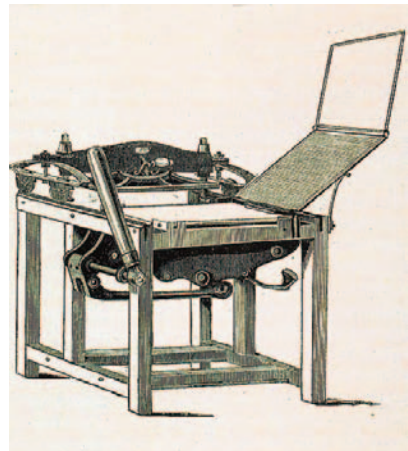


The Museum of Printing, North Andover, MA, and the Letterpress Press

Wooden presses from Gutenberg to Franklin



Gutenberg replica



Ruthven press



Ramage press



Common press



Franklin's press

In 1440, Johann Gutenberg adapted a wine/cheese press for printing. The key element is the screw. In 1817, Adam Ramage imported a Ruthven press. In 1818, he filed a patent for an improvement on the Ruthven Press; by re-designing the screw mechanism that lowered the print to the platen, he made the process much quicker and much easier. His first models were built of mahogany, but he changed parts of the press to cast iron, which made the mechanism far more durable. He eventually altered the design so that the entire device was made of cast iron.

Dr. Franklin's remarks relative to this press, made when he came to England in 1768. "The Doctor at this time visited the printing office of Mr. Watts, of Wild Street, Lincoln's Sun-Fields, and going up to this particular press (afterwards in the possession of Messrs. Cox & Son, of Great Queen Street, of whom it was purchased) thus addressed the men who were working at it, 'Come my friends, we will drink together. It is now forty years since I worked like you, at this press, as a journeyman printer.' " The Doctor then sent out for a gallon of porter, and he drank with them." There are fewer than a dozen original wooden presses extant in North America. Titles in red indicate a press on exhibition in the Museum's collection.

Metal handpresses from Lord Stanhope to Richard Hoe



Stanhope metal press



Marder Luse press



Columbian



Adams press



Hoe Washington press



Rust patent plate

In 1828, Cope, Sherwin & Company designed and built the Imperial press in Shoreditch, London. Cope was said to be related to R.W. Cope, the inventor of the Albion press. Although the Imperial shares a number of similarities with the Albion, the Imperial is the more powerful press due to its leverage system, which was influenced by Stanhope. A leaf spring raises the platen of the Imperial, while the Albion employs a coil spring located in its cap.

The basic design of this press is patterned after the early presses made of wood and dating back to Gutenberg. In 1827, Samuel Rust of New York improved and patented it. In 1835, Rust's patent came into the possession of R. Hoe & Co. While under manufacture by this company, the term Washington Hand Press came into being. The press works by parallel motion which brings the flat bed under the platen. Impression is then applied by a toggle joint lever. Presses of this type were used by photoengravers for proofing plates. Many firms manufactured the Washington, some well into the 1900s. The Washington press differs from the Columbian and Albion in that a very simple toggle joint provides pressure to the platen, and on each side of the platen are coil springs which raise it to open position.

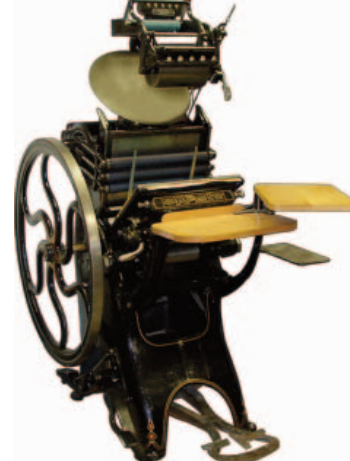
Platen job presses with automatic inking



Gordon Franklin New Style



Colt Armory



Golding Jobber



C&P New Style Jobber



Golding Pearl



The American platen jobber derives from that of Stephen P. Ruggles of Boston in the 1840s, in which platen and bed were hinged below their lower edges to close on each other in clamshell fashion. That basic form became known as the "platen jobber." Starting in the 1850s, George P. Gordon set a standard. As Gordon's patents expired, many entrepreneurs produced their own versions of his Franklin Jobbers. Gordon introduced his Improved Franklin Jobber with a different mechanism for controlling the movements of the platen and bed. The bed moved through about half the distance as the original model, resulting in a reduction of power needed to drive the press. Other press builders began copying the original model. The Challenge Gordon, built by Shneidewend & Lee of Chicago, appeared in 1884.

Within 10 years, 11 other companies were building presses based on the Gordon jobber design. A number of jobbers almost identical to Gordon's original were made: the Bronson (1894-1897), S&L (1884-1893), California Reliable (1886-1889), Chandler & Price (1886-1961), Old Reliable (1888), Powell (1884), New Era (1884), Dodson (1848-1853), Ben Franklin (1886-1898), Madison (1890-1892), and Cleveland (1890-1895). Several competitors also appropriated Gordon's name: the Jones Gordon (1888-1901), Challenge Gordon (1884-1910), Thorp-Gordon (1886-1890), Straight Line Gordon (1891), and Peerless Gordon (1891-1900).

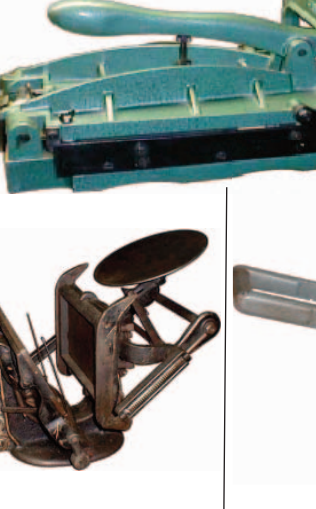
Table-top platen job presses



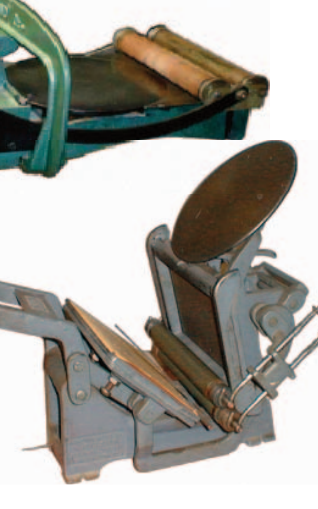
C&P Pilot (Oldstyle)



Kelsey



Baltimoreans



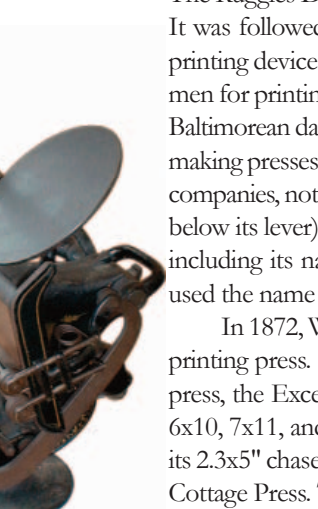
Adana



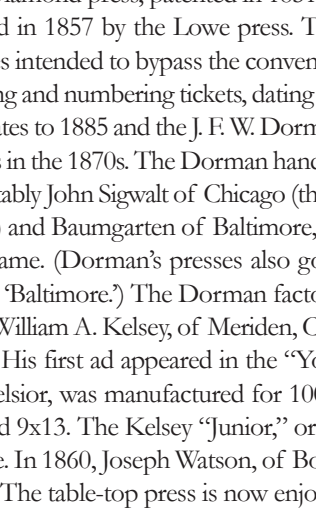
Excelsior Model P



Ideal No. 4



Model No. 1

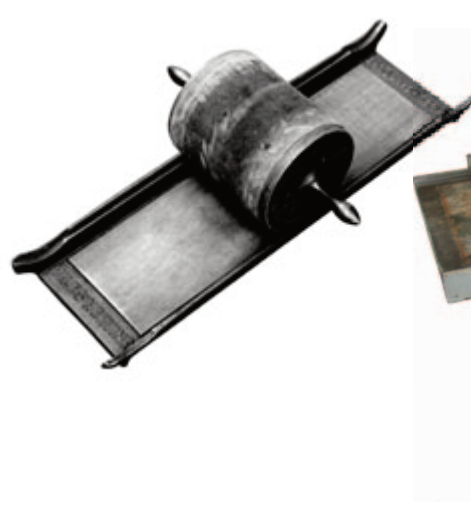


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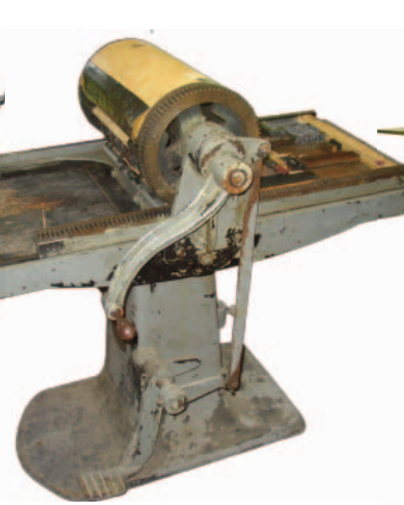
The Ruggles Diamond press, patented in 1851, was designed for printing cards and small work. It was followed in 1857 by the Lowe press. These presses were followed by other specialized printing devices intended to bypass the conventional job printer and appeal directly to businessmen for printing and numbering tickets, dating documents, and marking crates, for example. The Baltimorean dates to 1885 and the J.F.W. Dorman Company of Baltimore. The company started making presses in the 1870s. The Dorman hand-lever presses were popular and copied by several companies, notably John Sigwalt of Chicago (the Chicago No. 10 lacks the rippled ornamentation below its lever) and Baumgarten of Baltimore, which copied most of Dorman's Baltimore line, including its name. (Dorman's presses also go by the name 'Baltimorean,' while Baumgarten used the name 'Baltimore.')

The Dorman factory was lost to the 1904 Baltimore Fire. In 1872, William A. Kelsey, of Meriden, Connecticut began the manufacture of an amateur printing press. His first ad appeared in the "Youth's Companion" for December 19, 1872. His press, the Excelsior, was manufactured for 100 years with minor changes in sizes of 3x5, 5x8, 6x10, 7x11, and 9x13. The Kelsey "Junior," or Model-R, was made for printing cards that fit in its 2.3x5" chase. In 1860, Joseph Watson, of Boston, later of New York, brought out the Adams Cottage Press. The table-top press is now enjoying a renaissance for hobbyists worldwide.

Proof presses (low end and high end)



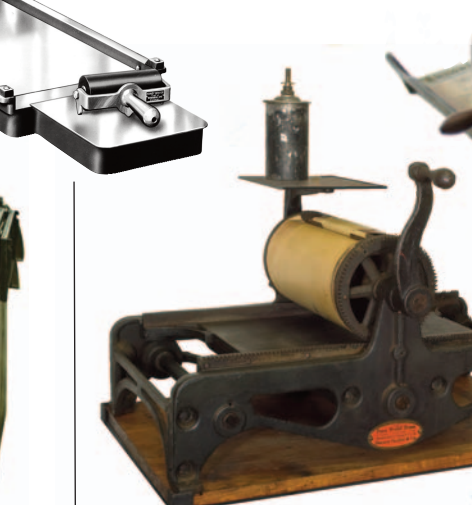
Hoe Galley, 1870



Potter



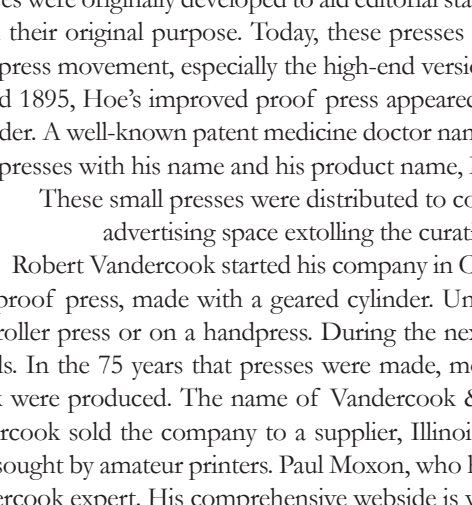
Vandercook SP-15



Vandercook 00



Poco No. 0



Miles Nervine

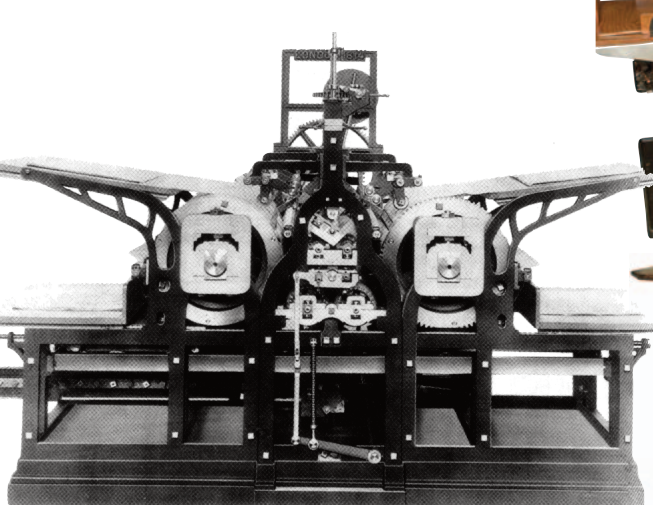
Galley presses were originally developed to aid editorial staff. The terms "galley" and "proof" derive from their original purpose. Today, these presses have become the mainstay of the global letterpress movement, especially the high-end versions.

Around 1895, Hoe's improved proof press appeared with a larger diameter but lighter weight cylinder. A well-known patent medicine doctor named Miles had Hoe make a number of these presses with his name and his product name, Miles Nervine, cast into the frame.

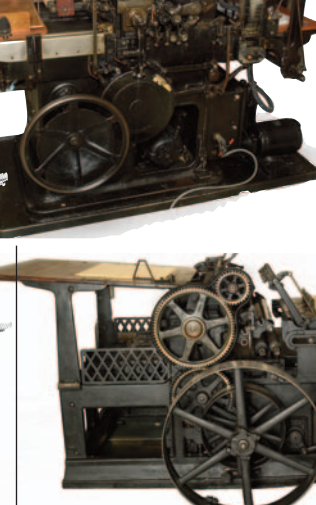
These small presses were distributed to country newspapers in exchange for advertising space extolling the curative powers of Miles Nervine.

Robert Vandercook started his company in Chicago in 1909. The first press was a "rocker" proof press, made with a geared cylinder. Until this time all proofs were either made on a roller press or on a handpress. During the next 54 years there were 60 different press models. In the 75 years that presses were made, more than 38,000 with the name of Vandercook were produced. The name of Vandercook & Sons was used until 1968, when E.O. Vandercook sold the company to a supplier, Illinois Tool Works. Today, Vandercook presses are sought by amateur printers. Paul Moxon, who has run workshops at the Museum, is the Vandercook expert. His comprehensive website is vandercookpress.info.

Automated presses



Koenig steam press, 1814



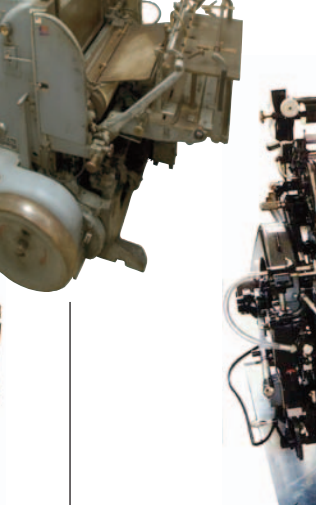
Kelly-B, 1914



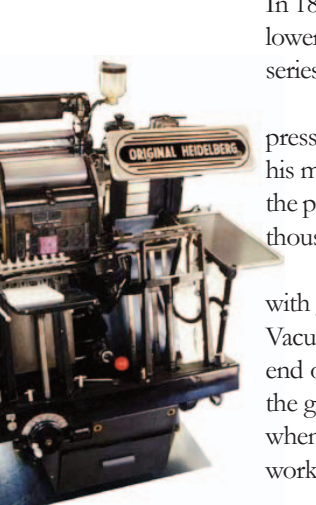
Whitlock, 1885



Hoe flatbed press, 1882



Miehle Vertical, 1947



Heidelberg Windmill, 1913

In 1803, in Germany, Friedrich Koenig envisaged a steam-driven press in which the raising and lowering of the platen, the to-and-fro movement of the bed, and the inking of the form by a series of rollers were controlled by a system of gear wheels.

The Hoe press was built from ideas that were obtained from the English flatbed cylinder presses. Hoe is said to have been the first American machinist to employ steam as a motor for his machinery. Also referred to as the "lightning press," Hoe's invention was first introduced to the printing industry in 1847 in the offices of the Philadelphia Public Ledger. The resulting eight thousand papers per hour revolutionized newspaper printing.

The most radical feature of the Heidelberg press is its windmill feeder. This delivery blade, with grippers on both ends, moves in quarter turns from feeding, to print, to delivery positions. Vacuum suckers lift unprinted sheets from the pile holding them until seized by grippers in either end of the windmill blade, which revolves, carrying the sheet to the edge of the platen. While the grippers still hold the sheet, the press closes, making the impression. The Heidelberg began when German machinist Andreas Hamm established a factory in Heidelberg in 1850. In 1912, work and testing began on the Heidelberg Original press. It made its debut in 1913.