

**FROM XYLOGRAPHS
TO LEAD MOLDS AD
1440, AD 1921**

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From Xylographs to Lead Molds AD 1440, AD 1921 by Various

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A 1440

A 1921



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The Rapid Electrotype Company
Cincinnati, Ohio

FOREWORD

Printing has been called "the art preservative of all arts." The invention of individual movable cast-metal type, between A. D. 1440 and 1446, made printing a commercial possibility.

The subsequent rapid spread of the art, in the hands of students and craftsmen, may be said to have been the centrifugal force of the Renaissance and the Revival of Learning, which age, if it can be chronologically delimited, began A. D. 1453.


Printing divulged to the masses the ancient classics which had been locked up in monasteries and accessible only to clerics and the nobility. The common people began to read. Education became popularized.

This brochure is a brief history of the evolution from xylographs to the methods used today for duplicating a typographical printing surface in a solid piece.

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INDIVIDUAL
MOVABLE CAST-METAL
TYPE

HE art of writing, and that of printing from wooden blocks, and all the subsidiary arts of illuminating, decorating and binding manuscripts and books, had long passed out of the exclusive hands of the monasteries into the hands of students and artisans, before printing with individual movable cast-metal type was invented. This epoch making invention came into practical use between A. D. 1440 and 1446.

When, therefore, Johannes Koelhoff of Lubeck, Germany, printed the "Cologne Chronicle" in 1499, he used individual movable cast-metal type. Typographic printing had long before superseded Xylographic printing, that is, printing from a solid block of wood on which type of an entire page were cut individually by hand.

Between the invention of individual movable cast-metal type and the perfection by the Earl of Stanhope of his printing-press, (a period of about three hundred and sixty years), very few improvements had been made in the mechanics of printing. Everything we know today about the art has come into use since 1799, and if Koelhoff had come to life in 1799 and been permitted to resume his occupation of printer, he would have found himself practically familiar with the mechanical equip-

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ment of his craft as used in the establishment of the Stanhope Press in that last year of the eighteenth century.

Centuries before 1440 printing is believed to have been attempted in China; presumably about the beginning of the Christian era. It is said that in the year A. D. 175 the text of the Chinese classics was cut into tablets which were erected outside the national university at Peking, and that impressions—probably rubbings—were taken of them. Some of these fac-simile impressions are still in existence, it is asserted.

Xylography was also practiced in China long before Europe knew the art. It can be traced as far back as the sixth century, when the founder of the Suy dynasty is said to have had the remains of the Chinese classics engraved on wood, though it was not until the tenth century that printed books became common in China.

The authorities of the British Museum also report that Chinese writers give the name of a certain Pi Sheng who, in the eleventh century, invented movable type, and the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts of the same institution possesses a copy of the Wen hsien tung Kao, a Chinese encyclopedia printed in Korea from movable type in A. D. 1337.

To the Koreans also is attributed the invention of copper type in the beginning of the 15th century, and the inspection of books bearing the dates of that period seems to show that they used such type, even if they did not invent them.

The first authentic European printing produced from individual movable type of which we have any recorded impression, bears the date of A. D. 1454. These documents are two different editions of the same Letters of Indulgence issued in that year by Pope Nicholas V. in

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behalf of the Kingdom of Cyprus. We do not know, however, whether they were printed from metal or wood type.

As to the exact date of the invention of printing from individual movable type in Europe, we know only that



it was some time prior to A. D. 1454. Where and by whom the invention came about, a dispute has been waged for more than four hundred years; one of the most hotly contested questions in history. In short, Koelhoff was in part responsible for starting this dispute. He published in his "Cologne Chronicle" a statement by Ulrich Zell, a printer of Mainz in Germany and a contemporary of Gutenberg, that Gutenberg *had improved*,

but *not invented* the art, which he attributes to Coster of Haarlem, in the Netherlands, in the year 1440. Gutenberg stole Coster's type, according to Zell, and printed from them in 1442. Other unrefutable evidence shows that Gutenberg could not have begun printing at Mainz before the end of 1450.

In addition to Gutenberg and Coster we also find Waldfoghel of Avignon, in France, and Castaldi of Felte, in Italy, mentioned as claimants of this invention. The value of their respective pretensions has been summed up by one well known authority in the words, "Holland has books, but no documents. France has documents, but no books. Italy has neither books, nor documents, while Germany has both books and documents."

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As the case stands at present, after careful and impartial examination of all available evidence, no choice is left but to attribute the invention of printing with individual movable cast-metal type to Lourens Janszoon Coster of Haarlem in the Netherlands between the years 1440 and 1446 and not to Gutenberg of Mainz in Germany.

Zell's statement in the "Cologne Chronicle" of 1499 is further substantiated by Hadrianus Junius in his "Beta-via." Junius stated that printing from individual movable type was invented by Coster in Haarlem, and that the "Speculum Humanae Salvationes" was one of his first productions. These two statements were made independently of each other and both are corroborated by books to which they refer.

The "Speculum Humanae Salvationes," attributed to Coster by Junius was partly a folio Latin block-book, and partly typographically printed. From this and other records it has been clearly established that Coster began as a xylographer and ended as a typographical printer, and before 1472 he had manufactured and extensively used at least seven different styles of primitive looking individual movable cast-metal type.

According to tradition, while he was walking in a wood near Haarlem, Coster cut some letters in the bark of a beech tree, and with them, reversely impressed one by one on paper, he composed one or two lines as an example for the children of his son-in-law.

Junius does not say it, but clearly implies that, in this way, Coster came to the idea of the movability of the characters, the first step in the invention of typography. He perceived the advantage and utility of such insulated characters, which hitherto he had been cutting together

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on one block, and so the invention of printing with individual movable type was made.

The questions as to whether he continued to print with movable "wooden" type, or even printed books with them, cannot be answered, because no such books or fragments of them have come down to us. Junius' words on this point are ambiguous, and yet, upon the examination of the first edition of the Dutch Spiegel (of which two copies are preserved at Haarlem) no one would deny that there are grounds for this belief. The dancing condition of the lines and letters make it almost impossible to think that they are impressions from metal type. But for how long and to what extent movable wooden type were employed, if at all, cannot be positively stated.

However, this idea of movability, and the accidental way in which it was discovered, form together the pith of the Haarlem tradition as told by Junius. Nothing seems more natural than that a block-printer should cut such separate letters as Coster did on the bark of a tree and thereupon perceive that they could be used over and over again for a variety of words on different pages, while those which he used to cut in a solid block only served him for one page and for one purpose.

It is equally clear from the Haarlem tradition that the art of casting metal type was the second stage in the invention, a development or outcome of the primary idea of "movable letters," for Junius says that Coster "afterwards changed the beechen characters into leaden, and the latter again into tin ones."

Theod. Bibliander, in 1548, was the first to speak of movable wooden type and to describe them. First they cut their letters, he reports, on wood blocks the size of