

An American Collection of Old-Fashioned Type

By JOHN L. LENT*

TYPE FONTS that echoed the heartbeat of a growing nation again enhance the printer's art through the efforts of Thomas J. Lyons, Boston printer, whose avocation has made a place for the craftsmanship of the past in the panoramic view of the future.

Reaching back more than 100 years Mr. Lyons' collection of old style type faces highlights the events of our history and represents a search that has extended all across the country.

The collection of Americana is made up of more than 1,000 faces that start with the 1800's, end with the gay nineties, and also contains copies of American Colonial printing used in the beginning of the 18th century.

They have come from early type foundries, from printers in all parts of the United States and parts of Canada and in many cases they have been salvaged from the "hell-box."

Realizing that the point system introduced during the 1885-1893 transitory period made all previous type fonts obsolete, Mr. Lyons felt that much of the old time type could and should be saved. Incidentally, he is one of those who contributed to the imposing book of old type faces issued in June by F. N. Phillips, N.Y.C. typographer (P. 38, July *Printing*).

In describing some of the difficulties encountered running down the old type he said, "The old-time printer appreciated his type, thought a great deal of it and, in fact, it was only following his death that it became available.

"His heirs usually had absolutely no use for it and, unless someone who understood its value was present, it usually went to the junk man. Most of the time we who collected it arrived too late."

Mr. Lyons has made no attempt to collect old fashioned text faces. He said they have changed so little through the years it is not worth the many hours required to use them.

**Mr. John L. Lent is the Boston Correspondent of "Printing." This article describing the hobby of Thomas J. Lyons, printer of Boston, is used with permission of "Printing."*

He has, however, dealers on the lookout for old-time type faces from California to Newfoundland. Some of the type fonts have turned up in many strange places such as old homes, attics, cellars, warehouses and once he discovered an excellent collection cached away a mere half-mile from his own home.

A 25-page specimen booklet entitled "Printing Types of Yore," presenting more than 200 type fonts, was made for advertising agencies some years ago by Mr. Lyons. Each line of type features a special face and plays its part in the continuity message the book contains.

The type faces are classified by number rather than name. Most of them, however, are known and can be traced to the foundry or era in which they were produced.

One type face classified by name was a beautiful French Clarendon, which is now recast and renamed "P. T. Barnum." This face has made its appearance in current national advertising.

The booklet also contains borders, many decorative pieces and old time cuts. It is hoped that a complete catalog, listing and naming all the type fonts in the collection, can be published in the future.

Other brochures featuring type fonts of the elegant '80s and the "gay '90s" have also been produced. Made up into advertising messages they have created a sensation wherever seen and always have been followed with an avalanche of mail that, because of the manpower shortage, it has been impossible to answer.

The menus and catalogs of the Wright Tavern and the Country Store in Concord, Mass., featured in a recent *Reader's Digest* article, utilized Mr. Lyons' collection. Jordan Marsh advertisements in the current *Old Farmer's Almanacs* and a series of ads created by Dickie-Raymond, Inc., Boston, are still bringing mail to the Lyons Print Shop in Allston, Boston.

Although there are other collectors searching for old-time type fonts, Mr. Lyons and F. N. Phillips, New York, are among the few actual printers who have given much time to it.