



Royal Printing Company

Today's Royal Printing Company Grew From Start Back in 1912

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The Royal Printing Company had its start back in 1912. Today it is an old church building at 514 Jersey. It was founded by John Hart in 1912 on the second floor of the Rogers Building on the southeast corner of Sixth and Hampshire, later known as the Belasco Theater building. Hart in later years was affiliated with the Quincy Herald newspaper, where he became display advertising manager. For years, his son, William, has been associated with the Pix Photo Co. At the time of the Royal Printing Company's beginning, Roscoe Benedict was a linotype operator at the Herald, and an extra at the Labor Advocate. At the time, Quincy had three major newspapers, the Herald, the Whig and the Journal. In addition, there was the Labor Advocate, the Labor News, the Western Catholic, and the Germania.

The Labor News was owned and operated by William Hoffman, 331 Hampshire. The Western Catholic was edited by the Rev. M. J. Foley, pastor of St. Peters Church, and located at 112 N. Seventh. The Germania was at Eighth and Kentucky, operated by Henry Steinkamp and Ferdinand Klene. All of these publications supplemented their income with job printing.

Roscoe Benedict bought an interest in the Labor Advocate, as did young Henry C. Distelhorst, an enterprising young machine operator, who came from Burlington, Iowa, having learned his trade working on the Burlington Hawkeye and later the Gate City Press in Keokuk, Iowa. Distelhorst came to Quincy and found employment on the Daily Herald, where typesetting machines were just then coming into use. Wanting additional work, Distelhorst worked for the Labor Advocate and, sensing the possibilities there, left the Herald to become a partner with Hart and Benedict.

The business grew, and needing more space for their activities, the Labor Advocate and its print shop were moved to a building at 120 S. Seventh owned by Fred Luhrs, today the site of the Illinois School Supply Co. At the time, it had been used by the Jenkins Auto Supply Co. and, if the writer is correct, had been used by Luhrs in the beginning as a wagon factory. The firm became the Royal Printing Company in 1916, with Henry C. Distelhorst as president, his wife, Elsie, as vice president; and Werner Sommers, a brother of Mrs. Distelhorst, as secretary-treasurer. Henry Obrock, the grandfather of Dr. Edward Obrock, also invested in the company.

In 1916 Distelhorst took the lead in the shop duties and was editor of the Labor Advocate, assisted by Mrs. Distelhorst, who did the bookkeeping and office work, along with Elwin Sommers, who moved to Quincy and took charge of sales.

By now John Hart had sold his interest in the firm to the Distelhorsts, who now had controlling interest. Benedict retained his interest and did part-time type-setting, along with the full-time employees. Warner Sommers and another brother, Walter Sommers, had a very successful law firm in Chicago.

Royal Printing grew and prospered, but not without competition. Among the firms were Curtis Publishing Company at Eighth and Main; the J. M. Irwin Printing Co. at Third and Spring, the location today of the Quincy Technical School; Jones and McMein on Hampshire between Third and Fourth; Jost and Kiefer Printing; the Western Catholic; Arnold Publishing Company, publisher of the Poultry News; the McMein Publishing Company, run by Henry Wemhoener at 711 Hampshire; the Globe Printing Co.; and the Ideal Printing Co. The Monarch Printing Co. was the forerunner of the Jost and Kiefer Co. at 631 Vermont. It was owned by the attorney, George Govert, who built the building. In spite of this, the Royal Printing Co. was relatively busy and the newspaper paid its way.

Forrest E. Otcheck joined the firm in May of 1926, having come to Quincy from Iowa, attending the old Gem City Business College in the Musselman Building at Seventh and Hampshire. Here he took a two-year course of mathematics, bookkeeping, banking and penmanship. Andrew Dickhut had been the bookkeeper at Royal and, wanting to change his activities, left the firm; with Otcheck taking his place as bookkeeper, office manager and billing clerk. Dickhut later became the first manager of the Quincy Memorial Bridge.

At the time the firm's equipment consisted of one Linotype machine, purchased for \$5,000, a press with sheet size of 32-by-22 inches, three open job presses, many cases of foundry type, a smelter for melting linotype metal, a paper baler, and the odds and ends that make up a printing shop.

After a time, Mrs. Sommers became homesick for Chicago and talked her husband, Elwin, into leaving Quincy.

Next, a young lady from LaGrange, MO, was hired as bookkeeper, and in the latter part of the 1920s, Marguerite Bitter took her place and became known to everyone as "Miss B."

Then came the stock market crash, and the Great Depression. Five banks closed within a week. Business began to disappear. Payment of bills had to be delayed and payrolls were hard to make. Many firms had to ask for advance money on their work, but Royal Printing was not forced to do this. Edward Schneider, who later became mayor of Quincy and died in the LaSalle Hotel in Chicago, was office manager and a deputy in the Sheriff's office and helped make collections for the firm.

In the 1930s, Otcheck was able to acquire a small interest in the business and in 1932 the Royal Printing Co. moved into the old church building at 514-516 Jersey. This building was erected by the First German M.E. Church in 1854, and was dedicated on Dec. 31, 1854, by the Rev. Phillip Huhl. The building was bought at a foreclosure sale in 1930, having been owned by the defunct Knights of Pythias Lodge. It had also been used as a natorium (swimming pool) for a short time. Horace Leibig, a brother-in-law of Henry Distelhorst, who was highly successful as an owner of Iowa Loan Co. in Burlington, loaned Royal Printing the money to purchase the building, interest free.

Up to this time the firm was working 44 hours a week, five eight-hour days and four hours on Saturday, no paid vacations and no paid holidays, no insurance and no fringe benefits. The foreman in the composing department was paid \$38.50 a week. No one was laid off for any length of time, with days traded and weeks shortened in order to keep going. Some of the shop employees at the time included Arthur Zolle, Cressie Brockman, Andy Anderson, George LeRoy Mahair, Ed Olson, Harry Wemhoener, Irene Wemhoener, Rena Ledig, William "Bill" Judson, John Zimmerman, August Blueme, "Short" People, Roy Voss, Lawrence Beckmeyer, S.R. Hoover, Charles Vincent, Rolland Ash, Jay Pulliam, Harold Bowman, Lloyd Heinz and Fred Berter. Ruth Bitter Schwagmeyer worked with her sister, Marguetter Bitter, in the office for 25 to 30 years. Harold Dare came in later as a machine operator. Hoover was actually a practicing Physician in the Illinois State Bank building. His family for years ran the Augusta Eagle newspaper and he helped out at Royal.

During the Depression years, the Labor Advocate newspaper became increasingly unprofitable due to lack of advertising. A name change to the Daily Record had little or no effect on its profitability and eventually the publication was suspended. As job work grew, the void was hardly noticed. In the late 1930s the Depression was beginning to fade and the company secured the largest printing job the firm had ever experienced. It was the wholesale catalog of the Tenk Hardware Co. of Quincy, then located at 125 S. Fifth, with a retail store at 512 Maine. Offset printing had not come into the picture yet, so the work involved hot metal typesetting and letterpress printing. More than 5,000 zinc etchings and electrotypes of merchandise illustrations went into the order.

Henry Distelhorst had been in ill health for a number of years and he died September 17, 1951, at the age of 72. President of Royal Printing since 1916, Distelhorst was born in Burlington, Iowa, on July 17, 1879. He married Elsie Sommers on June 19, 1907. There was one son, Henry S. Distelhorst. After Distelhorst's death, an agreement was reached with Werner Sommers, who was a corporate lawyer and a CPA in Chicago, and Otcheck acquired a controlling interest in the firm. A new corporation was organized with Forrest E. Otcheck as president and treasurer, Marguerite M. Bitter as vice president, and Mrs. Leona Otcheck as corporate secretary. Otcheck then embarked on plans for an upgrading of equipment. Two new presses were acquired. The old press was sold to the newspaper at Nauvoo.

Over the years, Royal printed the minutes of the Board of Supervisors and did City Hall printing, many times having to work all night in order to have work finished for a meeting the next morning. During the war years the firm did a lot of work for the Dick Bros. Brewing Co. in promotional printing. At the time, Dick Bros. had a contract with Radio Station WTAD giving war events daily. It was arranged for the scripts covering these events to be forwarded to Royal, and they were put in booklet form.

Henry S. Distelhorst, the son of Henry C., worked for a short time in the company and then went to Chicago where he became a writer for the Salvation Army Cry, and eventually was placed in charge of all its printing. Arnold Rosenboom came to Royal Printing from Golden, after having worked at the Hamilton Press. "Boom," as he was always been known, was a machinist and later, until his retirement, kept the old Linotype machines running at The Herald-Whig.

John Zimmerman and Lloyd Heintz were in Royal's composing department during the war.

In the summer of 1954 health problems took Otcheck to the Mayo Clinic at a time when the company was printing hand paper ballots for county elections, but in some way the firm managed. After weeks of worry and some exploratory surgery, Otcheck was sent home with a clean bill of health. At this time, art work and camera work were being done by Quincy Photo Engraving Company on Eighth, but Royal employees thought this work could be done in their building, so the investment was made in the offset field. Fred Berter, who later worked for The Herald-Whig, offered to operate two V-50 Vertical presses at the same time. The new equipment gave Royal a base for greater things.

In the late 1950s and early 1930s things began to change on Jersey and Sixth to the east and on York to the south. A local group of investors was buying up property in the block, supposedly for municipal parking. For a time, it looked as if Royal would have to move and Otcheck considered making a deal for the building at 615 Jersey, later occupied by the Delabar Office Supply Co., and owned by Don McConnell. However, the city settled on the 600 block of Jersey for public parking and the new Quincy Public Library went up next to Royal on the 500 block.

One day Otcheck and Clarence J. Shackleton, who, with Robert Middendorf, Edward Bozarth and George Koyer, had left the Jost and Kiefer Printing Co. owned and operated by Cressie T. Brockman and Alfred Bernhardt. These four had changed the name of the firm to Creative Printers and had been in business for six years. Shackleton suggested they consider a merger of the two companies, and wanting to slow down a bit, Otcheck became interested in the deal.

On Feb. 14, 1966, the new Royal Printing Co., came into being. It was understood that Shackleton would become president of the firm and take the lead in management, with Otcheck staying on and assisting, with no changes in personnel. The Royal plant and Creative worked in harmony and union.

Forrest E. Otcheck died at the age of 79 on April 12, 1984. Semi-retired at 70, he continued to "pop in" at the print shop, and help out on a part-time basis, although he and Mrs. Otcheck sailed on several cruises to foreign countries. It should be noted that he coined the word "Quinsippi" to describe the community's unique river connection; the suggestion was made in 1939 when the Jaycees were putting together their first celebration. Mrs. Leona Otcheck, widow of Forrest, died August 8, 1984. Marguerite Bitter died October 11, 1979.

On October 1, 1984, Royal Printing Co. changed hands again, with Clarence Shackleton selling to former employees Ken Moenning and William Larimore. Moenning had joined the shop as a printer in 1970, Larimore as a pressman in 1966. Royal at the time was employing 11 full-time and 4 part-time workers.

Today, in addition to the two owners, the firm has Chuck Yount, salesman; Nancy Davis and Judy McAfee, office; Dan Bohne, typesetter; Ron Stuckman, art department; Sharon Reis, platemaker; John Carman, pressman; Nick Meyer, bindery; Bill Cole, delivery man; Harold Moenning, salesman, formerly of M&M Printing.

The writer's experience with Royal Printing was in having two books, "Quincy in the Civil War," and "Historical Sketches of Quincy" printed. Excellent work as always!