



Fred Gage, 83, pumping iron on his 6x10 Pilot in one corner of his hobby printery. Door at right leads to his den and rest of house. Retired from daily Lewiston, ME *Sun-Journal* in 1990 as sports columnist.

## Looking back

In this issue we're looking back at the early days in APA. Fred Gage at #154 is a veteran and we asked his reactions to those early days.

# The early days in APA were exciting and frustrating

By FRED GAGE

Amalgamated was founded in summer 1958. Two years later, after a flurry of persuasive letters from one of the founders, Frederick MacMahon ("We need more New England members"), I joined. Perhaps because we had the same first name or his offers struck a chord, I became No. 154.

At the time, dues for this young letterpress printers group were only two bucks and APA counted 121 members. But the early goal was 150 and we had to print 150 pieces for the monthly bundle with the extras used for recruiting.

With 83 birthdays behind me, I no longer trust my leaky memory. For this article, I went to the attic and hauled out several cartons of APA bundles from the 60s. In contrast to current bundles, three obser-

ventions pop up: 1) early bundles offered more four-page journals than single pieces, 2) most printers used soft mimeo paper or newsprint (which aged very well), and 3) more articles on this new organization's operations and direction.

Early leaders had already brought new plans into reality. Members were adding pages to helpful loose-leaf APA Manual binders; a lending library of books on printing; a free, lending cut-bank was established. And the treasury was gaining. The first treasurer's report I located showed a balance of about \$65.00. At its fifth anniversary in 1963, the pot held \$761.00 with 123 members.

The December 1962 official membership list showed the highest number assigned was No. 250 (Oral Burdick, Michigan). At that point, only 33 members held numbers under 100. Active early members included

John Boulette, Mass., Edward Tevis, Ky., Bruce Towne, Iowa, Charles Broad, AZ., Mike O'Connor, Minn., Ward Schori, Ill., Ray Albert, Va., Luke Cory, Minn., Irwin Brandt, Ky., Norman Forgue, Ill., Rich Hopkins, WV., Frank Cushing, CA., Parker Worley, NJ., Emerson Wulling, WI. and others familiar to present-day members.

## Growing pains

Monthly bundles averaged 20-25 pieces; and bundle postage was only six to 12 cents. As the roster grew, it included five members in England. But by the mid-60s, there were occasional soundings of unrest.

Most of the wrangling involved the APA rules, especially the “four published pieces per year” requirement. This issue was debated for several years.

Another rupture festered in 1967 when treasurer George Benton complained he couldn't get proper response to his questions to the board and threatened to resign. President John Boulette took over the Secretary-treasurer duties from Benton and assigned duties of president to VicePresident Luke Cory with approval of the board.

Some members enjoyed another spat between Cory and director Norman Forgue. Cory's paper accused Forgue and other classy printers of trying to create a wedge

between what he termed “the pros” and members of lesser print skills.

In the 1968 elections, Bob Oldham of Ohio was elected president with Ron Ruble secretary-treasurer and Frank Spear, Board of directors. Marge Clelland, OH, was voted vice president and I believe the first woman to hold an APA elective office.

Six months after the election, the board gave notice that “the activity rule would be followed.” Claims in some journals said this would dump up to 80 members. This writer

is unsure how many were erased, but I was among those bounced. I appealed and argued that my four-pager should count for more than one small piece like a dance ticket. But I didn't win.

I was bitter about the decision and quickly lost interest in APA. My small shop was already getting busy with commercial work and I was very active in NAPA, the oldest ajay organization. Twenty-eight years later (1998), Marge Clelland convinced me I never should have been ousted, and printers were desperately needed in APA. So, here I am—17 issues of *The Line Gage*, 11 years in *Treasure Gems*, plus assorted pieces to main-

tain my No. 154.

I'm unsure what enticed me into letterpress. I'd earned my biscuits as a journalist even before learned my degree in journalism in four years at Boston University in 1950. I'd been on the staff of a daily and two weekly papers before I bought a new



3x5 Kelsey press. I also bought several books on printing and began my self-taught challenge.

Perhaps because of a 24-year journey in radio-TV I missed seeing my writing in print. Whatever, I love

playing with type and press as a pastime. I advanced through a series of presses to my current c&p Pilot and powered 8x12. I lost control at several auctions (as letterpress plants closed) and purchased far too many cabinets of type and other shop material.

Despite the dire forecasts, I think letterpress will have its place in graphic arts far beyond this century. Technology and speed are impressive. For the hobbyist, arranging slivers of type by hand and pressing his form into paper brings a deep satisfaction that's irreplaceable!

# There were some good ideas in the ‘good old days’ but they weren’t too practical 3

Long forgotten by most members (and probably actually not known to many at all) are the “purposes” of APA. Yes, they are stuck away in our constitution and by-laws—something everyone reads at least once year!

One of the purposes is “to encourage excellence in printing.” For the most part this aspect of APA has been lost for some time now. But back in the 1960s it was alive.

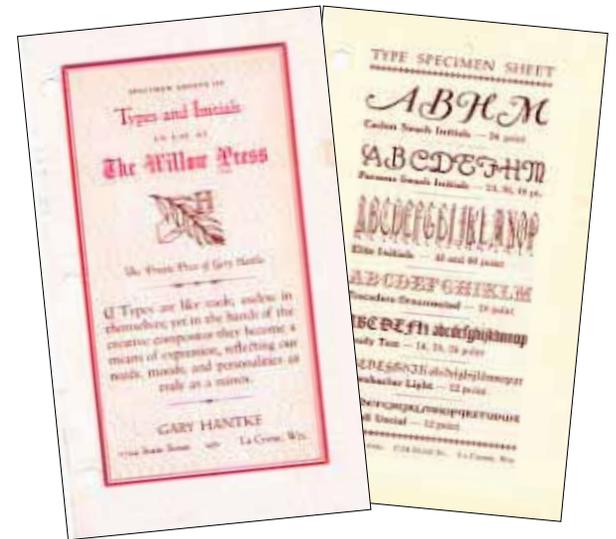
One thing tried but never really too successful was having printing contests. But trying to come in the back door to assist in the “excellence” category were two items—both are long lost in APA’s history.

In the early 1960s someone came up with the idea to have an APA Manual (mentioned earlier in Fred’s article). The idea was that various members would print a 5.5x8.5” sheet on some subject relating to

letterpress printing. These would be bound in a three ring binder and each member would have one. Members with certain expertise in various areas would publish their page. Some of the contents had titles such as: Storage of odd fonts, Rehabilitation of used type cases, Type has “personality,” Selection of type for the hobby print shop, Color—its effective utilization and so on.

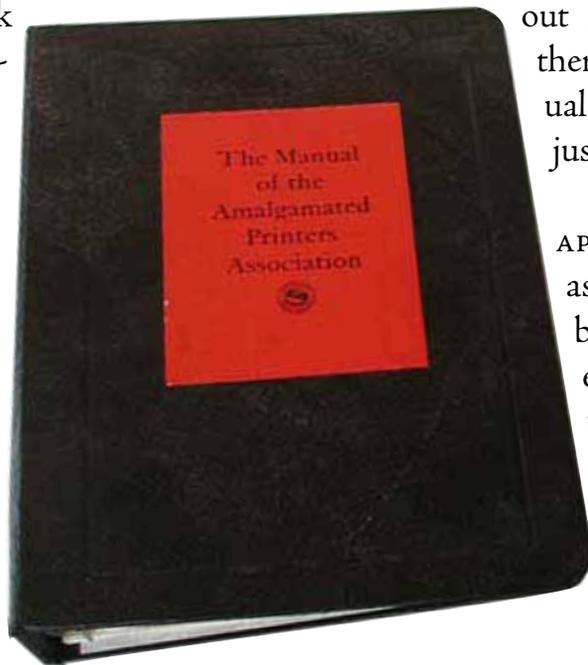
The idea was great but the manual couldn’t sustain itself. As members dropped out and new ones joined, there weren’t enough manuals and so the project just ran out of steam.

A big component of APA’s beginnings was to assist our members to become better printers. Someone came up with the idea that members ought to publish a specimen sheet showing the typefaces they have



in their shop. These would be 4.25x7.25” sheets, again for a three ring binder. It looks like maybe 15 to 20 members did so but as with the Manual, this ran out of steam.

This came about when I was very young and just starting in letterpress. These specimen sheets were very interesting to me especially giving a very careful eye towards those who were better printers and just what kind of type they had in their shop.



# Westchester Chappel prepares for 50th anniversary

# 2010



Next year 2010 the chappel will celebrate its 50th Anniversary. The Westchester Chappel was started in 1960 by Ben Lieberman APA #132 in Westchester, New York. Chuck Klensch #161 was also a founding member. The relationship between the chappel and the APA go back a long way.

This meeting was held at Howie's Gelbert's new home in Bethlehem, PA. Originally all the members lived in the Westchester area about 20 miles north of NYC. We are now spread all over the US and Canada. Members live in New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Washington State, Maine, South Carolina and Newfoundland.

Every year we produce about 300 all letterpress calendars for personal distribution.

Standing, left to right: Raleigh D'Adamo, Arlene Popkin, Steven Hirschberg, Howie Gelbert, Melanie Mauro, Ernie Blitzer, Steve

Saxe. Kneeling: Steve Vararo. Missing: Macfarlane/Richards, Rose, Bryan