

## The Old Printing Office in New Harmony

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In October of 1932, Harry T. Slater locked the forms and printed the final number of the *New Harmony Register*, which his father, Charles W. Slater, founded in 1867. Father or son printed the paper each week for sixty-five years. Some time after the demise of the *Register*, Mr. Slater delivered the office key to Miss Mary E. Fauntleroy, who owns the building in which the paper was so long published, the only stipulation, or rather request, being that the press remain in the room just as it had been standing for many years. It was made known that, before he retired, the editor had been visited by an agent of Henry Ford. The agent told him that the manufacturer of cars would probably buy the plant, but with the understanding that Slater should go to Dearborn and superintend the setting up of the press and office so that it would be a true duplication of the old plant of the *Register*. Whatever the terms of the offer, they were not accepted.

Upon investigation, one finds that this office stands in an unusual position as it is not only intact and where it was in constant use for over three score years, but it is the last office in Indiana, and, so far as known, the very last office in the United States, in which the Washington Press was the only means of printing a regular weekly newspaper. The *New Harmony Register* was established by Charles W. Slater after his return from service in the Union Army during the Civil War. He had previously started the publication of a weekly paper called the *Advertiser* which he established in 1858 with Albert Norcross as his assistant. Norcross joined the Union army and later, when Slater enlisted, the publication was suspended. Norcross lost his life at Nashville, but Slater lived through the war and was mustered out in 1865. In time he resumed the business he had left, but, after a time, gave his paper a new name, calling it the *New Harmony Register*, under which title it ran until his son, Harry T. Slater discontinued publication in 1932.

Charles W. Slater was born in London in 1826, the year the *Philanthropist* ("Boat Load of Knowledge") landed at New Harmony. When only a small boy he shipped as cabin-boy with a vessel on which his brother was mate. He made several voyages to the West Indian Islands and to South

America, but in his late 'teens he gave up the sea, landed at Galveston and settled at Victoria, an inland town about a hundred miles west of Galveston. At that time, Texas was an independent country and was offering free land to settlers who would agree to certain conditions. Young Slater took up a section and joined with neighbors to fight Indians from time to time. On account of illness, he soon gave up his ranch, went to New Orleans and then to St. Louis. Here he obtained employment in a bakery and also joined a theatrical troupe. The players went on the road and his tours finally brought him to New Harmony. Slater became so much in love with the place that he remained. In 1848, he obtained employment in the printing office of James Bennett. He learned to set type under that veteran printer, who, as a boy, had learned the printing trade in the school set up by the Owens and William Maclure.

Slater later engaged in other activities, but the newspaper work appealed to him and he went to Cincinnati to work on the *Commercial*. He crossed the River to Newport, Kentucky, where he worked on the *Newport News* for a while. Then he went to Louisville to work on the *Variety*. He returned to New Harmony in 1851 and married Mary A. Beal. Returning to Louisville with his bride, Slater was employed in the bindery department of Hull's Job Printing Office. From Louisville he went to Indianapolis to work at job printing, then to Evansville to work on the *Enquirer* until it was discontinued. He next returned to New Harmony and established again his newspaper, the *Advertiser*. . . .

The office was opened (assembled might be a more appropriate word) on the second floor of Rappite Dormitory No. 2. Here the *Register*, successor to the *Advertiser*, was also published from 1867 to 1875, when the press was moved to a larger and more convenient room on the third floor where it is today. The old Dormitory is worthy of a short description as the printing office fits into it so perfectly. It was built in 1822, and is not only the largest and most pretentious community building constructed by the Rappites but is the best preserved in original plan and condition.

The building, which was used principally as a dormitory for men, is seventy by ninety feet with three stories and a very large attic. It is built of brick that were made on the grounds. The massive stones of the foundation were quarried

in the nearby hills and the fine timbers used in the framework and to support the heavy roof were cut from the virgin forests in and near New Harmony. Three large chimneys were built, one at the north end, one at the south end, and the other near the center of the building. These permitted the location of large fireplaces on each floor. An old barbecue pit, on the first floor at the east side of the central chimney, is just as it was in the day of Father Rapp. This building is one of those selected by the federal Government as worthy to be preserved, and architects sent for that purpose reconstructed the plans of the building to the smallest detail.

Since the Rappites sold the town to Robert Owen, Old No. 2 has served the community in many capacities, and has seen a varied and sometimes tempestuous life. It has served as a hotel, as an apartment house, with several prominent families making it their home at various times, and as a post office. Fraternal organizations have used it, and offices of lawyers and doctors have been located in it. Merchandizing enterprises both retail and wholesale have occupied it. During the Owen regime, it was in this building that Joseph Neff established his Pestalozzian school. It served as laboratory or workshop for some of the scientists who made their homes in New Harmony, and also as a place for their meetings and their schools. In this building, meetings were held by the light of artificial gas, manufactured in the building, whereas, not many miles away in Spencer County, Abraham Lincoln was reading by the light from a fireplace.

Of particular interest was the School of Printing which was established in 1826. In this School, one of the most apt pupils was James Bennett who remained in New Harmony, and, in 1848, taught young Charles W. Slater to set type. He later taught the business to his son Harry T. Slater, and then, in the turn of fate, James Bennett set his own last stick of type in Slater's office. With this succession went many of the old instruments and equipment with which the *Register* office was set up. Here it is appropriate to tell that, when the *Industrial Arts Magazine*, a few years ago, investigated the history of printing as a school subject and began to search for the earliest use of printing as part of the course of instruction they quite naturally looked to the older cities and especially to Philadelphia, the home of Benjamin Franklin. They were surprised to discover that in none of those places,

but in New Harmony, a small town in Southern Indiana, was the first school for printing and that tuition in that school was free. The teacher was Cornelius Tiebout, a practical printer and engraver, who was among those active in the work of printing. The *Entomology* and *Conchology* of Thomas Say, the eminent scientist, were printed and bound in the school printing office and the illustrations as well were all made there.

After the deaths of Tiebout and Say, the work of printing was carried on as a school subject and one of the teachers wrote to William Maclure, who was in Mexico, that the boys learned "to set type very quickly. . . . The plates to *Sylvia* are to be colored by our scholars. . . ." The boys in the school printed the *Disseminator*, one of the earliest and best known papers published in southern Indiana. Another man who was connected with printing in New Harmony from the first was Josiah Warren who invented the first rotary printing press. The tradition is that Warren presented his invention to a convention of printers, and since they were strongly opposed to the idea, he destroyed his first model on his return to New Harmony. However, it is claimed that a man, who heard Warren's description, made a similar press and had it patented.

In the Old Printing Office in New Harmony, the central figure is a Washington Press. It is a six-column, two-page press and is said to have been assembled in the office where it now stands, having been made of two smaller presses which had been used for a number of years and on which the *Western Atlas* and the *Gleaner* had been printed. These papers, which preceded the *Advertiser*, were published by James Bennett. Among other articles of almost equal age and interest are an editor's desk and chair which are over eighty-five years old. The desk is hand-made and pigeon-holed. It was made for Bennett. There is a card press more than fifty-five years old and three wrought-iron cases made by John Echolls, New Harmony blacksmith, in 1858. There are two type-cases made by Josiah Warren after his own design, the type receptacles being round instead of square as are those of the present day. There is a beautiful hand-carved, hand-wrought metal clamp used to hold papers. This clamp represents a shock of wheat the heads clearly showing the plump grains outlined in the brass. Harry T. Slater re-

calls that as a boy he used to shine this clamp frequently with metal polish just for the enjoyment of bringing out its unusual beauty. Still standing intact is an old wood-stove formerly used in heating the printing office. Besides the oval firebox it carries a cylindrical box-like arrangement set in the pipe a few feet above the stove in such manner as to afford additional heat.

There is a six-font wood-type and a one-font wood-type all made by hand some time prior to 1850, probably nearly all made by Josiah Warren. The two imposing stones, each three feet and three inches by six feet and six inches, were made and used as grave stones—having been laid flat to cover the graves. These stones became available when the bodies were re-interred and suitable markers placed over their graves some time in the early 'forties. These stones having been used with the smooth side up, the inscriptions on them were forgotten. Recently, when preparing the Old Printing Office for public inspection, readers can imagine the astonishment when it was discovered that one of these stones had covered the grave of Thomas Say while the other had been placed over the adjacent graves of two sisters of William Maclure.

There is newspaper body-type in the Office which was in constant use for seventy-three years; one case of agate and non-pareil; one case of brevier with italics; a case of long primer and italics. The case-stands were all made in New Harmony. In the office there are about fifty kinds of display and fancy types, all kinds of letter faces and sizes, an accumulation of more than seventy-five years. There are many old electrotypes and various other pieces of equipment used in printing in the early days.

Besides the items mentioned, there are complete files of the *Advertiser* and *Register* since 1858. Twenty six of these volumes are bound. They afford a continuous record of New Harmony for more than three-score years. Within the pigeon-holes of the old Bennett desk were found many old and interesting pamphlets, papers, and books. One of these is a copy of the *Indiana Pocket Manual* printed in 1845; another a copy of the *Shipmaster's Assistant* printed in 1801, which was once the property of Gad Peck, captain of a privateer. This was brought to New Harmony by the widow of Captain Peck and found its way in some manner to the newspaper

office. Upon retiring five years ago, Mr. Slater reserved this book and took it to his home. Among some equipment acquired more recently, were plates for printing music composed by the late Peter Lichtenburger of New Harmony.

In the early days of the *Register*, as well as that of its predecessors, it was necessary to fill the entire paper by hand as there were no "patent" insides nor plates of advertising as there is today. Incidents are related of almost an entire edition of some of the old papers being reprinted the following week either because the "help" was indisposed or because there just wasn't enough to fill a new issue. It is said that some of the old time type-setters were unbelievably fast workmen and that a surprisingly large number of "sticks" could be set up by one person in a given time.

At the time Albert Norcross enlisted in the Union army the following item appeared in the *Advertiser*:

Our assistant having suddenly determined to enlist in the army and due to events now transpiring which may lead to the enlistment of many others, we are compelled to suspend publication of the ADVERTISER. The suspension is only temporary and we are determined to commence its publication as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made. The few who have paid their subscriptions in advance for the fourth volume, can, if they desire it, have their money returned to them, and for this purpose we call upon all those indebted to us to make immediate payment. If this call is not attended to the accounts will be placed in the proper hands for settlement.

Charles W. Slater soon followed his assistant into the service, enlisting in Col. Richard Owen's regiment, the Sixtieth Indiana Volunteers. He served until mustered out in 1865. Taking up his work as publisher of a weekly newspaper, he continued until 1894, when he laid down his last stick of type and wrote *finis* to a romantic life. His son, Harry T. Slater, took up the work and carried on with few changes either in equipment or methods until advancing age admonished him that he could not put out the *Register* much longer without assistance. Nevertheless, when the second Slater decided to retire he did not "unlock the last form and throw in the last type" but, with an unusual sense of the value of his plant, he left the last form just as it was used in printing the last number of the paper so that future generations may see the plant just as it was when in operation. Two years later, the retired printer returned to the Old Printing Office, set-up in type, and ran off several copies of a poem

which his life long friend, Ann Ford had requested. This he also left set-up just as it was when he printed the poem in 1934.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harry T. Slater is still living in New Harmony. He is hale and well preserved. He lets his white, curly hair grow long every winter, and is an interesting and unusual character. He was never married. His father, Charles W. Slater, died in 1894. The author, who lives in New Harmony, has had excellent opportunities to study the Old Printing Office. He knows the old printer, Harry T. Slater, well, and talked freely with him while this paper was being prepared. Mr. Slater also read the manuscript. Many citizens of New Harmony have never been in the Old Printing Office, and many have never been able to engage in conversation with the retired editor, who is a taciturn man.