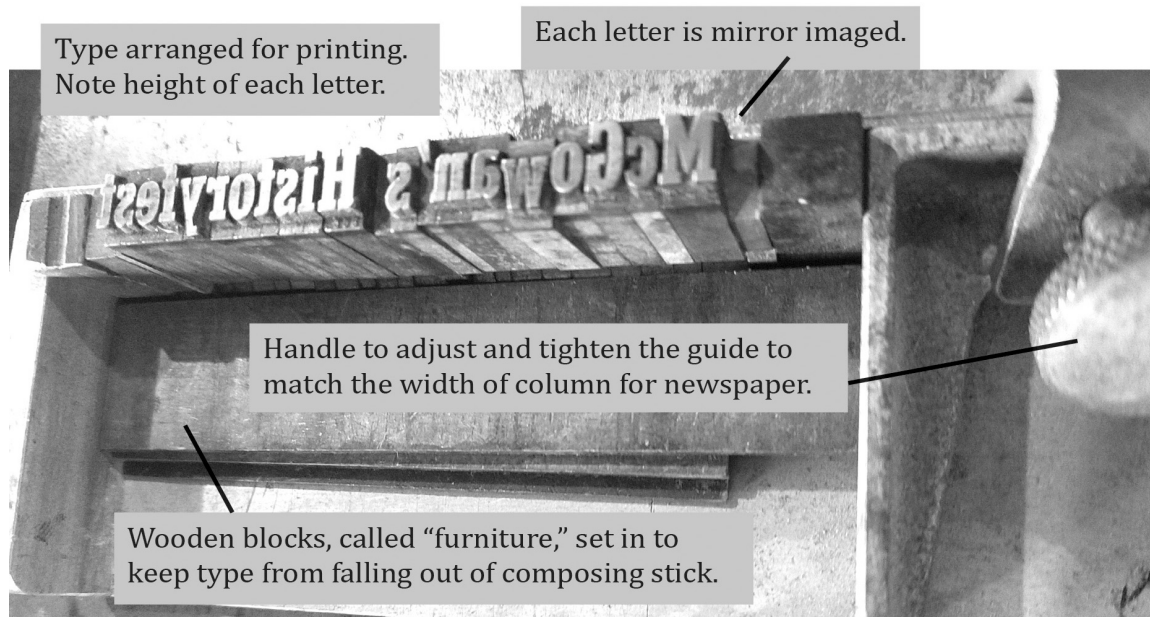


# TYPESSETTING

The process of typesetting is mind-boggling. Today, we can type to our hearts' content on a computer and not worry about whether we have it right the first, second, or even third time. Mistakes, edits, or all-out rewrites are easily made by simply using the backspace and delete key.

In 1880, a typesetter had to select individual letters to match a pre-written article, set those letters backwards into a composing/compositing stick (so, the phrase "quick brown fox" would be set on the right-hand side of the "stick" as "xof nworb kciuq," though each letter was also mirror imaged, to further complicate the identification of each), then assembled with all of the other "sticks" that made up an article. That article would then be organized with other articles to fill a column. Several columns would be combined to create a page.



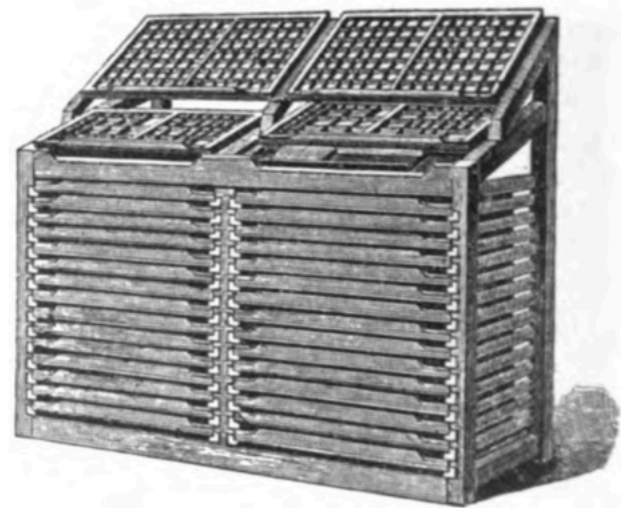
According to a newspaper census published in 1884, typesetting was one area of the printing process where mechanical improvement was not yet accomplished. "The ingenuity of man has not yet invented a substitute for the setting of type by hand, the method of composition remaining precisely the same as it was when printing was first invented. As the newspapers grow larger, as they spread out into supplements, extras, double sheets, quadruple sheets, and so on, every individual letter used has to be separately handled by the typesetter,

not only in the composition, but again in the distribution of the type. The process of typesetting is the most laborious feature in the manufacture of a newspaper. The average compositor will set from 800 to 1,000 ems of type an hour [a measurement of type, based upon size], rapid printers reaching an average of 1,200 and even 1,500, but the latter figure can rarely be maintained continuously. ... The only method of increasing the speed of getting large volumes of reading matter into type is to increase the force of compositors.”<sup>1</sup>

Once the proofread articles were organized into a newspaper page, and spacer bars added, the whole would be locked into place within a frame. Ink would be put to letters, and then to paper, in one of the various presses available at the time, and a (usually) weekly newspaper would be produced.

After the printing was complete, all of those letters and spacer bars had to be cleaned, disassembled, and re-sorted back into the individual compartments within the letter cases, to be ready for the next edition. If an article used different fonts for the headline or employed italic or bold letters to highlight a word or phrase, those letters had to be carefully placed within their proper case as well. The attention to detail required was enormous.

The editor of the *Egan Express* shared with his readers some insight into what a day might look like for him. “We trust our readers will overlook any typographical errors that may be found in our columns this week, and every week; also that they will excuse us in presenting so little local matter. The fact is, one man alone in a newspaper office, has little time to look after news, and if he devotes but a small portion of his time to that pursuit, he is so hurried with the mechanical work that mistakes are very liable to occur, even with the most accomplished workmen. Reader, just think of a man selecting [sic] and getting up his own "copy," and then upending from 16,000 to 20,000 pieces of type per day, while he must ever be on the alert to catch an item, stop to entertain a caller, dun a debtor



**No. 17. Double City Stand. The upper cases project over the lower, bringing the caps nearer the hand. There is a shelf to hold a galley under the lower case, which can be pushed back to permit matter to be emptied on the galley.**

or soft-soap a creditor, hunt through a stack of exchanges to see who has called him a liar, or what else of startling news they may contain, and the thousand-and-one other duties that fall to the all-alone printer's lot – think it over (though we warrant no one but he who has tried it will comprehend), and then wonder if you will that out of the many thousand types from which your paper is printed, a few have been misplaced, a word left out, repeated or wrongly used; or, that there is a lack of news of local happenings." <sup>ii</sup>

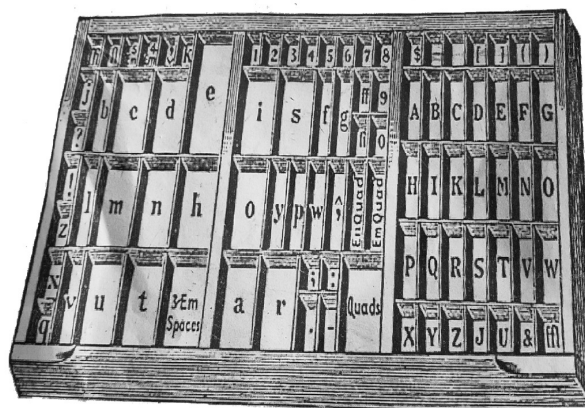
### Cabinets, Cases, and Compartments

Type cases had individual compartments for each letter, sized according to the frequency that a given letter tended to be used. For instance, the compartment for the letter x was smaller than the compartment for the letter e. For someone who enjoys having plenty of “tools for the task” at their disposal, perusing a printer’s catalog is enticingly exciting. The image here shows a sample rack, to hold trays of letters, one per size and style of a given font. <sup>iii</sup>

Letter trays were laid out based upon frequency of use and common word spellings. Looking at the tray diagram below, the letters “t” “h” and “e” are close to each other in the case. A modern hobbyist explained that it is as easy to adjust to as a modern keyboard, and a skilled typesetter can assemble words and sentences very quickly. The key is to put the letters back into the correct compartment when the articles are disassembled.



*Two styles of type drawer layouts. Each compartment is placed for rapid word composition. The layout diagram at right shows a tray with upper and lower case letters in one tray.*



The typesetting catalogs contained a dizzying array of fonts as well. This sample page, from an 1899 catalog, shows two out of hundreds of options.



### More About the Patents, or Preprinted Pages

A pattern emerged while looking at the myriad of newspaper issues. Usually, the outer pages (so, of an eight-page paper, pages one, two, seven and eight) had smaller fonts, denser articles—often of national and international nature—as well as general articles about deportment, morality, advertisements for products available from locations farther away, and the like. Interior pages, especially local news, tended to have larger type and local advertisements. Several articles throughout the winter bemoaned the non-arrival of their “patents” or “papers” from Chicago.

In *“The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century,”* the situation was described as follows. “At smaller papers, the effort to keep costs low meant that editors supplemented their local news coverage with syndicated material. A newspaper in Iowa City, Iowa, for example, could buy a full-page of articles on Lincoln’s birthday from the American Press Association at a relatively low price, because the APA sold that package to thousands of other newspapers across the country. ... This reliance on relatively low-cost news supplied by others was a significant development for late nineteenth-century journalism. The information

purchased ranged from the up-to-date news provided by the Associated Press to features (such as fiction, fashion, and personality profiles) provided by companies such as the American Press Association. Mass-produced news usually was far cheaper than home-produced news, so many newspapers relied upon so-called newspaper unions (unrelated to labor unions) to provide them with half or more of each issue's content." <sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> S.N.D. North, *History and Present Condition of the Newspaper and Periodical Press of the United States, with a Catalogue of the Publications of the Census Year*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), p. 104.

<sup>ii</sup> *Egan Express*, Egan, Dakota Territory, June 10, 1880

<sup>iii</sup> *Desk Book, Specimens of Type Borders & Ornaments Brass Rules & Electrotypes. Catalogue of Printing Machinery and Materials, Wood Goods, etc.* American Type Founders Company, 1898 p. 850

<sup>iv</sup> Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.), pp. 91.