

Challenge Machinery Co.

Late 19th century
Gordon-style platen
jobbing press



Book Arts & Letterpress Lab



letterpresslab@baylor.edu

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

I first encountered this press shortly before Christmas 2023 in Austin, Texas at the home of James Hill while on a visit to check out a Washington style hand press that he had for sale. I visited with James and his son Geren who arranged the visit and told them of my dream to establish a place at the Baylor Libraries where people could learn about experience letterpress printing. He must have seen me eyeing this unassuming little platen press sitting quietly next to the imposing hand press I'd come to see, and noted, "I'm also interested in selling this one as well," and I immediately fell in love!

Sadly, James passed away before his two presses came to Baylor in the spring of 2024, but he was the spark that launched the initiative that his son Geren Hill graciously made a reality.

-Sha Towers, Director of the Book Arts & Letterpress Lab.



This style of press, known as a platen or jobbing press was extremely popular from the mid 1800s and afforded a much higher volume of printing than its hand press predecessors. Considered the father of the platen press design, George Phineas Gordon received his first patent in 1850 and submitted over 50 more in his lifetime. Gordon's invention was "one of the first truly American contributions to printing technology." (Museum of Printing, Haverhill, MA museumofprinting.org).



Technological advancements of these types odd presses include automated inking rollers and powered operation, first by foot treadle (or on larger models, steam) and by motor.

Gordon claims to have been visited in a dream by Benjamin Franklin, who revealed to him the mechanism of the platen job press, but later credited Stephen Ruggles with its creation in the early 1830s ("History of the Platen Press" letterpresscommons.com)



Winston's home in Austin before coming to Baylor



Winston's big rig journey to Waco (with big sister Betty) in the spring of 2024. She was a fairly easy delivery, being a relatively petite platen press (Betty's was much more complicated and drama filled!)



Lock up & print job on Winston



The first test run of Winston with Max and Sha Towers.



The movement & sounds of this press are pure magic!

