

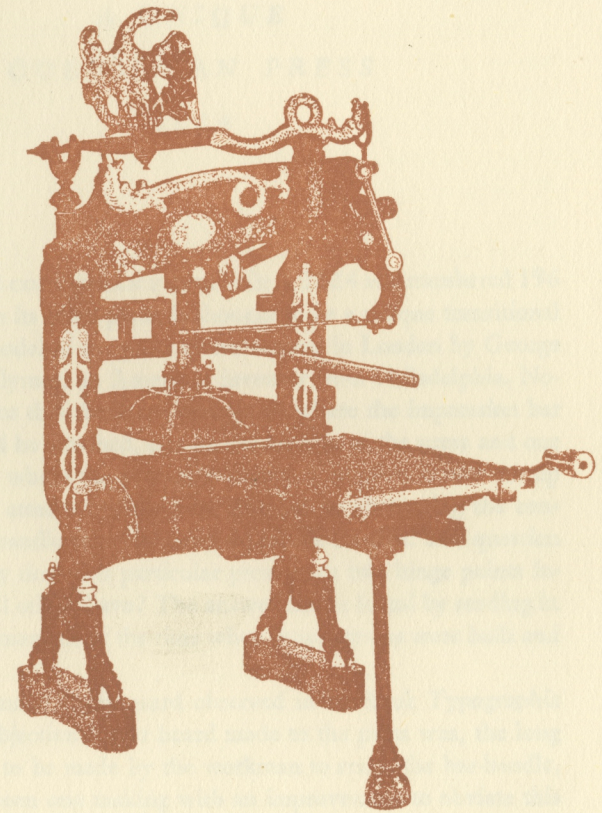
# A UNIQUE 1824 COLUMBIAN PRESS

This booklet was written 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.

Printed by Vance Gerry : The Weather Bird Press



*A brief description by* PALL W. BOHNE

A UNIQUE  
COLUMBIAN PRESS

1824



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, an American inventor from Philadelphia. 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 in certain printers' manuals of the time when these presses were built and used.

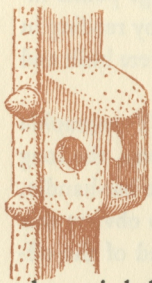
In 1825 Thomas C. Hansard observed in his book *Typographia* that "the only objection I ever heard made to the press was, the long stretch required to be made by the workman to reach the bar-handle, but I have just seen one making with an improvement to obviate this difficulty, namely, the bar being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

The Albion press, introduced in 1821 in London, also had the bar

fixed to the near side of the press and pressmen who worked in printing houses which had both kinds of presses could compare the working of both and found the handle of the Albion easier to grab hold of, though the Columbian was acknowledged to be the superior press when it came to printing heavier forms, the claim being, that even a boy of fifteen could make a good impression of a heavy form with a Columbian.

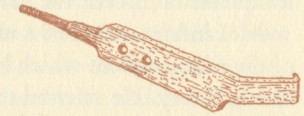
This objection to the press must have been brought to Clymer's attention and he took steps to correct this objection. But, being a cautious person, he wasn't going to discard the original design without first trying out the other position. After adding on a second hinge arrangement to the sand casting 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 and 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, now restored to perfect working order by its owner, Ernest Lindner, his wife Harriet and a couple of well-wishing devotees of the handpress.

The press was acquired in May 1973 at a London auction and restoration work began soon after the press was received late in the summer. During the rejuvenation work, which took about a year's time, Mr Lindner noticed several other things peculiar to this press. First, there is a *protrusion* of metal on the off-side of the press, on the upright pillar, which is called the staple. The protrusion has two holes, one rectangular in shape and the other round and at right angles to the first hole. It would appear that a rectangular attachment went into the one hole and was secured by putting a round pin through the parts to hold them together. Perhaps a shelf or a candleholder was attached at this place.



Another unusual arrangement is the way the *piston*, the square verticle post connecting the great lever to the platen, is held against its guide. A hook-like piece of metal has been forged and is bolted to the piston guide so that the piston is guided by

parts attached to one staple instead of being guided from both staples as is found on all other presses. This being a prototype it was necessary to make some unique fittings which were later changed when the new style press was in production.



When the press had been cleaned of one hundred and fifty years of paint and ink it was noticed by Mr Lindner that small areas of metal had been chisled off flat and slightly below the surface and numbers had been stamped into the flat places on the various parts. The numbers are found in pairs, so that by assembling the parts of the press in such a way that the numbers would pair up, the press would be put together properly. Most likely the presses were shipped unassembled so that Clymer thought these numbers necessary in order that the press could be properly put together by provincial or overseas printers. A close look at a later press manufactured by the Clymer-Dixon partnership in 1830 also revealed the numbers stamped into the small chisled areas, though the numbers are different on the corresponding parts, but still in pairs.

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 but she is not very noticeable, 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 which make up 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." By applying paint remover to a small area then waiting for a few minutes and then wiping off the remover and observing the newly uncovered surface, noting its color, applying another coat of remover, wiping and observing, etc, you can go all the way down through successive layers of paint to the bare metal and thus get a history of the painting of the machine.

He 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 not obtained, though traces of colors and gold were found.

Perhaps the most significant suggestion of presses being bought new with not only gilding 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 Encyclopædia 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." It might be added, that printed matter can be bronzed by the use of a size and bronze powders, which comes in many colors. 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 requires a great deal of time, patience and ability.

It is hoped that these comments will prove informative to those interested in the history of printing. Most of this material was derived from conversation with Mr Lindner and by reference to the publications mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs. Other books which will give a general history of George Clymer and his presses as well as other versions of the Columbian press by the later competitors, are as follows:

GEORGE CLYMER AND THE COLUMBIAN PRESS By *Jacob Kainen*, San Francisco 1950

JOURNAL (No. 5) OF THE PRINTING HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Published by the Printing Historical Society, London 1969

PRINTING PRESSES, History and Development from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times By *James Moran*, London 1973

Mention should be made of a book published in 1970 which extols the pleasure of printing with a press such as the Columbian. It is written by Lewis M. Allen, who, with his wife, Dorothy, operates *The Allen Press* in Kentfield, California. His book, *Printing with the Hand-press*, will surely delight you.

Finally, let me thank Mr Ernest Lindner for letting me share in the restoration (I welded up the frisket frames and the new tympan) of his unique press, which, by the way, is just one piece of a marvelous collection of antique printing equipment he has assembled over the past twenty years or so. The collection contains about fifty major pieces of machinery and a multitude of small items used by printers, typesetters and book binders. The collection is said to be the largest private collection in the world.

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