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Printing in a Time of War: The Stamp Album of George E. Mintline

by Bruce L. Johnson

George E. Mintline was a printer from New York State who served in World War I. There is perhaps nothing unusual in that; what sets him apart, however, was that he kept a scrapbook of his experiences both during and after the war, and several years ago I had the good fortune to “win” the scrapbook on eBay. The eBay lot was especially interesting to me because Mintline was also a stamp collector who focused on the history of printing, and he mounted the stamps he found on the subject in his scrapbook, along with myriad other printing-related items.

The stamp issues that Mintline had in his collection are nothing unusual or difficult to acquire, even today. The first page features Bulgaria, Sc384-385, a set issued on 16 December 1940 to mark the 500th anniversary of Johann Gutenberg’s

work on the 42-line Bible, and the 100th anniversary of “the first Bulgarian printing press” and the work of Nikola Karastoyanov (1778-1874), the first Bulgarian printer (Fig. 1). Even before this first page, however, Mintline fashioned what could be considered a “frontispiece” for his scrapbook, the front cover of the February 1967 issue of *The Typographical Journal*, the “official paper of the International Typographical Union” (ITU). It shows a portrait of Gutenberg painted by S. Alfred Nelson, an “80-year-old pensioner [and ITU] member of Downey, Calif[ornia]. . .” Nelson had donated the painting to the ITU headquarters library (Fig. 2).

Other Issues that Mintline included in his scrapbook will be familiar to most GPA members: two first day covers of the Printing Ter-

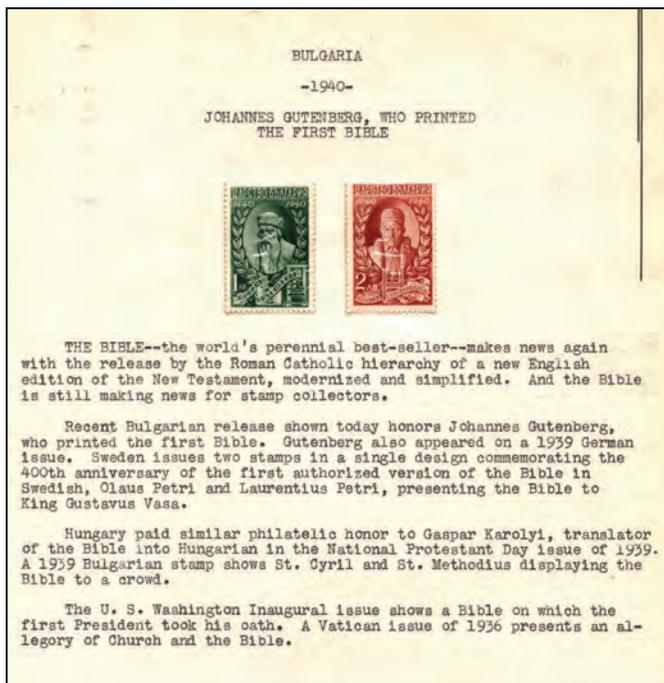


Fig. 1: The first page from George E. Mintline’s scrapbook/album, containing Bulgaria, Sc384-385, plus his historical summary of these and related stamps.

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White & Black: The History of Paper and Printing

If you have a few spare moments to explore one of the best online exhibitions on the history of printing, check out:

<http://www.japhila.cz/hof/0260/index0260a.htm>

That’s the “address” for “White & Black,” by Willy Serres of Hesperange, Luxembourg. His exhibit is one of the Virtual International Philatelic Exhibitions made available through EX-PONET, founded by Milan Gendarmes and Brětislav Janík. Their aim in establishing EX-PONET was to create “a permanent presentation of high-quality stamp and philatelic exhib-

its so as to facilitate on-line study for visitors throughout the world.” That aim is well accomplished if Serres’s exhibition is any indication.

One important addition to anyone interested in adding to their philatelic holdings on the subject: Willy Serres is in the process of selling on the Delcampe Auction site

www.delcampe.net

much of the material he used for his award-winning exhibition, and more. Searching on the seller’s nickname, 0536willy, brings up a remarkable array of philatelic material on the history of printing, papermaking, and ancillary subjects. It’s nice to know that eBay has some competition from Delcampe, and to know that the quality of the material appears (to your genial editor, at least) as high if not better.

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Fig. 2: Gutenberg



Fig. 3: U.S. Sc857 FDCs



Fig. 4: Mexico, Sc748-750

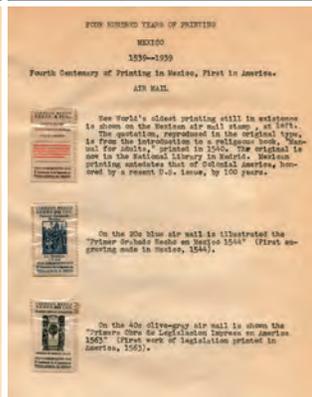


Fig. 5: Mexico, ScC97-C99

centenary Issue (United States, Sc857), featuring the Stephen Daye Press (Fig. 3); three issues from Mexico (Sc748-750), which marked the 400th anniversary of printing in Mexico



Fig. 6: Germany—Berlin, Sc 9N105, and Germany, Sc723, on cover

(Fig. 4), and three additional issues from Mexico (Fig. 5), the airmail issues marking the same anniversary (C97-C99); and a fine cover featuring three copies of the German Occupation Stamp (Germany—Berlin, Sc9N105)

commemorating the centennial of the birth of Ottmar Mergenthaler (1854-1899); Mergenthaler was a German-born inventor who has been called “the second Gutenberg” because of his invention of the Linotype machine, the first device that could easily and quickly set complete lines of type for use in printing presses. Perhaps not coincidentally, this cover also carries a copy of the stamp issued by Germany in 1954 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the publication of the 42-line Bible by Gutenberg (Sc723). It features a design showing Gutenberg at his press based upon a woodcut by Jost Amman (Fig. 6).

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Fig. 7: The Press Room at AEF Headquarters

That George Mintline was a topical stamp collector with a focus on printing was reason enough to purchase his album; perhaps even more fascinating, however, is the series of 18 photographs that make up most of the first third of the scrapbook. The images are captioned with headings such as: Draughting Room (East End), Press Room (Fig. 7), Composing Room, Photographic Studio, Map Room, Photostat Room, and the like. The images document work done at Pershing's General Headquarters for the American Expeditionary Forces in Chaumont, Haute Marne, France, during World War I. Mintline appears in several of the photographs working as a printer/compositor for the 29th Engineers (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8: The Linotypes at AEF Headquarters (left), and George Mintline composing type (right), a portion of the larger image.

Mintline's war service began on 8 December 1917, when he enlisted in the Army in Albany, New York; he then went to Fort Slocum, in New Rochelle, on the western end of Long Island Sound, and to Washington, D.C. for military training. He boarded a transport for France in February 1918 and received further training in Angers. When the Army discovered that Mintline was a printer, it transferred him to the 29th Engineers, a special outfit not connected with any division, and sent him to Chaumont, where John "Black Jack" Pershing (1860-1948) had the main army headquarters and from which he issued battle orders.

Mintline worked at a secret printing plant that had been housed in an old town hall since November 1917. The plant was operated under the direction of G-2-C (Topography), which was a subsection of G-2 (Intelligence). It produced charts, orders, and maps showing the daily progress of the combat forces and other summaries of information, all of which had to be kept strictly secret. Staffed initially with just three printers, by the time the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, 24 printers worked there (including Mintline), "with two linotypes, one linotype saw, three job presses, one folder, one stitcher, and an abundance of type and material."¹

The machines were obtained from various sources, and spare parts were practically unobtainable. The type height of much of the type made in France was often shorter than American made type, which complicated the work done by Mintline as a compositor.

Printing was apparently important to an army in the field during World War I. With two million soldiers scattered all over France in numerous encampments, it was vitally important to communicate orders and detailed instructions to them, including battle orders, methods of handling food at base camps, how to relate to the local populace, and how to salute officers properly. There were also troop movement instructions, hospital and rail-

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road forms, passes for leaves to Paris or Mar-seilles, and propaganda meant to undermine the morale of the enemy.

The base printing plant for the American army was located at Langres, in north-eastern France, and was equipped with French and English Linotypes, lithographic presses, small presses, and many cases of type. Although Mintline spent most of his time at the Chau-mont headquarters, he did spend at least a week at Langres, before receiving orders to sail back to the United States on 25 June 1918. He was mustered out of service on 15 July 1919.

Mintline had been “obligated” in Typographi-cal Union No. 4 on 4 January 1914 (Member No. 72382), and following his military service, on 27 January 1923 he began working as a compositor for Williams Press, Inc., in Albany, New York (Fig. 9). He retired from the business on 31 De-



Fig. 9: George Mintline composing type, about 1956

cember 1956. Because of his experience in the Great War, during World War II, Ernest F. Barvoets, his boss at Williams Press, appointed Mintline as the Williams Press War Stamp Sales Manager; his slogan was “Use all your pay envelope change to buy war stamps.” In 1954, Mintline received his 40-year pin from Albany Typographical Union No. 4, which he mounted in his scrapbook (Fig. 10). The recognition certificate reads in part: “Through trying times and good you have continued your membership in No. 4. It has been difficult now and then to meet your obligations, especially in the face of the unemployment periods and the few instances when there has been unpleasantness between the union and the employers. We are proud that you have weathered the storms that confronted us. . . .”

Although it now, too, is retired, in 1923 the linotype seen next to Mintline in Fig. 8, eventually found its way to the Government Printing Office Apprentice School in Washington, D.C. Nicknamed the “General Pershing,” it was No. 93, a Model 5, single magazine, and was used for training apprentices and “to set at least one

odd-measure line for every bill printed for Congress.” As a news story later recalled, “General Pershing had these machines made with a specially cast low base so as to allow them to fit in the truck in which they



Fig. 10: George Mintline’s 40-year pin from ATU. No. 4.

were transported over France as armies of the A.E.F. changed headquarters.”²

George E. Mintline died in June 1981 at the age of 90. I don’t know how his scrapbook came to be offered on eBay, nor do I recall from whom I bought it. A recent online obituary, however, indicates that George Mintline’s son, Selleck “Gene” Mintline, who passed away on 28 Sep-tember 2012, picked up his father’s hobby and was an avid stamp collector beginning as a young boy. I suspect he deserves the credit for preserving his father’s war service and collecting legacy by offering the scrapbook to someone who might appreciate it; this has been my at-tempt to fulfill that wish.

Notes

1. “Mintline Prints for Pershing in World War of 1918,” in *Between the Lyons*, 1 March 1940, page 2. Most of the specific information included in this story came from the same article, mounted in George Mintline’s scrapbook.
2. “Pershing Machine in Actual Operation in France During the First World War,” by William Boteler, in *The AGPO*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (21 June 1940), pages 1, 5-6.



The General Pershing Linotype on display in the Government Printing Office 150th Anniversary Exhibit, “Keeping America Informed: The U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861-2011: 150 Years of Service to the Nation,” which opened to the public on 22 June 2011.