

The WAYZGOOSE GAZETTE

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The Columbian Press: "A Symbol of American Power"

One look at a Columbian hand press will leave any viewer with a lifelong memory of this rather unusual and majestic press. Invented in 1813 by George Clymer, an American living in Philadelphia, the Columbian hand press was decorated in its cast iron with bizarre symbolic ornamentation and weighed an impressive 2300 pounds.

George Clymer was a hydraulic engineer whose inventive nature begun early in his life. At age 16, young George invented a plough "so infinitely superior to those then in use as to attract the attention of the most scientific men of the day." His decision to marry Margaret Backhouse was the most fortuitous event in his life, for her father was the owner of Durham Furnace in 1787, one of the few cast iron foundries in the colonies. While serving as a teacher to the children of the furnace workers, George explored the mysteries and possibilities of iron casting.

With his skills in carpentry, Clymer was hired in 1800 by Henry Ouram, maker of wooden presses. Ouram was one of several Philadelphia press makers experimenting with various improvements to the wooden Common Press. But Clymer's unique background in engineering and iron founding set him apart and was foundational for the superior press he was to invent in 1813.

A critical weakness in every printing press up to Clymer's Columbian in 1813 was the application of a screw, which when turned by the pressman's pull on a long lever, applied the pressure for printing. Despite great efforts to improve the speed and power of presses, the limitations of the screw prevented success. Clymer eliminated the screw in favor of the "great lever", a concept he observed in Thomas Newcomen's beam pumping engine invented in 1712. Similar to the engine, Clymer's press had a heavy horizontal beam with a vertical, square bolt or shaft connecting it to the platen of the press (in place of the screw). When the pressman pulled on the lever, a



The 1838 Columbian Press in the Lindner Collection, manufactured by Clymer's first competitor, Woods & Sharwood.

series of compound levers and toggles multiplied his effort and subsequently pulled down the great horizontal beam, creating the impression. Clymer's invention reduced the labor necessary in printing and made a better impression than any other press.

But although all-metal presses had begun to replace wooden ones in Europe after the introduction of the Stanhope Press in 1800, American printers remained unaccustomed to the new technology. Despite rumors of faster printing of larger pages with metal presses, few Americans were convinced to surrender their faithful, and cheaper, wooden presses. The Columbian was an expensive investment, costing nearly four times the price of a wooden press. And though its all-metal feature provided a benefit in the way of power and strength, it presented some definite difficulties for the American market.

Having a weight of 2,300 pounds, transportation of the press was difficult. With the Louisiana Purchase, seven new states were added to the Union between 1803 and 1821 and there was no railroad to connect them. Printers traveling westward found the wooden presses made by Ramage to be easier to move and more economical. The market for the press was limited to the major cities of the day, such as Philadelphia and New York. If there was any damage or breakage on the press, the possibility of finding someone familiar with repairing cast iron in a large city was far greater than in the countryside.

The wooden press, however, could be repaired by the local carpenter or joiner.

Though innovative, Clymer's Columbian found little success in its homeland. Less than twenty printers were using Columbians in America by 1817. George Clymer must have been an indefatigable optimist and believer in himself, for at the age of 63 in 1817, he sailed for England. It is with his efforts in England that we gain greater insight into this distinctly Yankee inventor and foremost early American salesman (albeit he failed at home!).

To begin with, Clymer set sail for a country with bitter memories of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, with a press that was distinctly American, replete with symbolism any English viewer would hardly miss. A description of the press in 1825 by Hansard details the imagery on the press:

"...on each pillar of the staple a caduceus of the universal messenger, Hermes (representing the news-distributing function of the press)—alligators, and other draconic serpents, emblemize, on the levers, the power of wisdom—then, for the balance of power we see, surmounting the Columbian press, the American eagle with extended wings, and grasping in his talons... the olive-branch of Peace, and cornucopia of Plenty, all handsomely bronzed and gilt, resisting and bearing down all other power!"

Clymer's time around his father-in-law's foundry must have taught him the possibilities of working in cast iron. The ornamentation found on the Columbian Press was not typical of the style of presses in that time. It was simply a sales technique used by Clymer in competing against the sometimes austere looking presses of his day. In short, he wanted the viewer never to forget his press.

Besides the outlandish visual appearance of his press, Clymer arrived in England fully prepared to

make his press famous and ultimately successful. Though the press found little use in the States, Clymer made sure each of the users gave him a glowing testimonial about the superiority of the Columbian. A pamphlet of these testimonials was distributed by Clymer to the printers in England, leading them to believe the Columbian was the definitive press used by most American printers!

The only concession this daring Yankee made in the appearance of his press was to remove the rattlesnake, a symbol of revolutionary America, from around the brass name plate and replace it with a cartouche of fruit. The other symbols remained. Of course, Clymer's English patent application was very plain, lacking most of the ornamentation, especially the American bald eagle at the top which functioned as a counterweight; in its place was simply a round circle indicating a counterweight.

Clymer brazenly set up his manufacturing sight just down the street from the King's Artillery. On more than one occasion, the King's soldiers must have observed these symbols of American power passing in front of their gates on carts.

When sales of the press dropped slightly, Clymer again obtained letters attesting to the press's advantages over the English presses. He also presented his press to a few reigning dignitaries, including the Czar of Russia who gave Clymer an award worth three times the price of the press! But more valuable to Clymer was the ability to tout such recognition to his customers throughout England and Europe.

Though originally American, the Columbian Press became English by adoption, having been manufactured in England for about 100 years. The memory of Clymer and his strange press faded to the background in America as the more popular Smith Acorn Press and the Washington Press took hold. Besides Clymer himself, a dozen or so companies manufactured the Columbian during the century. Versions could be seen in other countries as well, such as France, Germany, the Hague, and Scotland.

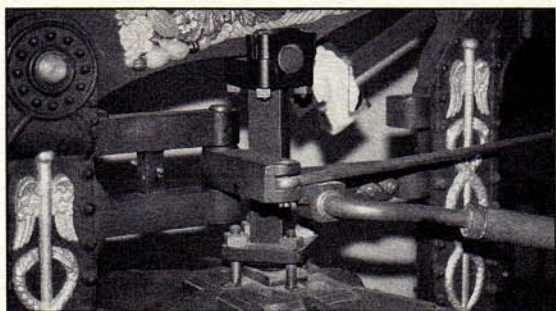
George Clymer died in London on August 27th, 1834, wealthy and reasonably famous for his contribution to printing technology. His presses are now highly sought after by collectors for their unique beauty. And though his presses are rarely used today for printing, Clymer's innovative Yankee sales practices are regularly used by our modern salesmen.

Two Columbians are on display at the Museum, beautifully restored. The 1824 Columbian is the second oldest Columbian in North America (the oldest is still in Lindner's house). On your next visit enjoy a view of these symbols of *American power!*



A Brief Description of the Unique 1824 Columbian in the Ernest A. Lindner Collection at the Printing Museum

The Columbian Press built in 1824 and numbered 196 on its brass plate, is thought to be a unique transitional model of the press manufactured in London by George Clymer. Notice that there are two places where the impression bar and handle could be attached, one on the far side of the press and one on



the near side where the pressman stands. The press is now set up with the handle attached to the near side but by shortening the connecting rod the handle could be attached on the far side. The question of course is, why does this particular press have two hinge points instead of one as all others have? The answer can be found by reading a printers' manual of the time when these presses were built and used.

In 1825, Thomas C. Hansard observed in his book *Typographia* that "the only objection I ever heard made to the press was, the long stretch required to be made by the workman to reach the bar-handle, but I have just seen one making with an improvement to obviate this difficulty, namely, the bar being fixed to the near instead of the off-side."

This objection to the press must have been brought to Clymer's attention and he took steps to correct this objection. But, being a cautious person, he wasn't going to discard the original design without first experimenting with the other position. After adding on a second hinge arrangement to the sand casting pattern he had a prototype cast at his foundry. When he found that the press worked well with the bar on the near side he had the pattern altered again to remove the old hinge position. All presses from 1825 on have the bar on the near side. Apparently only one press was necessary to be made with the two positions, this being number 196, restored to perfect working order by its owner, Ernest Lindner, his wife Harriet and a couple of well-wishing devotees of the handpress.

When viewing this press in person, perhaps the most striking impression is the beautiful coloring of

the various decorative features. Though the basic tone of the press is dark, the eagle on top is brightly gilt as is the caduceus on each staple. The dolphins are silver but the cartouche surrounding the polished brass nameplate and the leaves and cornucopia on the eagle are a blend of colors, some bright and some subdued. Columbia herself is painted up in natural colors, being bolted to a counterweight arm on the back side of the press. Various other parts are gilt or colored and the overall effect is splendid!

While the average Columbian press seen nowadays may have a golden eagle and perhaps a few other parts gilt, there are good reasons to believe the presses originally had a lot of color in addition to the gilt parts. First, there is the logical question — why are the castings so ornate if they were just to be painted monochrome or gilt? Many of the individual parts of the cornucopia and cartouche can only be noticed after being painted their native color. Merely gilding or painting them black makes it difficult to discern the various elements in the design.

Mr. Lindner described a method by which you can discover the colors of the coats of paint which have been applied over the years to a piece of machinery. He referred to the procedure as "opening windows." Paint remover is applied to a small area and after a few minutes the remover is wiped off. After the newly uncovered surface is observed for its color, another coat of remover is applied, then wiped, etc. This process of windowing allows you to go down through the successive layers of paint to the bare metal and thus get a history of the machine's painting.

Mr. Lindner applied this procedure to the 1824 Columbian with interesting but inconclusive results. The eight or nine layers of paint revealed changes of colors — one, a bathroom green — but when getting near to the bare metal, rust and fungus became so intermingled with the paint that definite answers were elusive. Traces of colors & gold were found.

Perhaps the most significant suggestion of presses being bought new not only gilt but colored as well, can be found in the aforementioned *Typographia* by Hansard. In his somewhat facetious description of the ornate features of the press, he describes it as, "all handsomely bronzed and gilt." The fact that he uses the word bronzed in addition to gilt indicates that bronzed must mean something different than what is commonly thought now, that is, of a bronze or golden color. Sure enough, research has revealed that bronzing was a process which could be varied to result in

almost any color. The Encyclopaedia Britannica under Bronzing reads, "With a solution of platinic chloride almost any colour can be produced on copper, iron, brass, or new bronze, according to the dilution and number of applications. Articles of plaster and wood may be bronzed by coating them with size and then covering them with a bronze powder." While bronzing is still possible today, Vance Gerry, who did the decorative painting of the

1824 press, used modern acrylic paints instead. The gold and silver parts were done by Harriet Lindner, using the size and leaf technique, which required a great deal of time, patience and ability.

This brief description was written by Pall Bohne for the occasion of the first public display, after its restoration, of this unique 1824 Columbian Press at the Ninth California Antiquarian Book Fair held in Los Angeles in October of 1974.

Franklin's Wayzgoose: The Annual Open House at the Printing Museum Set For Saturday, November 9th

Since the 16th century, and probably before, printers have needed little excuse to throw a party for themselves. Traditionally, such a celebration is known as a "wayzgoose," being given once a year by the Master Printer, or shop owner, for all his employees and vendors. The excuse for the revelry was the annual changing of the paper which covered the open windows in the shop and diffused the light. The feast was held at the Master Printer's home. Joseph Moxon in 1683 described the event as such:

It is customary for all the Journeymen to make every Year new Paper Windows, whether the old will serve again or no; Because that day they make them, the Master Printer gives them a Waygoose: that is, he makes them a good Feast, and not only entertains them at his own House, but besides, gives them Money to spend at the Ale-house or Tavern at Night; and to this Feast, they invite the Corrector, Founder, Smith, Joyner, and Inck-maker, who all of them severally open their Purse-strings and add their Benevolence to the Master Printer.

That statement about the money for the Ale-houses made by Moxon would be of great interest to your own employees should you ever decide to host a traditional Wayzgoose! Since the days of Moxon, countless Wayzgooses have been enjoyed by members of our trade, with equal number of visits to the local Ale-houses.

In the spirit of Moxon, though not the letter, our patron saint of printing, Ben Franklin, invites you to enjoy a Wayzgoose in his honor at the Int'l Printing Museum. Franklin's Wayzgoose is the annual opportunity for friends of the Printing Museum to view the new exhibits, see the new acquisitions and hear some lore about printing's past. In reality, it is our excuse to throw a rousing party for our Friends.

Franklin has spared little expense for this Gala Open House set for Saturday, November 9th. Besides chatting with the famous doctor himself, special keepsakes will be printed for you on Smith Washington Press, c. 1835, recently acquired from California's Motherlode. Entertainment will be provided by the Leon Guide Band, always a favorite at the Museum. Of course the Master Printer will not neglect your feasting needs: plenty of hors d'oeuvres, desserts and refreshments will be on hand throughout the festive evening.

Ernie Lindner, whose collection is displayed at the Museum, will be on hand to regale visitors with many of his stories. Plus you will hear a presentation by the Museum's Foundation on the future development of the Printing Museum.

As an invited guest to his Wayzgoose, Ben Franklin will ask you to also open your purse-strings for this annual celebration. Tickets are \$18 per person (\$15 if you are a member of the Friends of the Printing Museum) and can be ordered by calling 714/523-2070 or mailing a check payable to the Printing Museum, 8469 Kass Drive, Buena Park, CA 90621. Co-sponsored by PIASC. All proceeds will benefit the Museum's Foundation.

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is issued quarterly for the Friends of the International Printing Museum, founded by David Jacobson and which features the Ernest A. Lindner Collection of Antique Printing Machinery.

Membership into the Friends is \$25 annually and goes to support the programs of the Museum.

The term "wayzgoose" refers to a traditional annual printers celebration, dating back to the 17th century.

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