

The address of  
William Dana Orcutt  
at the first meeting of  
**The Society of Printers**  
Boston, Massachusetts,  
February 24, 1905





**When The Society of Printers** of Boston was founded in 1905, its membership included some of the leading book designers of the day, among them Bruce Rogers and Daniel Berkeley Updike. Its mission was “For the study and advancement of the Art of Printing,” which we learn from the writings of the time, is nearly equivalent to the term “graphic design” we use today, thus making the Society of Printers the oldest graphic design organization in the country.

The following document includes the text of the address given by William Dana Orcutt at the Society’s inaugural meeting. The occasion for which it was reprinted was the 1940 celebration of the 500th anniversary of the invention printing, at which time the Society’s Council thought it desirable to reaffirm its commitment to the goals stated by Orcutt. The purpose of the Society as stated by Orcutt, was: “to force a recognition of the possibilities of printing as an art,” and the “self-education” of its members through the sharing of their work and of their investigations into the history of graphic design; to educate the public to appreciate the art of printing through exhibits, lectures, and articles; and by influencing the formation of trade-schools.

The Society of Printers, along with the American Institute of Graphic Arts that its members helped create in 1912, brought the profession of graphic design into the public consciousness long before the advent of Modernism. Therefore the SP’s founding documents are useful sources for anyone interested in the history of 20th-century graphic design in the U.S.

— *Lance Hidy, August 2010*

*A KEEPSAKE FOR  
THE SOCIETY OF PRINTERS  
BOSTON*



A KEEPSAKE

printed in the year of the

Five Hundredth Anniversary of the

*INVENTION OF PRINTING*

and Commemorating the thirty-fifth year

since the Inauguration of

THE SOCIETY OF PRINTERS

Being the Address of

*WILLIAM DANA ORCUTT, Esqr.*

at the First Meeting of the Society

February 24, 1905



THE  
SOCIETY OF PRINTERS

1939-1940

*Officers*

*President*, WALTON C. ALLEN

*Vice-President*, WATSON M. GORDON

*Secretary*, FRANK LIGHTBOWN

*Treasurer*, DONALD C. HAGAR

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HOWARD WALLINGFORD

## FOREWORD

*The thirty-five years which cover the history of the Society of Printers in Boston are a short period to set beside the current commemoration of the Five Hundredth Anniversary of the Invention of Printing. Yet they mark the Society as one of the oldest groups in America which has as its only purpose "the study and advancement of the art of printing." There is much being written about the old masters and the general history of printing but, as its tribute to the past and challenge to the future, the Society has reprinted the speech made by William Dana Orcutt, Esquire, the first president, at its initial meeting in 1905. The art of printing was little considered anywhere in the United States at that time, so that the aim of the Society and the remarks of Mr. Orcutt might have been revolutionary. Today, there is a mounting interest in fine print-*

*ing and such active members of the Society as D. B. Updike, Bruce Rogers, William Dana Orcutt, W. A. Dwiggins, and the late Henry Lewis Johnson, have had a large part in that renaissance. The steadfast purpose of the founders of this Society should ever remain the guide and incentive of its members. The words of Mr. Orcutt are as fresh and pertinent today as they were at the time they were said.*

*This keepsake was designed and printed in an edition limited to three hundred copies by D. B. Updike, The Merrymount Press, by order of the Society, to be distributed to its members and those who are similarly interested in the craft.*

W. C. A.

## THE SOCIETY OF PRINTERS

THE initial Meeting of the Society of Printers was held at the Hotel Empire on February 24, 1905. The following officers were then elected: William Dana Orcutt, *President*; Bruce Rogers, *Vice-President*; Frederick D. Nichols, *Treasurer*; Henry Lewis Johnson, *Secretary*.

At this meeting Mr. Orcutt, as President, made the following address:

GENTLEMEN: It was my pleasure to meet with your committee, when they first took under consideration the questions which you submitted to them to be reduced to concrete form, and it seems to me that they have acted exceedingly wisely in handling the matter exactly as they have. The only excuse we have for existence as a society, is our united conviction that printing has been considered too much as a craft, and

too little as an art. To consider and to encourage the art side is by no means to disregard the craft side. Too many people believe that the two cannot be considered at the same time, and it must be one of the duties which we must assume, to convince the incredulous.

To make this condition of affairs more clear, let me read an extract from a recent letter received by *The Printing Art* magazine. An apparently progressive printing establishment in the West, in discontinuing the magazine, writes: "We do not in any way wish to convey the impression that we find no practical suggestions in *The Printing Art*, but as you know, most of us are in the business to make money rather than to uplift the standard of typographical taste in our respective localities, and hence must place rather more emphasis on the merely utilitarian than would otherwise be the case."

This is not an unnatural attitude for the narrow business man to take, but we who have gotten together here to-night are not posing as philanthropists. Unfortunately most of us are forced to recognize the necessity of making our relations to our business practical, first of all. But we believe that we can be practical, and at the same time do our share to force a recognition of the possibilities of printing as an art. If we cannot do this, our organization will not be a success.

How are we to force this? It seems to me that several self-evident methods may be employed. First of all, a danger point would be for us to assume to pose as critics. Your committee has anticipated this by suggesting that the first aim of the society be *Self-education*. All of us who are seriously studying printing as an art, realize more and more how little we really know. Our study has been along different



lines, our individual tastes differ, and even our standards vary one from the other. We meet, then, not as the final court of appeal, but as fellow-workers in the same field, exchanging with each other the results of our investigations, hoping that the sum total of our endeavors may result in something which will permanently benefit printing itself, and raise it above a craft, to an art. For the craft, as I understand it, can never progress beyond perfection in execution, while the art includes the perfection of the craft and a soul as well.

We cannot do this without developing a social intimacy which will add much to the pleasure and gratification of our work. We cannot meet as rivals. If any man has so little confidence in his individual ability that he fears to share with his fellow-members the results of his study and experiments, he has no place in our society. The work of the presses themselves is com-

petitive, but that part of printing which interests us is what comes from the brain and not from the press. For this reason, the one who can most richly contribute to our general knowledge, is the one who can give to his clients the most valuable service, and we could not take these clients from him, if we would.

It is suggested, along these lines, that from time to time members bring in to our informal meetings specimens of their own work behind which they are prepared to stand. Taking these as a basis of discussion, these should develop the underlying principles which created the specific piece of work, and whether approved or not, this consideration can hardly fail to contribute to the interest and value of the society.

But the great responsibility which must rest upon us as an organization, is the education of the public to know the difference

between good and bad printing. I am convinced that the *desire* to know already exists, but unfortunately the intelligent appreciation is limited to a very few. If the public will buy one book upon the stalls in preference to another because the one is well-made, the commercial necessity for good printing will be far more apparent to the buyers of printing than any argument which could be advanced.

This education of the public is a formidable undertaking, it is true, but it will never be accomplished unless a definite though modest start be made. I believe that the interest which has already been manifested in the formation of this society is the most hopeful sign we have yet seen that even so great an undertaking need not necessarily be in vain. By arranging for exhibits and lectures, by interesting the daily press, by influencing the formation of trade-schools and by generally

making it our business to be aggressive wherever the art of printing is concerned, we certainly can make our existence as an organization felt for good.

The possibilities of what may grow from our little nucleus to-night are so great, in my own mind, that I should expect to be looked upon with suspicion were I to state even a fraction of what I believe. But to accomplish this, we need, at the beginning, at any rate, a small, wieldable company of active workers, pledged to each other and to the single object which we have in view,—the advancement of Printing as an Art.

*FINIS*

*This Edition, limited to 300 copies,  
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in the Month of May*

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*This is Number*

*178*

The image shows the front cover of a book, featuring a traditional marbled paper design. The pattern is a complex, organic, and somewhat symmetrical arrangement of colors, including deep maroon, teal, mustard yellow, and forest green, all set against a white background. The colors are blended and feathered together, creating a rich, textured appearance. A central vertical strip of red cloth or leather covers the spine, with the text '1905 - THE SOCIETY OF PRINTERS - 1940' printed in gold or yellow ink. The overall aesthetic is that of a classic, well-preserved antique book.

1905 - THE SOCIETY OF PRINTERS - 1940