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Dream comes true

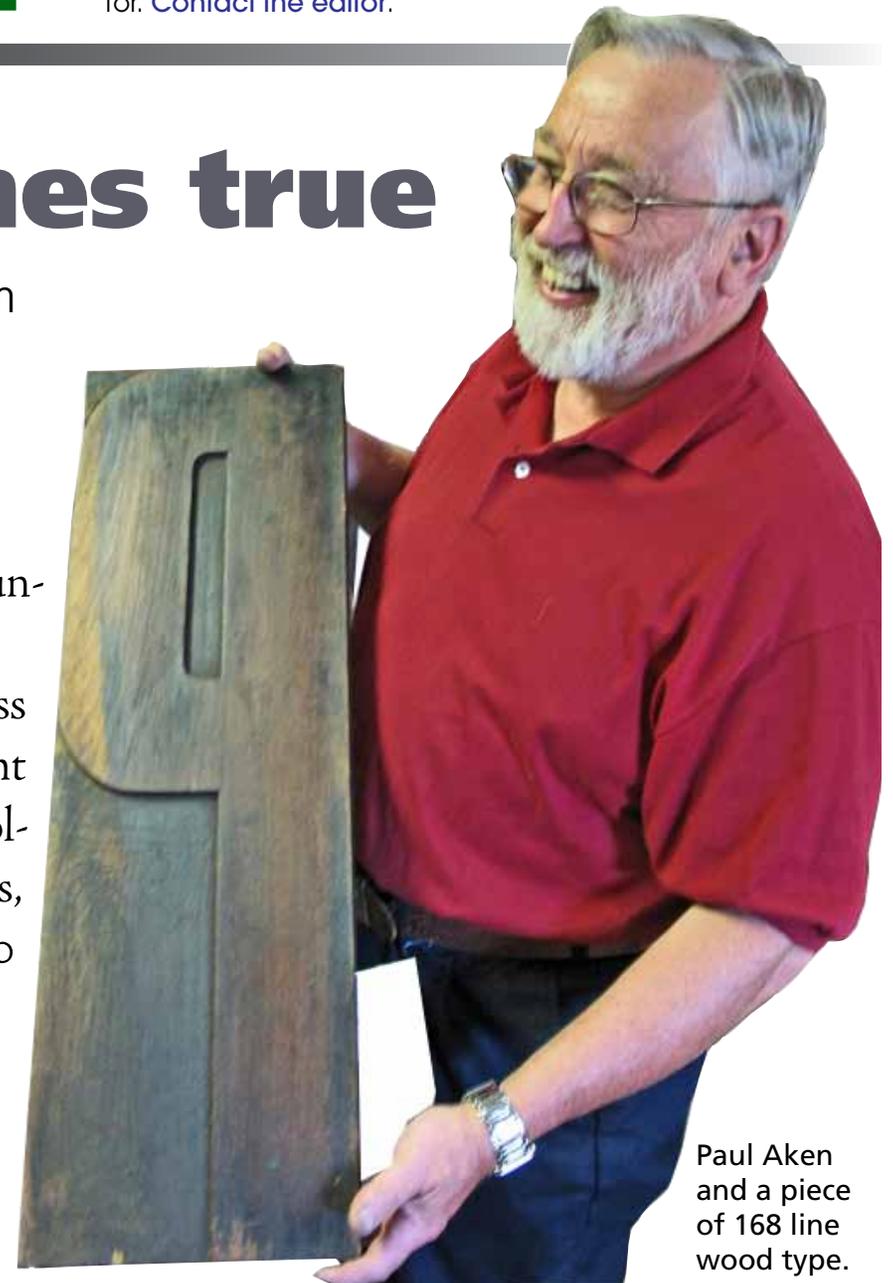
Paul Aken's Platen Press Museum is a treasure trove of letterpress equipment and type

When it hits, it hits hard.

Ask any of the hundreds of "nuts" around the country who collect letterpress equipment, type, etc.

Put Paul Aken, #659, and his The Platen Press Museum squarely into this category but he might be on a pedestal above most others. Why? His collection includes 6000 books, 275 composing sticks, 3000 cases of type, 50 floor model presses and 300 tabletop presses. Space doesn't permit the complete listing. He even knows where everything is—it's all cataloged on his computer for easy location!

Paul started collecting letterpress items in early 1990 after visiting the "Printers' Row" in Chicago



Paul Aken and a piece of 168 line wood type.





The Platen Press Museum—4000 sq. ft. of goodies!

with a dream of someday having his own museum. By 1992 he had run out of room in his garage and found a 4000 sq. ft. building in December 1993 located in Zion, Illinois. In June 1994 he was offered early retirement from his industrial arts teaching career. Everything seemed to fall into place at that time to make his dream come true.

“The joys of running a museum are many,” Paul confessed. “The people see the machines run; the Linotype amazes the people who see it in operation and they love to take home a slug with their name on it,” Paul said. The same is true when they watch a press in operation and Paul’s museum is one of few where visitors can operate a Columbian hand press, the Vandercook and a small tabletop press.

There is a bit of a downside to this extravagant hobby and that is the expenses such as taxes, insurance, utilities and acquisitions! He supports the museum through his savings and once a year he has a sale of type, duplicate equipment, and mats. The



Shown here are just a part of the 300 tabletop presses that are housed at the Platen Press Museum in Zion, Illinois.



A few of 50-some different platen presses on display at the museum.

only other minor downside Paul confessed to is that before people come to visit he has to clean the bathrooms and of course after they leave, has to wash up the presses.

Paul's quest for equipment and type has taken him all over the country. When he hears of something he wants, he hops into his truck and away he goes to purchase it and haul it back to add to his collection. Two

presses are on his "wanted" list to complete his collection: A Lowe and Army press!

Paul's museum also takes in interns at times. They come for either instruction in letterpress or to use the equipment—sometimes both. He trades them an hour of instruction or use of equipment for an hour of help around the museum. He said most of the interns are people who have an



1883 Columbian Press...the only one Paul knows of that visitors are allowed to print on.



The Cowpers Parlous Press.



Paul Aken at the Linotype.

interest in letterpress and he said in some areas probably know more than he will ever learn. "My first student was Jennifer Farrell, Paul said. [Yes APA's Jennifer Farrell.] Paul said she is very creative and knows her type backwards and forwards. Much of her time trading in hours for Paul was in identifying his 3000 cases of type.

Paul picked up his interest in letterpress at an early age in high school in the late 50s. He related how his dad sent him to a technical school to learn a trade because he said Paul was the dumbest kid he had! Turned out not to be true at all because a few years later Paul enrolled in Stout State College in Wisconsin to pursue his degree in teaching. He received his BS in industrial education in January 1966 and his MS in August of that same year.

During those very early years he admits to loving letterpress and especially hand composition, running the Linotype and make-up.



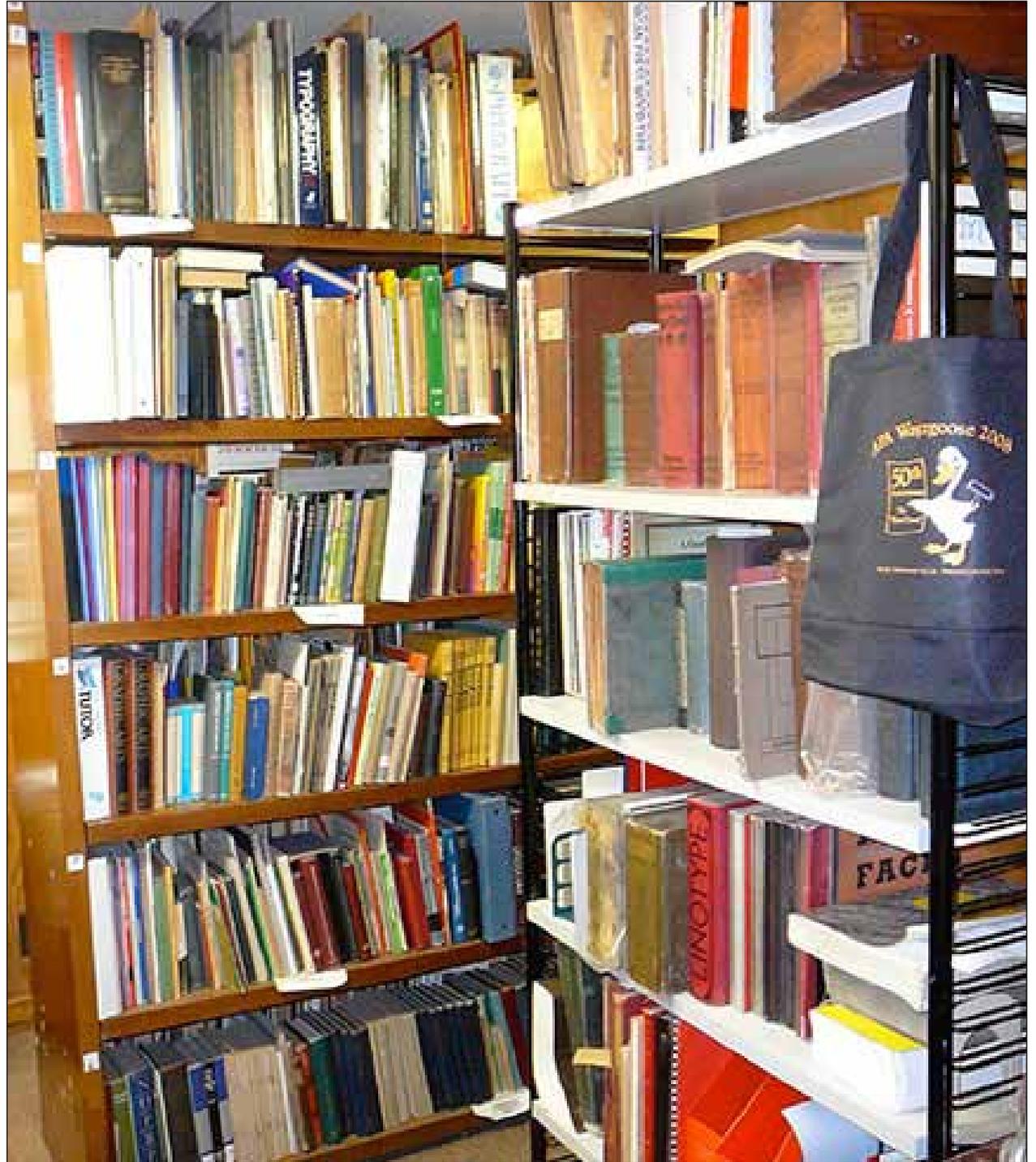
Paul has eight working typesetting machines at the museum.



Top: The Golding Official 8x12 Rotary.
Left: Some of the 6000 books at the museum relating to printing.

During his college years he worked part-time as a Linotype operator at a weekly newspaper and in the composing room at the college. He bought his first press (an 8x12 C&P) in 1970.

Asked about the future of the museum Paul stated, "The future of the museum will probably last through my lifetime and after that the assets will be dispersed to the letterpress community."



He sees the future of letterpress as very good—not necessarily to earn a living—except in special cases—but as a way to supplement one’s salary and as an avocation. With Paul’s humor, he added, “The only limitation is the availability of equipment, and when I kick the bucket, that will ease the shortage.”

Thankfully Paul has a wife, Irene, of some 44 years, who puts up with his obsession with all that is letterpress. Paul has two grown daughters who are married.

With letterpress enthusiasts like Paul around, it gives one a warm, fuzzy feeling about the future of letterpress.



Some of the items Paul has in his “hand bookbinding room.”



Part of the display of 275 different composing sticks.

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For more info, contact [Jim Daggs](#)

Sorry to report the untimely death of member Stan Tichenor, #720. Stan passed away on June 30, 2009. He was 72 years old.