

The Cary Graphic Arts Collection

David Walden

The Cary Graphics Arts Collection (library.rit.edu/cary) on the second floor of the Wallace Library at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) is a library on the history and practice of printing. Contained within the Collection is the Cary Graphic Design Archive,¹ “preserving the work of significant American graphic artists from the 1920s to the present”. The library has many important holdings and is open to visitors as well as faculty and students at RIT.

Unusual for a library and archive, the Cary Collection includes a print shop with “a working collection of some 20 historical printing presses and more than 2,000 fonts of metal and wood type”² of mechanical design spanning from the early 1800s to the present.

The collection curator Dr. Steven Galbraith (in photo below) says that last year 2,000 students came through or used either the library or print shop for classes and projects.



On June 25, 2018, Curator Galbraith gave me a tour of the Collection’s facilities, along with Kris Holmes whom I was interviewing (see interview in this issue), in the Collection’s Reading Room.

According to the 85-page book *Highlights of the Cary Graphic Arts Collection*, the collection was initially established at RIT in 1969 with the gift, in honor of Melbert Cary Jr., of his library, by the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust (created in memory of Melbert Cary’s widow). Melbert Cary’s life involved printing in several ways: he was director of an agency that imported metal type from Europe that it sold to printers, he had his own small printing business, and his interest in the history of printing led to a library of 2,300 books on the topic. In the years since the creation of the Collection, the library has grown

through other gifts and acquisitions and now contains some 45,000 volumes. The Collection also includes a number of subcollections, including typography specimens, examples of fine printing, books on book binding, and many more (twcarchivesspace.rit.edu).

Curator Galbraith is anticipating a major renovation of the RIT Libraries, and he says, “Our goal in the Cary Collection is to expand our facilities to make our collections more visible and accessible to students and researchers.”

The Collection also regularly presents lectures and exhibits,³ for instance a 2012 exhibit on the edges of books (photo by Elizabeth Lamark).⁴

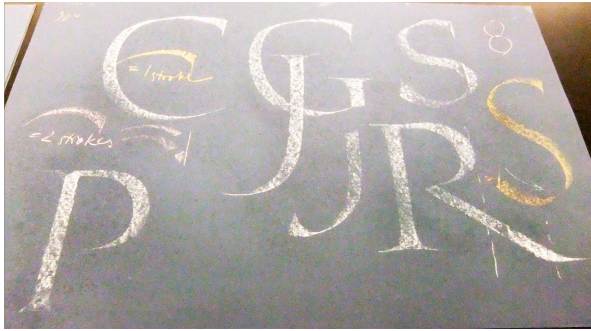


In early 2018, Chuck Bigelow and Kris Holmes gave a lecture at the Collection celebrating the 40th anniversary of their first commercial font, Leviathan, a display capitals type for a fine press printing of *Moby Dick*.

Chuck and Kris have long been involved with RIT’s graphic arts programs, with Chuck until recently serving as Melbert Cary Jr. Distinguished Professor of Graphic Arts at RIT and Kris teaching type design. Chuck is now resident scholar at the Cary Collection.

Hermann Zapf was an earlier Melbert Cary Jr. Distinguished Professor of Graphic Arts (from 1977).⁵ From 1979 through 1988, Zapf taught a summer workshop on type design and calligraphy at RIT. More generally, Zapf significantly influenced RIT’s programs related to printing, was an ambassador for the Cary Collection, helped the Collection obtain significant archives, placed many of his own papers and works in the Collection archive,⁶ and designed etchings for the glass-surrounded RIT Press space in the Wallace Library (please see rit.edu/press/history). At the time of my visit, the Collection staff was preparing for an exhibit on Zapf; it opened in late August—The Zapf Centenary: The Work of Hermann & Gudrun Zapf, 1918–2018, commemorating the 100th birthdays of Hermann Zapf and Gudrun Zapf von Hesse with a retrospective of their influential work and careers. The following drawing,

from Zapf's 1979 RIT summer course, is typical of what he used when demonstrating calligraphy.



Kris Holmes explained, “Many teachers use a chalkboard and they write the letters with a piece of chalk held parallel to the surface, thus creating a ‘broad edge’. But Zapf chose to put up sheets of dark paper and write with his chalk directly on the paper. These sheets are usefully less ephemeral than chalkboard samples. They now provide a little window into Zapf’s teaching.”

I particularly enjoyed being shown the Arthur M. Lowenthal Memorial Pressroom with its cases of type, various styles of printing presses, and other equipment for trimming, binding, and so on.

The image in the left column of the prior page shows an Albion iron hand press No. 6551 (1891) once owned by William Morris in England and Frederic W. Goudy in New York.² An RIT alumnus provided funds to the Collection to buy this press at a Christie’s auction. Associate Curator Amelia Hugill-Fontanel was in charge of restoring the press to working order once it was acquired.⁷ Of the press room and collection more generally, Hugill-Fontanel says, “Each of the Cary presses demonstrates technological progress in the development of printing machines. We firmly believe that they will be preserved through teaching and limited-edition press work.”

According to another story from Curator Galbraith, a fire at Goudy’s print shop destroyed much of Goudy’s work. However, Goudy had loaned a different Albion press and some cases of type which thus survived the fire; that press is also now in the pressroom along with the type which is known as the “The Lost Goudy Types”.

Kris Holmes took the following photo as we walked through the Lowenthal Pressroom. Of the photo she says, “This is the ‘Adopt A Font’ project. Students commit to cleaning up one of the Collection’s wood type fonts. In this case it is one of their beautiful collection of Hebrew wood type. I think this is so typical of the Cary—they find ways of getting students engaged.”

David Walden



Having engineering students on the same campus as the pressroom provides especially interesting opportunities. For instance, in 2015 five students developed an “aluminum hand-operated letterpress, weighing in at 25 pounds and assembled with two Allen wrenches, [that] can produce high quality and repeatable prints”⁸ (photo by Amelia Hugill-Fontanel).



In 2016 another set of students built an 18th Century English common press that was then added to the Cary Collection (see videos^{9,10}).

Visiting the pressroom and learning how it and the rest of the Collection is used in classes throughout RIT makes me wish I were back in college again. Visit the collection if you are near Rochester.

Notes

¹library.rit.edu/gda/historical/about

²tinyurl.com/morris-press

³library.rit.edu/cary/exhibitions

⁴Steven K. Galbraith, *Edges of Books: Specimens of Edge Decoration from RIT Cary Graphic Arts Collection*, RIT Graphics Art Press, 2012.

⁵Others who have held the Cary Professor position are Alexander Lawson (the first Cary professor, library.rit.edu/cary/goudylawson) and Frank Romano (between Zapf and Bigelow, www.rit.edu/news/story.php?id=49409).

⁶library.rit.edu/cary/news/hermann-zapf-tribute

⁷tinyurl.com/amelia-press

⁸rit.edu/news/story.php?id=52390

⁹youtube.com/watch?v=gVbGoQVDYjk

¹⁰youtube.com/watch?v=JJvFYa3EBn0