was not the primary *raison d'être* of the organization, though—distribution of the writings of the participants was the purpose, and they typically referred to themselves not as hobby printers, but as amateur journalists, the precursors to today's bloggers. But since there was no internet, no email, no photocopying machines, no word processors nor even

widespread availability of typewriters, the only way for people to disseminate their writing was for them to print it themselves using letterpress. Thus, the NAPA was made up of a group of individuals who used the printing press as a vehicle for reproducing their writing so that it could be shared with others. Writing was primary—printing was secondary.

In 1895, the United Amateur Press Association of America (UAPAA) split off from the NAPA due to internal dissension, and in 1936 the American Amateur Press Association (AAPA) split from the UAPAA for the same reason. Not surprisingly, people whose opinions were so strong that they were willing to laboriously hand-set and print their own amateur publications to express themselves also tended to develop strong opinions about each other. As a result, the squabbling that went on within these groups was downright comical. The flaming that scorches cyberspace in internet chatrooms, listserves and newsgroups is a continuation of this long tradition of incivility between opinionated idealogues.

Finally, the Amalgamated Printers Association (APA) was founded in 1958 as an alternative to the other organizations for those whose interest was primarily in letterpress design



and printing rather than in writing. This is the group—decidedly more civil—that makes up Dave's best customers.

"What about gearheads?" I ask.

"Oh, yeah—lots of gearheads," Dave confirms.

Gearheads are people who are obsessed with the machinery, the tools and the stuff. The two biggest groups of gearheads in the world nowadays are car gearheads and computer geek gearheads. I know a chainsaw gearhead. He loves chainsaws but is only tangentially interested in actually sawing wood with them. He wants to own chainsaws, take them apart, put them back together again, make them pretty, get them running as smoothly as possible. He even likes to make hot rod chainsaws, chainsaws with souped-up engines that will drive the chain at supersonic speeds, loud enough to blast your eardrums through your head and out the other side. He has two-man chainsaws big enough to saw down the Washington Monument (*Timber!!*), engines powerful enough to propel an ocean liner. Those damn saws scare the livin' poop outta me!

Gearheads are almost always men, of course. It may be a testosterone thing, I don't know. Guys just seem to love working with heavy stuff, fondling steel and iron and lead, getting all sweaty and greasy, sanding off the rust, buffing

everything to a lustrous shine. They love to use their big powerful tools to coax adjustments, to move the gear from here to there. Gear is like their mistress, resisting and playing hard to get, and then succumbing to the seduction of the earnest suitor, yielding to the probing and prodding, the lubricating and the caressing. Nothing like some prime gear to get you all hot and bothered!

The ranks of hobby printers have always included a large contingent of gearheads. The private typefounders are even bigger gearheads, usually. I knew this guy once who had an old Linotype machine set up in his garage. His great joy was in just making the thing work. He loved to tinker with it. He actually liked it when something went wrong—it gave him something to fix. When the damn thing would squirt a hot jet of molten lead on some unsuspecting visitor, he'd just cackle happily, since it meant that it was time to take something apart and dislodge a clog. Rarely did he actually cast any slugs with it to do any printing—that wasn't the point. Playing with his gear was the point.

Lots of guys love their presses, they love their type, they love all the *accoutrements* that go along with printing—they just don't care so very much about getting around to actually printing anything.

I was recently at a workshop on Vandercook press operation and maintenance in Asheville, North Carolina, and this rotund old fellow from Ohio was there to learn about his recently acquired Model 4. During a break, I struck up a conversation with him.

"So, what kinds of things do you print?" I asked.

He hemmed and hawed a little. "Well, I haven't actually gotten the press set up to do any printing yet," he answered sheepishly. "But I'd really like to print some wine bottle labels."

"Oh, that's great," I stammered.

Wine bottle labels. Ok, let's get this straight: he'd spend a couple of thousand dollars to buy a big cylinder press so he can print wine bottle labels? Horsecrap! The guy's a gearhead. He wanted the press as a toy to play with. Which is fine, of course. God bless the gearheads. Without them, an awful lot of the surviving letterpress equipment would have gone to the scrap heap long ago. Churchman himself is a gearhead—what could be more satisfying for a gearhead than to be in the business of buying and selling gear? I think Churchman may be a bit of a genius when it comes to gearheadedness. The King of Gear! "Shall we go out this evening and buy some more gear, dear?" Gear out the old

wazoo, man! Gearheads of the world, unite! Ah, gearheads, you poor driven maniacs!

I should talk. I'm a composing stick gearhead. Don't ask me why—I just love composing sticks. The way they feel in my hand gives me a sense that all's right in the world [like how I feel this moment as I'm setting these very words]. I've started collecting them recently, trying to get as many of the various types and models as I can find. Will I use them all? Of course not! I basically use one stick [it's in my hand right now], a 12-inch Rouse stainless steel job stick, the most common type of all. I do love setting type—I even enjoy distributing type! I always use that one same stick, though. But that doesn't stop me from buying dozens of other sticks—Grovers, Stars, Buckeyes, Yankees, old fixed-measure newspaper sticks, cheesy aluminum sticks from Kelsey and Adana, wooden and brass sticks; any type of stick that I don't already have, I want. It's all just gearhead shit, and I'm one of the worst. One of the reasons for today's visit to Churchman's is to search through the scores of sticks that he has in stock to see if I can find any to add to my collection—I end up buying eight.

"Say, who buys wood type these days, and what do they do with it?" I ask. I've never fallen under the spell of wood



type myself, although I do like the looks of it. I just can't think of how I'd use it. Dave has a room half-filled with cases of wood type of every style, size and description.

"I have no idea what they're doing with it," Dave responds. "It's great for printing posters, but most of the people who buy it from me aren't gonna be printing posters anytime soon."

"Yes, and doesn't it require a lot of makeready?" I ask.

"Oh God, yes! It's a bitch to print with if you want it to look like anything."

I only printed with wood once—some moderately large wood engravings by Michael McCurdy. I just about had apoplexy cutting tissue overlays for those damn blocks—one of them took twenty-three layers before it would print right! Christ! So, no—I'm a metal type guy, myself. Metal just calls out to me—it says, "Lift me, hold me—don't you love how I feel?" And I answer, "Yes... oh, yes, I do!"

And speaking of metal type, Dave is also the co-owner—with Dave Peat—of the Sterling Typefoundry. The previous owner died in 1980, and the Daves bought the business. Sitting today in the Boutique are two Nuernberger Rettig Universal Typecasting machines, made in Chicago and capable of casting type up to 72 point, along with two

Thompson Typecasters. None of these machines are being actively used—Churchman does some casting on a British Monotype Supercaster, but subcontracts most of the typecasting to others whom he regards as being more expert at it than he.

The Sterling Typefoundry specializes in ornaments—mostly typecast cuts, borders and dingbats, although some fonts of antique faces are occasionally produced as well, on a sporadic basis.

THE WITHDRAWAL

So my time in the Boutique has passed too soon. Dave and Charlene only open the place up for a few hours on Saturday afternoons, so you have to get yourself acclimated quickly and scurry around with haste if you expect to get a decent purchase together. I end up with the sticks, some ornaments, some steel furniture, including some great giant furniture to fill the bed of my Vandercook, and some other odds and ends.

Dave tallies up what I owe, and I pretend to be furious at the outrageous prices he's charging me, and he pretends that he's just about making a gift of the stuff to me, the



prices are so low, and I start bellowing like a crazed water buffalo, and Dave goes for his gun, and Charlene grabs a pig of type-metal and rushes me like a linebacker, fixing to crack my skull and barbecue the contents, and . . .

Ok, well, that's a bit of an exaggeration. In truth, I meekly pay up and we load the loot into my trunk.

Then it's off to a liquor store where I pick up a 12-pack of Budweiser to help me make it through the night. After all, man does not live by letterpress alone.



COLOPHON

THIS BOOK was set by hand in the Bembo typeface. It was printed on Frankfurt paper using a Vandercook SP20 press.

The original photographs were taken by Noel Hawley using a Mamiya RB67 SLR Pro-S camera, and printed by hand by the photographer.

The paper for the binding was decorated by Carol Blinn at the Warwick Press. The book was bound by Campbell-Logan Bindery.

The book was printed in an edition of 23 fucking copies.

David C. Churchman
Carolene Churchman

