



Fall 1992

The Private Press Tradition in Lexington, Kentucky

Burton Milward

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review>

 Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Milward, Burton (1992) "The Private Press Tradition in Lexington, Kentucky," *The Kentucky Review*: Vol. 11 : No. 3 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review/vol11/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Kentucky Libraries at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Kentucky Review by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

The Private Press Tradition in Lexington, Kentucky

Burton Milward

The history of printing extends far into Lexington's past, beginning on 11 August 1787 when John Bradford, a versatile man with no previous printing experience, produced the first issue of *The Kentucke Gazette*.¹ Kentucky then was a part of Virginia and would not become a state for five years. The town of Lexington was but eight years old, and it had fewer than 500 residents.

Nevertheless, the people of Lexington and of Kentucky were hungry for news and for books. In January of the next year, 1788, Bradford advertised books for sale at the *Gazette* office—"Spelling books, ABC, books with the shorter catechism," and *Poor Will's Almanac* for 1788. In the fall and winter of that year, a half-dozen Lexington merchants advertised for sale extensive stocks of books, imported from Philadelphia, as were practically all the goods they sold.

In 1788, too, Bradford printed *The Kentucky Almanac*, the first pamphlet published west of the Alleghenies; in 1789 he printed a little book of poems by a Kentucky poet, and, in 1792, when Kentucky became a state, he was named the official printer of the Acts and the Journals of the General Assembly. The poet, incidentally, is said to have been a caustic and inebriated character, and on one occasion he was refused a meal by an innkeeper named Gill. The hungry man took his revenge in verse:

O! Thou who blest the loaves and fishes
Look down upon these empty dishes;
And that same power that did them fill,
Bless each of us, but d--- old Gill!²

Transylvania University—then only a grammar school—held its first sessions in Lexington in 1789, and in 1796 several citizens of the town subscribed a total of \$500 to establish the Transylvania Library and buy 400 books for it. Four years later, this became the Lexington Library, in which use of the reading rooms was limited

to the subscribers. It was the predecessor of the Lexington Public Library.³

In the year 1795, Lexington had two printing offices and two newspapers, and about 1803 one William Essex was engaged in the bookbinding and bookselling business. The following year he issued a forty-page catalogue of books he said he had available; whether, in fact, he had them all in stock seems doubtful, but he could order them from the East. He quickly built up a successful business in blank-books, such as ledgers and account books. It was the largest establishment of this kind in the West, until Lexington lost much of its trade to the Ohio River cities.

William Essex was a substantial businessman, a founder and vestryman of Christ Episcopal Church, and very highly regarded, until about 1817. Essex at that time converted all of his business assets into cash, "absconded with his wife's housekeeper," and took off for New York or Canada. His creditors hired a "stout Irishman" to pursue him, and they managed to collect some of the money due them, but they must have been amazed by Essex's explanation that it was all right that he had left his wife—because he was never married to her in the first place!⁴

In any case, these facts reveal that there was quite early a regard for the arts of printing, binding, and literature in the city of Lexington. When the first *private* press was established in Lexington is unrecorded. Certainly *private printing* dates back to the early days of the city and played an important part in the political life, and death, of the people in an era of personal journalism, vituperative broadside, and the Code Duello.

Several interesting printing ventures of this character may be mentioned, one of them from the Civil War period. John Hunt Morgan, the Confederate cavalry commander, had in his outfit a man who was an experienced printer. Morgan's Men seldom stayed long in one place, but on a few occasions when they did, they would take over a printing office and put out an issue of *The Vidette*, a sheet published "Semi-occasionally by Morgan's Brigade." One issue was printed in Lexington in September 1862.⁵

The second instance is described in a brief article in a local newspaper in 1873:

Amateur Printing.

Quite a number of the youths of this town are engaged in amateur printing. They have purchased fonts of type and

small presses, and some of them do remarkably neat jobs. They print ladies' and gentlemen's visiting cards, bank checks, invitations, funeral notices, circulars, &c., and they have sensibly interfered with the business of the regular job-offices.

The spirit of the youthful amateur printer persisted in Lexington, for between January and May of 1903 nine-year-old Brownell Berryman and his friends produced a tiny newspaper, *The Gratz Park News*, for a small circle of subscribers.⁶

Passing now from the beginning to the middle of our century, it is possible to see how a period rich in private press publishing has carried on the tradition of the early Lexington printers and, to a large extent, revived the same methods of book production that Bradford, Essex, and their contemporaries used.

Some years ago Dr. Lawrence S. Thompson, former director of libraries at the University of Kentucky, wrote that "Most of the printed matter that appears today, perhaps eighty-five percent, is ultimately destined for wrapping garbage, the incinerator, or the pulp mill"; against this mass production Dr. Thompson saw "advancement in the art of printing" as the province of a few presses "operated by the idealist."⁷ His remarks echoed the history of printing as it had unfolded since the end of the preceding century, for a remarkable revival of fine printing, peripheral to the general publishing industry, accompanied the Arts and Crafts movement in England during the 1890s. It was led by William Morris, the poet, painter, and social reformer. The aesthetic fascination of producing beautiful books has since persisted not only in England but also spread to parts of the Continent and to America, as well. By 1965, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Saturday Review* discovered that there was a great increase in printing by talented amateurs, and that among thousands of practitioners there were a few striving to "match the artistry and craftsmanship of the old master printer"⁸ and "experimenting to achieve greater beauty in graphic art."⁹ By this time, however, printing of this quality had been flourishing in Lexington for well over twenty-five years.

It is necessary, but difficult, to define the private press, as I use it here. At its best, it is a publishing venture operated by one, two, or a small group of people, in which printing is done in the tradition of the printing craftsman, with type hand-set and pages



Members of the Bur Press in the mid 1940s—artist Harriet McDonald Holladay, printers Amelia Buckley and Carolyn Reading Hammer, and hand bookbinder Mary Susan Van Allen

hand-printed, and with design and illustrations done by the craftsman or an associate. Fine papers may be from a hand paper maker, and even specially designed typefaces may be proprietary to the press, or perhaps chosen and imported from a foreign foundry. Characteristically, the binding will be hand crafted. Production is understandably limited, and, while the cost of the work may seem expensive, returns are rarely more than sufficient to cover the cost of materials and time.

Interest in modern fine printing arose in Lexington around 1940, when Amelia King Buckley and Carolyn Reading got the idea of publishing a series of essays by Central Kentucky writers on persons of historic interest. Kentucky Monographs, they called their books. They bought a small table-top press from New York, some type, a book of instructions, and, to finance their project, they got out a "Kentucky Calendar" for the year 1942, which they sold at the Christmas season. These calendars were embellished by photographic views produced by members of the old Lexington Camera Club.¹⁰

The first of the Kentucky Monographs produced at their press was *The Education of a Gentleman: Jefferson Davis at Transylvania*, by Margaret Newnan Wagers, the dean of women there, and it appeared in 1943. The printing shop was in Mrs. Buckley's basement on Dudley Road, but because of the limitations of their press and type, the actual printing was done on a larger press at the home of a neighbor, R. P. Swango. Later, a press room was added to the garage of Carolyn Reading's residence on Bullock Place, and it remained the pressroom until the demise of their enterprise together.

Mrs. Buckley and Miss Reading adopted as a name the Bur Press, and they had associated with them Harriett McDonald (later Holladay), who did the art work, and Mary Spears, of Paris, who served as binder. The Bur Press soon acquired a larger press, and then a Chandler and Price motor-driven one, and in the next few years it printed and published several books, including *Rafinesque in Lexington*, by Prof. Huntley Dupré, and Clavia Goodman's *Bitter Harvest: Miss Laura Clay's Suffrage Work*. In 1947 it issued a children's story, *Mr. Poof's Discovery*, by John Jacob Niles, with illustrations by Harriet Holladay, and the fourth and last monograph, Clay Lancaster's *Back Streets and Pine Trees: The Work of John McMurtry*, which was printed for them by Jacob Hammer, who had recently come to Lexington to live. These were



Joseph C. Graves draws the bar of his antique Washington at the Press of Gravesend.

all published in editions of 200 to 300 copies. The operation of the Bur Press, and the interest it created, helped to pave the way for the development of fine printing in Lexington.

The late Joseph C. Graves, a man with a true devotion to the heritage of the past, pursued broad cultural interests, including art, literature, and architecture, as well as the history of books and printing. In 1948, at an exhibition of paintings and drawings at the University of Chicago, he met Victor Hammer and found him to be a man of great culture and a craftsman of many talents. Dr. Hammer had brought his family to America to escape the Nazi dictatorship, had taken a position at Wells College in Aurora, New York, and was near the age of retirement there. Graves and Dr. Raymond McLain, then president of Transylvania University in Lexington, arranged an appointment for Dr. Hammer as artist-in-residence at Transylvania. In this they were aided by R. Hunter Middleton of Chicago, head of the department of type design of

the Ludlow Typograph Company and one of the truly important men in the fields of commercial and private printing. Hammer's achievements and influence changed the course of hand-press printing in Lexington.

Hammer's classes at Transylvania and his reactivation here of his own private press, the Stamperia del Santuccio, were as seed falling on fertile ground. Joseph Graves soon established his own Gravesend Press at his home in the country.¹¹ In 1949 The Gravesend Press issued its first book, a small work by the eloquent J. Soule Smith, entitled *The Mint Julep*. It was published in an edition of 273 and 1/2 copies, because that was all the paper on hand. Joseph Graves went on to design and publish a considerable number of small books that were outstanding in format and binding, the second of them illustrated with woodcuts from the original blocks of the great English wood engraver Thomas Bewick, and some later ones with illustrations by Fritz Kredel. The first two books, though conceived by Joe Graves, were printed, however, by others, the first by Raymond Redd and the second by Philip Reed, a Chicagoan. Graves, nevertheless, had his own antique printing press, an iron press of the Washington style, and he used it not only for books but also for such ephemera as Christmas cards and advertisements for Graves, Cox, and Co., his gentleman's clothing firm. He designed the Gravesend books, sometimes did the art work for them, and sometimes hand-colored the illustrations.

When Joe first got his printing press, an antique one, he needed a place to put it, and decided that Mrs. Graves's vegetable storage room in the basement of their home would be a suitable shop. He installed the rather sizeable press, the type cases, and the other paraphernalia amidst the fruits and vegetables and canned goods, and got to work. One day when he and Jacob Hammer, Victor Hammer's son, were operating the press, putting their combined weight on the handle to insure a clear impression, the old press creaked and groaned and flew completely apart. The printers, type, paper, preserves, and pieces of the press lay in a jumbled heap. The printing shop was moved to the stable and only later returned to a much-improved basement.

The third issue of the Gravesend Press was Rudolf Koch's *Wer ist Victor Hammer*, designed by Victor Hammer and printed in 1952 by Jacob Hammer, with the German and English texts interlined in different types and different inks. Next came *Doctor*

Faust, printed by the Hammers, with fifty-four copies for the Gravesend Press hand-colored by Hammer's first wife, Rosl, and 350 copies for the Caxton Club. *Andrea de Piero* was printed in 1954 by Joe Graves and Jacob Hammer, with the signatures folded and sewn by Mrs. Lucy Graves, who did this also for the next book, *Aucassin and Nicolette*, which was printed by Jacob Hammer in 1957 with woodcuts by Fritz Kredel. Of the 225 copies, twenty-five have illustrations colored by Joe Graves. The last Gravesend book was *Dolls and Puppets*, with charming woodcuts by Kredel, which was printed and hand-colored in Germany. When Joe Graves died unexpectedly in 1960, the type had been set for a little book on the old Episcopal burying ground in Lexington, and several years later it was printed by Joe's good friend Robert Hunter Middleton in Chicago.

Although the Gravesend Press and Joe Graves's fine library are now, through the kindness of Mrs. Graves, located at the Margaret I. King Library at the University of Kentucky, the Gravesend press and other equipment were loaned for a period of time to Mr. and Mrs. Wayne C. Williams, who had adopted the name Helm Press. (According to the printers, the name had no special significance—they simply liked it.) Their first book, *A. A. Milne on Lewis Carroll*, was issued late in 1964 in an edition of only twenty copies, of which twelve were made as keepsakes for the Board of Registry of the American Society of Clinical Pathologists. The Williamses also printed a book of poems, *Hounds on the Mountain*, by James Still, which was issued as a publication of the Anvil Press.

The Anvil Press, unlike others here, is an association, originally comprising ten members, inspired and guided by Victor Hammer and his second wife, Carolyn Reading Hammer, who began her printing with the Bur Press. Anvil Press books may be printed on any one of the several presses owned by members of the group, and the editions are intended for sale at cost, a figure that makes no provision for the printers' time and labor. At one time the active members of the group were Carolyn Hammer, Nancy Chambers (later Lair), and Harriett McDonald Holladay.¹²

The Anvil publications include Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 1953; Chaucer's *The Booke of the Duchesse*, 1954; and William Tyndale's translation of *The Four Gospels*, in four volumes, 1954-1955, all printed by Jacob Hammer. Further imprints include C. Sedulius' *De Quatuor*

Evangelistis, 1955, printed and bound by Mrs. Hammer; Shakespeare's complete *Sonnets*, 1956, and Johann Peter Hebel's *Francisca and Other Stories*, 1957, printed by Jacob Hammer; and *Chapters on Writing and Printing*, by Paul Standard, R. Hunter Middleton, and Victor and Carolyn Hammer, 1963, printed by Mrs. Hammer; and Aratus of Soli's *The Phenomena*, designed by the Hammers and Nancy Lair and printed both at the Anvil Press and at the King Library Press, the teaching press founded at the University of Kentucky Libraries by Carolyn Hammer.

Anvil also has issued a number of "extra publications": Willa Cather's *Father Junipero's Holy Family*, 1956, and Mrs. Holladay's *A Wildflower Book*, 1956, both printed by Mrs. Hammer; Bertold Brecht's *On "Tao Te Ching,"* 1959, and Mrs. Holladay's second book of hand-colored wildflower drawings, *Ravens Creek*, 1960, both printed by Nancy Chambers, and the James Still poems completed by the Williamses. The quality of the Anvil Press output is shown by the fact that in 1953 and 1954 it was awarded top honors among leading publishers in the Southern Books Competition of the Southeastern Library Association. Anvil has not competed since then.

Using the imprint of the Press of Carolyn Reading, Mrs. Hammer, prior to her marriage, also printed Conrad Fiedler's *On the Nature and History of Architecture* as well as a text by John Milton. Another scarce imprint, for it has appeared in only one book, is that of the High Noon Press. It was so named because the printers, Mrs. Hammer, Mary Voorhees, and Nancy Chambers, devoted their lunch hours at the University of Kentucky Libraries to the printing of *The Marriage of Cock Robin and Jenny Wren* in 1956. It should also be mentioned here that many of the books of the various Lexington private presses were bound by hand by Lucy Shropshire (Mrs. Lawrence) Crump, who has since made a gift of her large collection of binding tools, some of them quite old, to the Transylvania University Library.

The highest point in the printing history of Kentucky is the work of Victor Hammer and his Stamperia del Santuccio, one of the truly great presses. Joe Graves, who played a part in bringing Hammer to Transylvania, had attended the University of Virginia. It was with much satisfaction, therefore, that in 1954 he was invited to Charlottesville to read a paper before the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia. His subject was Victor Hammer. He said, in part:

Victor Hammer, . . . whose private press . . . has combined calligraphy, punch-cutting, metal engraving and printing, is a craftsman whose work is too little known in the United States. Slowly evolving a type from his own hand-writing, his meticulously printed books represent the noblest flowering of letter-press printing in a fashion almost unique since the inception of printing in the fifteenth century.¹³

Victor Hammer was born in 1882 in Vienna, where he early became interested in artistic matters, joined an architectural studio at fifteen and supported himself by drawing and painting. From 1922 until 1934 he and his family lived in Florence, Italy, and his workshop there attracted such talented apprentices as Fritz Kredel and Paul Koch (the son of Rudolf Koch, the foremost of the German typographers), Fritz Arnold, and Edgar Kaufman, the press's great patron.¹⁴ It was in Florence that Hammer established his printing office, the Stamperia del Santuccio and printed his first book, John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. For this he used an early version of his uncial type. Regarding the name of the press, Joe Graves explains as follows:

It is easier to understand the rather obscure name, Stamperia del Santuccio, when one remembers that Victor Hammer's work is motivated by a deeply religious principle. In Italian the word Stamperia means "press," while "Santuccio" is the name of a saint of little interceding power. All of Hammer's finest work is dedicated "Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam."¹⁵

In 1934 the Hammers moved to Kolbsheim, in Alsace, where Victor Hammer built and furnished a chapel adjoining the parish church, and two years later returned to Austria, where he became a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts. During that period, he continued his experimentation with type faces, perfecting first his Samson Uncial and later the Pindar Uncial, and also printing small books in limited editions. When the Nazis took over Austria, the Hammers left everything in Europe to make a fresh start in the United States. At Wells College Hammer and his son, Jacob, founded the Wells College and the Hammer presses.

It was Dr. Hammer's conviction that type, subject matter, and the language used should be in harmony, and so he designed his American Uncial, which, as Joe Graves says, he felt was needed

"for the loftier expression of the philosopher and the sacred language of the past." Some years later, in 1954, the New Orleans *Times Picayune* wrote in an editorial:

It seems that Dr. Victor Hammer, artist-in-residence-emeritus at Transylvania College, has by diligent hammering over a period of 30 years set typography back 954 years. This is a good ratio, though some are able to set history, art, and science back much further in shorter time.

Dr. Hammer is the creator or restorer of a type that is hard to read. . . . One of its features, discarded about 1000 A.D., gives it the name, "uncial." But its main intent is to slow reading time; and this, according to the dispatch, it does. The intent behind this intent is to make sure the reader proceeds slowly enough to understand what he's reading. This is particularly valuable, the inventor believes, for tackling the "great classics." It seems most of us skim through these works much too rapidly.

The great books boom is bound to get a bang out of this, and we can't wait for the multiplication of editors that will grow out of making the print somewhat illegible. There's always a way to get behind the times, however, no matter what school of thought one resurrects. The man who first prints all the words of the classics in scrambled form will become lord of the tortoise road to wisdom.¹⁶

One hopes that Victor Hammer never read that unfortunate editorial, but in one of his books he provided a good answer to it. Victor Hammer, lover of the arts and a deeply religious man, had no illusion that he, through his work, could reform the world and revive the long-lost virtues. "I am no reformer," he wrote, "and I know that I shall never see the day when the arts will again be a mode of life and an approach to the godhead." These words are from *Memory and Her Nine Daughters: The Muses*, written by Hammer and printed by him in a small edition de luxe in which he used, for the first time, the two-color initial letters he had cut.¹⁷ In this same work there is a dialogue between the Craftsman and his Patron, and through this dialogue Victor Hammer expresses a part of his philosophy:

As a craftsman I am expected to accept responsibility for the

work that I do with my hands. You wondered about the "mystical" quality of handwork: it is that trace of life which lingers on in things made entirely by the human hand.¹⁸

He also said:

There is mass production, but there can be no mass creation. The craftsman proceeds by methods different from the machine. A pot produced by the machine will hold as much water, and hold it as well as the craftsman's pot which, however, has the advantage that there is no designer between it and its maker.¹⁹

The poet Robert Graves expressed much the same thought when he wrote, "Factory-made objects are born dead."

In concluding his conversation with the Patron, Hammer's Craftsman states:

You labeled me the Contrary Man, but you did not say contrary to what. Truly, I am contrary to mediocrity, though I know we could not live on this planet without it. I am contrary to sloth, and contrary to waste, which will go on in spite of me, and I am contrary to blasphemy against the Spirit. I have proved to myself that I can change the world, but only within the reach of my hands. The work I leave behind me may not be great, yet it will prove to be genuine—genuine, though not "progressive." It may however show that I had to work alone most of the time.²⁰

In another book, *Chapters on Writing and Printing*, Hammer stated, "Industrial methods may be legitimate for production and distribution, but they are not legitimate for the act of creation."²¹

When he came to Lexington in 1948, Victor Hammer conducted classes at Transylvania in art, printing, and calligraphy, and brought here his former apprentice, Fritz Kredel, and others to lecture and teach. Not only in his classes, but in his studio and printing shop, he provided the guidance and inspiration for the interest in fine printing in Lexington and for the output of books that, for a number of years, made this city preeminent in the field of private press printing.

It was at the Stamperia del Santuccio in Lexington that Victor

Hammer completed the printing in German of the lyrical poems of J. Frederick Christian Hoelderlin, a three-year task he and Jacob started at Wells. Large of format and with a frontispiece portrait of the poet taken from a finely engraved brass plate, this volume was the most ambitious work of the press and, in the opinion of Joseph Graves, "ranks among the great private press books of our time." Fifty-one copies were printed.

The first book bearing the Stamperia imprint was, as I have said, the *Samson Agonistes* of John Milton, issued in 1931 in Florence and printed in the Samson Uncial type. It was printed on a wooden hand press, made for Victor Hammer in Florence and modeled on a press in the Laurentian Library. The next title to appear was *Tauernreise*, by Otto Reicher, and then the *Essays* of Francis Bacon. While in France, Victor and Jacob Hammer printed Hoelderlin's *Fragments des Pindar*, using the new Pindar Uncial, and in Grundlsee they printed Max Mell's *Paradeisspiel in der Steiermark* (1936); Otto Reicher's *Das Faschingrenner*, and Louise Labé's *Les Vintquatre Sonnets*, both in 1937; and Reicher's *Tauernreise* in a new edition in 1938. In 1938 and 1939, in Vienna, the Stamperia published Maurice de Guerin's *Le Centaure* and *Ventiquattro Sonnetti di Torquato Tasso*.

In Lexington, after the completion of Hoelderlin's poems, the Stamperia published in 1951 *Three Fragments from the Posthumous Papers of Conrad Fiedler*, translated by Victor Hammer and Thornton Sinclair of Transylvania. Hammer's early Lexington work was carried out at Transylvania and at Hopemont, the early nineteenth-century residence of John Wesley Hunt on Gratz Park, where Hammer lived and maintained his studio. He retired from Transylvania in 1953 and, after his second marriage, to Carolyn Reading in 1955, moved to his final home, which also housed a studio, on Market Street. The Stamperia in 1958 issued *Of Scribes*, from Cassiodorus' *De Antiquarius*, the first book in which Carolyn Hammer shared the press's imprint. The press produced several of the books written or translated by Thomas Merton, who was then active at the Trappist Monastery at Gethsemani, Kentucky, and also Hammer's own *Concern for the Art of Civilized Man*.

Another of Hammer's projects was to print Jean Racine's *Andromaque*, and for this he designed a typeface bearing the drama's name. This remarkable type, though roman, is evocative of a cursive Greek script and is, in contrast to the weight of the

various Hammer uncials, a light and elegant type that is equally suggestive of the manuscripts of antiquity. Although the uncial face has enjoyed immense popularity, the *Andromache* has been used only at the Hammer presses in Lexington. The publication of Racine's play was realized in 1985-1986, some years after Hammer's death. It is illustrated by a series of cleverly devised woodcuts by Fritz Kredel. These are assembled from scaled individual components to form a variety of scenes, and a limited number of copies of the book show the woodcuts tinted in watercolors.

Earlier Hammer books formed what he termed the *Opus* series, but in 1959 he began printing some briefer texts in a *Broadside* series. These broadsides were not of the traditional kind, printed on a single unfolded sheet, but brief works folded in a single signature and bound in boards. These included Hesiod's *Fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale*, translated by Robert Graves; Meng Tzu's *Ox Mountain Parable*; J. J. Backofen's *Walls: Res Sanctae, Res Sacrae*, and *The Twelve Apostles*.

Victor Hammer died in 1967. In 1976 there appeared a biographical study by Sir John Rothenstein, former director of the Tate Gallery in London. This has been followed by several bibliographical studies and a republication of Hammer's essays.²²

Hammer's tradition of hand-press printing has been carried on at the King Library Press at the University of Kentucky Libraries, founded in 1956. There, with the great Florentine wooden hand press of Hammer's Italian days, and with the early twentieth-century iron hand press of Joseph Graves's Press of Gravesend, students and interested staff of the university join with the press's director to produce beautifully handmade books. Over a period of more than thirty-five years, the King Library Press has published more than twenty-five distinguished books. Begun by Mrs. Hammer, the King Library Press has also been directed by W. Gay Reading, who has been active independently as a printer, as well. Joan Davis served briefly as director in 1983, and presently Dr. Paul Evans Holbrook has maintained the work of the press and its apprentices. Dr. Holbrook, a gifted calligrapher, typographer, and bookbinder, himself worked as an apprentice at the King Library Press, and he has also been pressman to the Anvil Press for some years. David Farrell and Dr. James D. Birchfield, both former curators of rare books, have contributed to the success of the King Library Press through facilitating public programs, exhibitions, and



Victor and Carolyn Hammer examine proof sheet at the Stamperia del Santuccio.



W. Gay Reading raises the frisket of his Washington hand press.

workshops that have brought important figures in the graphic arts to the community.²³

W. Gay Reading, mentioned above for his role in directing the King Library Press, has worked with the Anvil Press in its production of books. A nephew of Victor and Carolyn Hammer, his interest in fine printing has been lifelong. He maintains two press names for his own use. These are the Reading Lion Press and the Windell Press (named for his father, Windell Reading). The former is used for work carried out on a Colt's Armory motorized press; the latter is for work done on a Washington hand press. In 1988 he published J. R. Jones's translation of Luis Velez de Guevara's *Inez Reigned in Death* at the Windell Press. The roman font in the book is a face called Jenson, created by the two Chicago typographers R. H. Middleton and Ernst Detterer; the italic is Frederic Warde's Arrighi. There are two illustrations by the artist and printer Robert James Foose, and the book is on Japanese Iyo paper. Another of the works of his press is a collection of poems by the late Susan Hamilton.

The fine press tradition is carried on, too, by some of the



Arthur Graham, of the Polyglot Press, and J. Hill Hamon, of the Whippoorwill Press.

people who, in and around Lexington today, maintain their own presses. Among these, for example, is Arthur Graham, a former tenor with the Metropolitan Opera and now a professor of Music at the University of Kentucky. Prof. Graham began printing in New York and continued in Pennsylvania and Florida before moving to Lexington. Printing as the Polyglot Press, he has brought fine typographic treatment to works in various languages. He has printed in Danish, in English, in French, in German, in Hebrew, in Latin, in Neapolitan, in Spanish, and in Yiddish, and his work demonstrates a sensitive appreciation for linguistic nuance. In addition to the variety of languages in which he prints, Arthur Graham also has assembled an enviable array of type fonts, allowing him to bring further suggestions of meaning and mood to the way in which his words are displayed. Typical of the direction of Arthur Graham's work is a handsome printing of Psalm CXVII in English (of the 1611 King James translation), German, Hebrew, Latin, and Yiddish. Perhaps the most ambitious and popular of his publications has been *Elegant Homes of Lexington* (1982), a discussion of a choice of Victorian

architectural specimens, illustrated with serigraphs by Grace Perreiah. Prof. Graham possesses a gift for light verse and telling insights, and his witty poems and epigrams are the occasional matter of his printing; one of his publications is an announcement for Mercator's map of the Metropolitan stage, showing the best places for projecting one's voice over that of others.²⁴

J. Hill Hamon, a professor of Biological Sciences at Transylvania University, is the proprietor of the Whippoorwill Press, which he founded initially to generate offprints of his scientific papers. A gentleman of broad interests and skilled in graphic design, Prof. Hamon soon discovered printing very much to his liking. He has assembled over the years a small collection of presses, including several table-top clamshell presses, a treadle press, and a motorized Chandler & Price. He keeps a press in his office at Transylvania and the others in an abandoned cistern, the site of a printshop at his home in rural Franklin County. His publications include the *Heiligenstadt Testament* of Beethoven (Prof. Hamon is a pianist, as well) and a hitherto unpublished lecture of 1820, *On Botany*, by the early Kentucky naturalist Constantine Rafinesque. Other books include a miniature *Candy Cook Book*, with recipes by his wife, Libby. Garamond is a typeface he uses regularly, although he experiments with others. His specialty has become the printing of miniature books, which he has found to be popular among the friends with whom he shares his printing. Attracted by all aspects of the book arts, he has become interested in papermaking as well as in printing, and he has made the paper for a number of his publications. With a press in his office, he has created an interest in typography among a number of his students, some of whom have gone on to operate their own presses elsewhere.²⁵

Two members of the Art Department at the University of Kentucky have been talented printers and designers. The first of these is Robert James Foose who, before becoming chairman of the department, enjoyed a productive career in the graphic arts. He has won widespread recognition as a watercolorist, woodcut artist, calligrapher, illustrator, and book designer. From 1968 to 1972 at his Buttonwood Press, Prof. Foose produced nine books of from forty to one hundred copies each, and these were carefully designed works from the standpoint of typography, illustration, and binding. An example of his work is Jonathan Greene's *A Seventeenth Century Garner: Composed of Three Poems & Three*

Characters. It is printed in Baskerville type, with Bulmer display lettering, and the binding is in brown Japanese Sugikawa paper, sewn in a traditional oriental manner, and decorated with a woodcut in red and with black lettering on the cover. Another Buttonwood title by Jonathan Greene is *Instance*, and in this the printer has used the Electra type designed by W. A. Dwiggins. Prof. Foose's intention was to create books as appealing for their design as for their content, and in some ways to address experimental possibilities in the creation of books. One such effort was a work in accordion folds on the subject of crushed cans, and within the folds it presented the cans lithographically in pointillist drawings.²⁶ A publication incorporating the work of another Lexington artist was a selection of eight of the fables of Aesop, each accompanied with a silk screen print by Grace Perreiah; the text is in Baskerville and forty copies were produced, as with his other books, on a Vandercook cylinder press. Additional books, on animals and on the Amish, for example, have appeared, illustrated by linoleum blocks or other methods.²⁷ Although a "Memento Mori" for the Buttonwood Press appeared in 1972, several promising projects still remain in press. These include *Sheep of England*, dealing with the illustration of different breeds of the animal, and *On Colorado*, a work which depicts, in twelve lithographs, views of an antique automobile in a ravine.

Prof. Clifford Amyx, who taught studio art and art history for many years at the University of Kentucky, has produced more than a dozen books in his retirement. His publications are on a variety of subjects and are realized, as well, in a variety of forms. Topics include Italian and other European proverbs, Confucian texts, haiku, oriental calligraphic forms, figure studies, mythical beasts, observations on printmakers, comments by artists and philosophers, and passages on epistemology. The type for each is handset, and linoleum block illustrations combine several colors, each requiring not only individual inking, but an additional run through the press. Some of the books, such as the philosophical *Tao Te Ching* of Lao-Tsü, are stitched in an oriental manner, with the boards sewn so as to show the cords on the outside at the left margin; others, dealing with topics in art, are presented with their illustrations in loose sheets in a portfolio, in the style of the French *livre d'artiste*. The influence of a keen interest in the Japanese print and the confident skill of an artist's training are clearly evident in the books of Prof. Amyx.²⁸

Other Lexington printers include Sally Ruff, of the Rosemary Press, who was an apprentice at the University of Kentucky's King Library Press. Working with a large Hoe iron press, acquired from Lexington radiologist Dr. Zygmunt Gierlach, she maintains two press names: the Rosemary Press for broadsides, and the Luke-Paul Press, which will be reserved for books. A representative work is her broadside of a Marian hymn by St. Ephraem, printed using the uncial types and decorated with a wood engraving on boxwood by the artist Gloria Thomas. For a period in the early 1980s, she worked with Earl and Ivana Kallemyn to print on a Washington hand press. Their output, though small, was fastidiously carried out. Christopher Meatyard, another of the King Library Press apprentices, independently produced a stream-of-consciousness narrative by Max Heckard, an undergraduate mathematics student. This specimen of *avant garde* literature is composed in the American Uncial type and abstractly ornamented in rich colors, including gold; Christopher Meatyard's sense of graphic style (like that of his father, the celebrated photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard) is most striking. After an apprenticeship at the King Library Press Gray Zeitz went on to found his own Larkspur Press at Monterey, Kentucky; his publications have included writings by Wendell Berry, Guy Davenport, and other well-known writers, and his books have been handsomely printed and bound by book artists such as Carolyn Whitesel, another former associate of the King Library Press. Clara Keyes has prepared a descriptive bibliography of the Larkspur books.²⁹ Jennifer Stith, too, is the possessor of an iron hand press and has maintained an interest in the book arts for over a decade, sharing her enthusiasm with young students. In 1980 James and Martha Birchfield brought an English Albion hand press to Lexington from Florida, where it was used for demonstrations for students of printing history.³⁰

Jonathan Greene is another figure in the arena of Lexington fine publishing. Although his Gnomon Press calls on others, including commercial printers, to produce the texts he selects, he is well-versed in printing as a traditional craft and became acquainted with a number of California fine press printers during a sojourn on the west coast. His own writings have been produced by Buttonwood and Larkspur, among other presses, and he has worked as an apprentice at the Anvil and King Library Presses. Moreover, for a number of years he was associated with the

University of Kentucky Press as a book designer.³¹

The tradition of the book arts in Lexington has been a remarkably fruitful one. Here there have been individuals whose type designs and whose printing have won general recognition, and figures whose relationships within the craft have extended from California to Chicago and to Europe. The tradition continues today and promises to sustain Lexington's longstanding interest in the book as a finely crafted object.

NOTES

Various forms of this essay have been used for presentations before the Lexington Torch Club (21 October 1965), the Lexington Rotary Club (9 August 1973), and the Typocrafters National Meeting (Lexington, 7 October 1989).

¹For information on John Bradford see Samuel M. Wilson, "The Kentucky Gazette' and John Bradford, Its Founder," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 31 (1937): 102-32. For more information on the early period of publishing in Kentucky see "The Pioneer Press to the Civil War," and for information on the topic of this present discussion, see "The Private Press and Modern Fine Printing," both in "A Preliminary Bibliography of Kentucky Printing History," an appendix to *A Kentucky Hundred: Landmarks of Kentucky Printing*, by James D. Birchfield and William J. Marshall (Lexington: University of Kentucky Libraries and the Lexington *Herald-Leader*, 1987).

²The poet was Thomas Johnson, Jr., "the Drunken Poet of Danville." See Burton Milward, Jr., "Kentucky's First Poet," *The Kentucky Review* 9 (Spring 1989): 25-41.

³See William A. Leavy, "A Memoir of Lexington and Its Vicinity," *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society* 40 (April 1942): 129.

⁴William A. Leavy, "Memoir of Lexington," *Register* 41 (October 1943): 321-22.

⁵Howard D. Doll, "John Hunt Morgan and the Soldier Printers," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 47 (January 1973): 29-55.

⁶Bettye Lee Mastin, "Small Paper, Young Editor Once Made Big News in Lexington," *Lexington Herald*, 20 July 1982.

⁷In *Publications of the Anvil Press* (Lexington: Anvil Press, 1958).

⁸*Wall Street Journal*, 30 August 1965.

⁹*The Saturday Review*, 9 October 1965, p. 70.

¹⁰For information on the Bur Press see "Printing with that Feminine Touch," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 2 December 1947 and Carolyn Reading Hammer, "The Lexington Connection," *RHM: Robert Hunter Middleton, the Man and His Letters* (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1985), pp. 31-49.

¹¹See Joseph C. Graves, "The Gravesend Press," *Hoja Volante* 35 (May 1953): 7-8 (newsletter of the Zamorano Club); Laura Lyons, "Makes Christmas Cards on Home Printing Press," *Lexington Leader*, 24 April 1951; Bettye Lee Mastin, "Mr. and Mrs. Joseph C. Graves, Swigert Avenue, Both Print and Collect Books," *Lexington Herald*, 16 March 1958; Joseph C. Graves, *The Gravesend Press: A Bibliographical Confession* (Maple Shade, New Jersey: Pickering Press, 1960); and H. Richard Archer, "Joseph Graves and the Press of Gravesend," *The Kentucky Review* 7 (Spring 1987): 3-18.

¹²See Joseph Graves, "The Anvil Press: Unique Publishers of Hand-Printed Books," *Book Club of California Quarterly Newsletter* 20 (Fall 1955): 81-84; see also Sue M. Thierman, "Books by Hand," *Louisville Courier-Journal Magazine*, 16 September 1956. "The founders of the Anvil Press were: Gordon Bechman, W. O. Bullock, Virginia Clark (Hagan), Clavia Goodman, Lucy Graves, Joseph Graves, Martha Livesay (Whiteside), Harriett McDonald (Holladay), Robert Hunter Middleton, Carolyn Reading (Hammer). Maria Bizzoni, Caroline Porter, and Nancy Chambers [Lair] became Anvil Press associates during the years following the founding of the press in 1952." See Carolyn Hammer, "Notes on the Stamperia del Santuccio" in *Chapters on Writing and Printing* (Lexington: Anvil Press, 1963), p. 57 and pp. 66-67, n14. See also Bettye Lee Mastin, "Siamese, Airedale Keep Eye on Production of 1880 Hand Press in 1888 Brick Cottage," *Lexington Herald*, 30 October 1966 on Nancy Chambers Lair, and also Lawrence S. Thompson, "Printing in Lexington, Kentucky," *Printing and Graphic Arts* 2 (September 1954): 54-57.

¹³Victor Hammer: *Calligrapher, Punch-Cutter, & Printer* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1954), p. 4.

¹⁴Susanna Ragionieri, "Victor Hammer a Firenze," *Artista: Critica dell'Arte Toscana* (1991): 48-63.

¹⁵Graves, *Victor Hammer*, p. 4.

¹⁶New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 4 October 1954.

¹⁷See Carolyn Hammer, *The Two-Color Initials of Victor Hammer* (Lexington: Stamperia del Santuccio, 1966).

¹⁸*Memory* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1957), p. 74.

¹⁹*Memory*, p. 78.

²⁰*Memory*, p. 105.

²¹Victor Hammer, "Digressions on the Roman Letter," *Chapters on Writing and Printing* (Lexington: Anvil Press, 1963), p. 35.

²²See John Rothenstein, *Victor Hammer: Artist and Craftsman* (Boston: David Godine, 1978). See also *Victor Hammer: Artist and Printer* (Lexington: Anvil Press, 1981) and *Victor Hammer: An Artist's Testament* (Lexington: Anvil Press, 1988).

²³Shirley A. Olofson, "Presses and Printing at the King Library," *University of Kentucky Library Notes*, Volume I, Number 2, Spring 1969, pp. 1-3; Rhonda S. Pettit, "Handcrafted Touch Still Exists Today," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 18 May 1975; Fred and Anne Blackmon Woodress, "Kentucky's King Press Continues Tradition of Bibliographic Presses," *Antique Monthly*, May 1980, p. 23A; Barbara Hickey, "Ancient

Craft Still an Art at Library," University of Kentucky, Lexington, *Communi-K*, 13 April 1981; Dennis Pennington, "A Special Collection: Miniature Books, Campaign Buttons, and Hand Press Live Snugly in Library's North Wing," University of Kentucky, *Kentucky Kernel*, 25 February 1982.

²⁴Bettye Lee Mastin, "Home is Quiet Setting for Lawyer-Wife and Opera Singer Who is Teacher, Printer," *Lexington Herald*, 17 June 1978.

²⁵Bettye Lee Mastin, "His Type of Craft is Miniature Books," *Lexington Herald*, 5 February 1984; Byron Crawford, "Bite-Size Books: Printing Miniature Works No Teensy-Weensy Task for Transylvania Professor," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 13 January 1989; "Professor Has Big Fun Printing Little Books," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, "For the Record" section, 22 February 1989.

²⁶*Crushed Cans are of No Significance: Sixteen Drawings* by Robert James Foose, production in progress.

²⁷*Eight Fables of Aesop as Presented & Illustrated by Grace Perreiah with Eight Original Serigraphs* (Lexington: Buttonwood Press, 1969), a *livre d'artiste* with each fable in a small folio and a serigraph tipped in; placed in boards covered with green papers and with a green cloth spine; front board lettered as is the title-page. Also, Robert James Foose, *Amish Portfolio: Eight Original Prints & Essay* (Lexington: Buttonwood Press, 1971) contains eight linocuts on Hosho paper, protected by individual folders, with the remaining text paper American Strathmore; the text is in Baskerville with Garamond display; the work is in a lettered green wrapper and limited to seventy-five copies.

²⁸"Modern Fine Printing," *The Kentucky Review* 6 (Fall/Winter 1986): 82-83.

²⁹See David Minton, "Tiny Monterey Pressed in Charm and Creativity," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, "Community" section, 26 February 1992.

³⁰See "Arrival of an Albion," *The Gator Growl*, No. 81, April 1976, pp. 6-9, rpt. *American Amateur Journalist*, 46 (July 1982): 5, 12; "First Poem About Florida," *Gator Growl*, No. 83, April 1977, pp. 7-10; Beth Rudowske, "F.S.U. Librarian Prints His Own," Jacksonville, Florida, *Times Union*, 5 November 1978; Bettye Lee Mastin, "Birchfields Have Twice the Fun in Half a House," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 31 July 1981; James Barron, "Ancient Craft of Printing Comes Home," *New York Times*, 17 March 1983; David Burg, "Hand Press Printers Pursue Lexington Artistic Tradition," *Lexington Artscene*, July/August 1983; Rena Niles, "Bits and Pieces," *Lexington Chevy Chase Chronicle*, 27 June 1986; Dr. Hawley T. Tompkins [Timothy Hawley], "Typocrafters Trash Derby City," *Fine Print*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 19-22.

³¹See James D. Birchfield, "Gnomon Press and Jonathan Greene: Two Bibliographies," *The Kentucky Review* 11 (Spring 1992): 49-82.