

## The Kelmscott/Goudy Printing Press: Printing History as a Living History

---

The arrival of the Kelmscott/Goudy press to the Cary Graphic Arts Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology in January 2014 was a homecoming of sorts. From 1932 to 1941, the press belonged to our library's namesake, Melbert B. Cary, Jr., director of the Continental Type Founders Association in New York City. Cary used the press to produce the whimsical publications of his Press of the Woolly Whale.

In addition to its connection with the press's past, the Cary Collection offers a home where the press can be maintained and used in support of teaching and the book arts. To this end, Associate Curator Amelia Fontanel led the effort to restore the press into working order. It has since been used in dozens of RIT classes, visited by alumni and other printing enthusiasts, and has produced broadsides, chapbooks, and exhibition brochures. This past October it served as the centerpiece of the annual conference of the American Printing History Association.

Manufactured in 1891, the press began its life as Albion no. 6551 and was put in the service of William Morris's Kelmscott Press. Thick iron bands were added to the press's frame to ensure a true impression for the printing of Morris's edition of the *Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* in 1896. The Kelmscott Chaucer, as it is more commonly known, is considered one of the most beautiful books ever printed and helped initiate the twentieth century's fine press printing movement.

The press remained in England until 1924, when type designer Frederic Goudy imported it for his Village Press in Marlborough, New York. Goudy greatly admired Morris and later wrote that his acquisition of the printing press would ensure for his own Village Press "a very definite mention in the annals of American printing."<sup>1</sup> Although Morris's press resided with Goudy for only a short time, its brief association with the master was sufficient enough. In honor of its two most famous owners, future owner J. Ben Lieberman would rechristen Albion no. 6551 the "Kelmscott/Goudy Press."

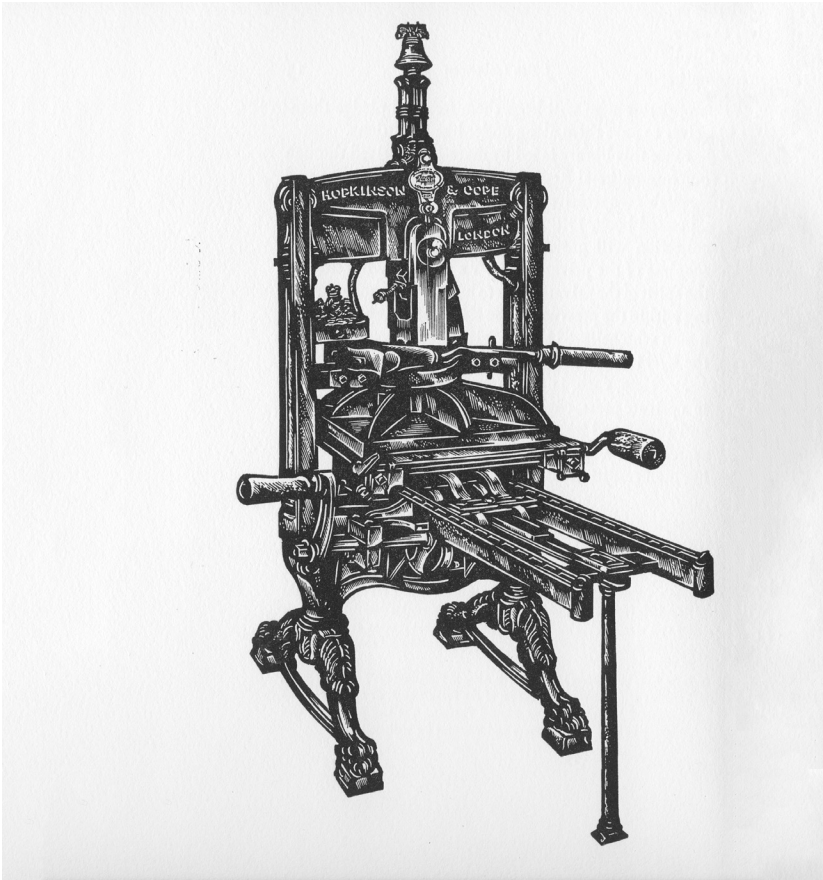
---

1. Melbert B. Cary, Jr., *A Bibliography of the Village Press* (New York: Woolly Whale, 1938), 153.

Lieberman also made a famous physical modification to the press. An ardent believer in the freedom of the press, he topped the Kelmscott/Goudy Press with a miniature Liberty Bell in 1962 and encouraged visitors to his home in New Rochelle, New York, to ring the bell after pulling a print. The Liberty Bell also confirmed that this English export had, by that time, lived most of its life in the United States.

The Kelmscott/Goudy press has had a long, productive life, and its continued use is critical. As I've heard Amelia frequently say, printing on historical presses is an example of "preservation through use." Just as a sixteenth-century lute demands to be maintained and played, a press persists through printing.

In that spirit, the Cary Collection is pleased to offer the keepsake included with this issue of *RBM*. Designed by Jerry Kelly and printed on the Kelmscott/Goudy press, our offering reminds us that the value of historical printing presses is tied to their continued use. We are honored to be a part of the legacy of this fabled press and to present printing history as a living history.



A wood engraving of the Kelmscott/Goudy Press by John DePol. From J. Ben Lieberman's *The Liberty Bell on the Kelmscott Goudy Press* (Council Bluffs, Iowa: Yellow Barn Press, 1996).