



Patience and a keen eye for persnickety detail are prerequisites for success in the Book History and Print Culture programme.

Credit: Don McLeod.

## ✂ Grab an Apron and Get to Work: Experiential Learning at Massey College

JULIA KING

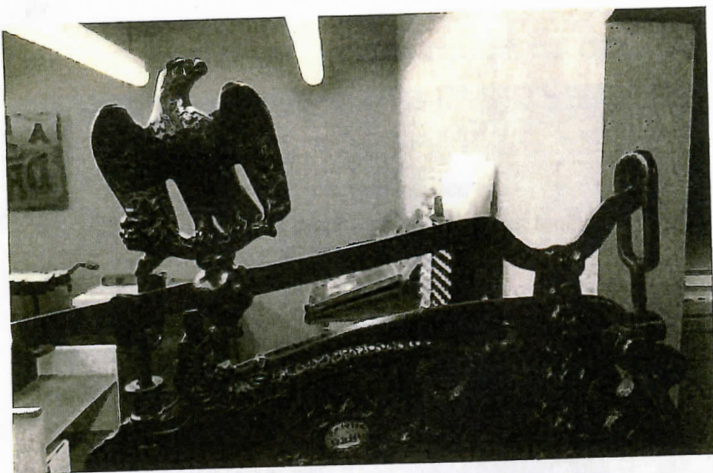
Robertson Davies, the founding master (principal) of Massey College, once remarked:

A small college cannot hope to have a large library, but if it sets to work along the right lines it may aspire to the possession of a fine one. . . . A book may be a thing of beauty, and an example of a great craft which we must not allow to die. The means of craft and the aspiration toward beauty live on in our College library.<sup>1</sup>

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Massey College Bibliography Room, which offers students in the University of Toronto's Book History and Print Culture (BHPC) program the opportunity to learn the craft of letterpress printing on the college's collection of nineteenth-century iron printing presses. Massey was designed with the idea of having a space for book creation. In addition to the Bibliography Room, there is a room mysteriously marked 'Paper Room', which once housed a papermaking studio but is now a common-area kitchen. The Bibliography Room and the special collections of the Robertson Davies Library, both housed in the basement of Massey College, provide a unique opportunity for students to work with rare books and manuscripts and also to experience the processes that created them.

The Bibliography Room houses five antique Victorian printing presses: a Washington, a Columbian with a distinctive eagle counterweight, a tabletop, an 1870 Improved Albion and an Imperial. These iron hand presses are complemented by a relatively modern mid-century Vandercook Proof Press No. 1, a Vandercook No. 15 and an early-twentieth-century Haddon 'Swift' press, recognizable by its treadle and 'clam-shell' motion. Since all of the presses are still in use, they





The Columbian with its distinctive eagle counterweight.  
Credit: Don McLeod.

require individualized care and maintenance and, in some cases, modifications. In addition to the presses, Massey also holds a large collection of metal and wood type.

The first press at Massey was the 1870 Improved Albion press, which is still used for the bulk of teaching today.<sup>2</sup> This press, which now sits closest to the Bibliography Room door, was sold to the college for a nominal sum by typographer Carl Dair, along with his printing equipment. Dair had originally purchased the press from the Chiswick Press in 1959 in the hope of setting up his own imprint, Orchard Press. The Albion is ideal for small presswork; Leonard and Virginia Woolf owned a similar model that they used to do their own printing in Bloomsbury. In 1963, Roy Thomson presented a smaller tabletop version of the Albion Press, dated 1852, to the university. These presses are relatively small, and are ideal for the creation of bookmarks, postcards and small broadsheets.

The three larger platen presses in the Bibliography Room are much more imposing. The Washington Press, which was deposited on permanent loan by the firm of Sydney R. Stone, was so large that bringing it down the stairs into the basement was a serious concern. The Columbian was manufactured in Edinburgh in the mid-nineteenth century for an American buyer (hence the large eagle on its counterweight), but had ended up instead with a firm in Durham, and then made its way to a Mr John McCain, a Canadian student



Nameplate on the Washington Press, on permanent loan  
from Sydney R. Stone. Credit: Chris King.

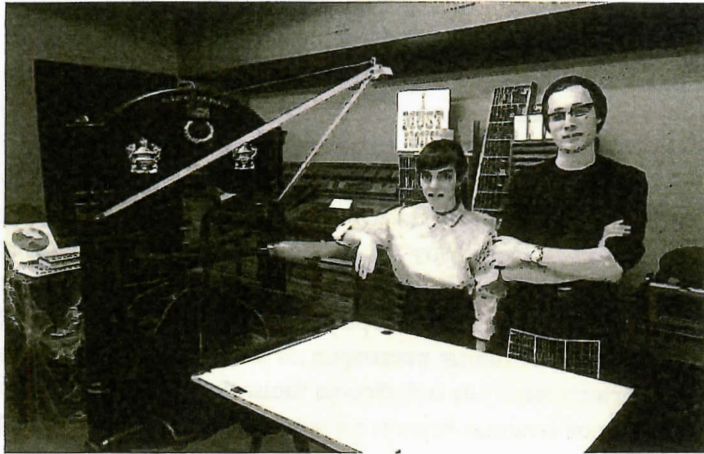
studying in Newcastle. He sold the press to the college for the handsome sum of \$750 in 1971, and it is still the most expensive press in the Bibliography Room. Rounding out the collection of iron platen presses is the 1848 Imperial Press, which Roy Gurney negotiated to purchase from a Boy Scout troop that met in the basement of the Riverdale Presbyterian Church in Toronto. They were happy to let it go for \$125, including delivery, preferring to spend their time camping rather than printing.

#### Teaching in the Bibliography Room

The primary function of the Bibliography Room is to 'preserve and pass on skills in letterpress printing and the care of its collection of nineteenth-century hand presses.'<sup>3</sup> Because Massey is a residential college, there are quite a few students who live on the premises and are interested in volunteering. The vast majority of students who choose to take advantage of the Bibliography Room, however, are part of U of T's BHPC program. BHPC is a collaborative specialization for graduate students from fifteen different units at the university, ranging from music to literature, in both Master's and PhD programs.

Massey College and BHPC share a special relationship — Massey houses the administrative offices of the program, provides space for events and provides classroom space for the core courses. Students in





BHPC students Abi Lemak and Joel Vaughan, 2016.  
Credit: Don McLeod.

BHPC are allowed similar privileges to Massey College Junior Fellows, and are as such allowed to use the premises. Davies and the other founders of the college imagined that it would provide 'a unique, congenial and intellectual environment for graduate students of distinguished ability in all disciplines to share in a rich and stimulating community.'<sup>4</sup> Even the name 'Bibliography Room' indicates the relationship between the craft of letterpress printing and the study of the history of the book. Students who volunteer in the Bibliography Room not only learn practical skills, but should also be able to apply their experiences to their coursework and their own research.

In practice, all activity in the Bibliography Room is overseen by College Printer Nelson Adams, himself a veteran of the early days of Coach House Press. Other printers and book artists from the larger Ontario book arts community often volunteer their time to help maintain and repair the presses. Notably, Stephen Sword, master at the Stiff 'n' Sore Press, helps with press maintenance and particularly thorny impression issues, and Don Taylor, of Pointyhead Press, helps the library with conservation and bookbinding. The Robertson Davies Library itself is headed by P.J. MacDougall, who also employs a part-time assistant librarian. Student volunteers are expected to contribute to the cleaning, maintenance and organization of the Bibliography Room, and eventually become involved with typesetting and producing presswork.



A markedly handsome pair of Resurrection-sized Xs; positioned, perhaps, to suggest that the Second Coming is not, in fact, at hand.  
Credit: Don McLeod.



Nelson Adams had studied Classics before he became the Vandercook operator at Coach House in the late 1960s. Nelson would, of course, know that the term *Deus ex Machina* is often associated with the plays of Euripides, though the theatrical device may have originated with Aeschylus. Credit: Don McLeod.



Anybody can volunteer to be part of the Bibliography Room. After an expression of interest through e-mail, a new volunteer completes a few trial sessions where they perform grunt work and prove that they're willing to do hard work and return again the next week. Tasks at the beginning of life as a volunteer are particularly grungy—new volunteers might spend the first few days putting drop cloths over the stones and using a pumice cleaner to grind rust off galleys. After that, they might spend a few weeks vacuuming lead dust and dirt out of typesets, and then finally be allowed to set alphabets. After starting volunteering in September, it's not unusual that the first time a volunteer is allowed to pull the bar of a press is on a Christmas card in December. In the spring term, new volunteers typically design and print their own work.

#### Apprenticeship

In addition to the volunteer program, the Bibliography Room welcomes four apprentices each year: two from BHPC, and two from the Massey College junior fellowship. Prospective apprentices are selected on the strength of their application letter and on the program's ability to contribute to their professional and personal goals and aspirations. Apprentices are required to commit to regular Bibliography Room hours, and to follow a prescribed set of readings in addition to their practical work with the presses and type. Eventually, they move on to setting a small quarto that will be used for their teaching in the fall on the 1870 Albion.

The apprenticeship takes applications in November; the apprentices begin in the winter, and the following fall they are considered fellows. Fellows are responsible for running seminars and teaching the introductory book history, bibliography and other similar classes that want their students to understand letterpress printing. The Bibliography Room has not only had tours from BHPC, but also from the iSchool's (previously the Faculty of Information) bibliography and rare books courses, as well as the English department's Texts, Theories and Archives course. These visits are important parts of the course curriculum—in the analytical and historical bibliography course, understanding the nature of movable type is essential in order to know the differences between editions, impressions, issues and states, for example—and it is much easier to see when you are confronted with a press and type first-hand.

Fellows develop their quartos specifically for teaching bibliography and book history. Teaching quartos are required to have a number of features in addition to text: page numbers, signatures, running heads, catchwords and a few intentional printer's errors. Previous quartos have been designed at the discretion of the apprentices—the 2014 quarto was made up of a selection of Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises*, which allowed the fellows to explain the hierarchy of the early modern printing press; the 2015 quarto was made up of selections from Nicholas Culpeper's *Complete Herbal*, which incorporated decorative metal cuts of herbs and spices from the library's collection. The 2016 apprentices designed a quarto with selections from Walt Whitman, and the 2017 quarto was modelled after an eighteenth-century miscellany, incorporating more text than the last four quartos combined. Each quarto is unique, and the final exercise during a visit to the Bibliography Room allows visiting students to ink and print their own copy, under the direction of the apprentices.

Apprenticeship, of course, is hardly a new method of teaching letterpress printing. Bibliography Room apprentices are part of a long line of poor souls forced to oil presses and clean dust out of type cases. Educational theory behind apprenticeship tells us that an apprentice should ideally first observe and imitate behaviour, and then begin to play with the rules a bit and experiment. At this point, they should be able to summarize what they have learned in general terms and explain it to others—in other words, Massey's apprentices have demonstrated that they really understand how printing works when they are able to satisfactorily teach their peers about it.<sup>5</sup>

Another way of explaining apprenticeship argues that apprentices must first understand the individual parts and processes of printing before they pull the bar, and the only way they will do that is by experiencing it themselves. One apprentice began her apprenticeship asking, 'Why do projects take so long?' Nelson told her that he wasn't going to answer that question, but that she would find out. After she set the type for her first project, and made mistakes and had to reset lines and dropped pieces and had to replace spacing and catch broken type, she understood the length and complexity of a single printing project.

#### Making as Learning

Another way to look at the apprenticeship is through the lens of the



'makerspace', which is a super-trendy word in the library world these days. Kurti, Kurti and Fleming describe the maker movement, which is becoming increasingly popular, as 'built upon the foundation of constructionism, which is the philosophy of hands-on learning through building things.'<sup>6</sup> Rather than the apprenticeship, however, the makerspace emphasizes the exploration phase of learning—the master/apprentice relationship is central to the success of an apprenticeship. In the Bibliography Room, Nelson Adams often describes the system as being a 'benevolent dictatorship, not a democracy'. His word, as the master printer, is the last one, which may be a different experience than what apprentices and volunteers are used to in their other courses. If an apprentice decides they want to do a project that won't have enough support, or isn't feasible, Nelson will often say no, and guide them along to something different.

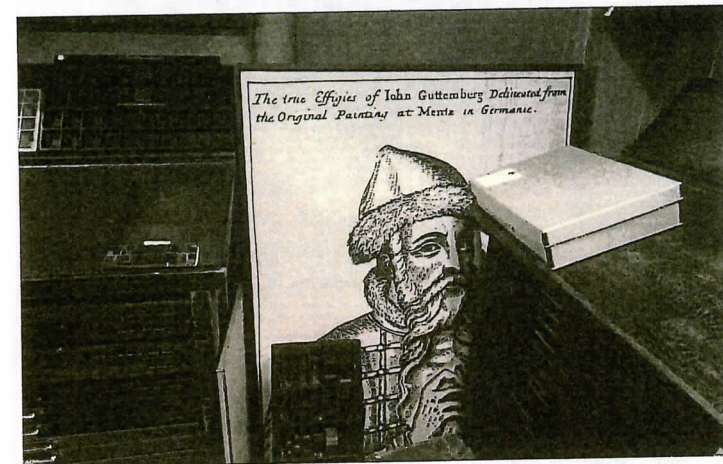
Equally, if you come to Nelson with an idea that he doesn't necessarily think is easy to print or a good idea, he'll often just let you go along with it anyway and try, in order to learn. Apprentices often want to print their own business cards, which Nelson thinks is a bad idea for a project due to their complexity and the importance of a clean image. Business cards are very complicated: they often involve different typefaces, specialty paper stock and they have to be perfect in order to make a professional impression. In the process of making them, however, a student learns about clamshell presses, about imposition and about legibility. They learn about new typefaces while they search for the right one for their card, and learn more about paper stock and how it interacts with the press.

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Along with the practical learning that apprenticeship and makerspaces afford, the Bibliography Room is generally a pleasant place to be. Makerspaces champion the process of creating something with your hands; similarly, most people who come to work in the Bibliography Room talk about how calming it is to come downstairs and work with your hands after a day of study. The Room is even lined with lead type so that cell phones don't work properly. There are no distractions, and the volunteers and apprentices develop a sense of camaraderie. There's nothing quite like setting endless alphabets of 10-point type with someone for hours on end to really get to know them.

This process of 'making' brings up its own set of questions. How do the mistakes that you make inform the mistakes that you find in

your research? How do you collate an early modern book after you have made one yourself? Librarians find that in their personal practice, cataloguing of early modern books gets immensely better because the printers' errors they find are the same as the ones they make themselves in the Bibliography Room. Similarly, collation becomes easier once apprentices have a better idea of what's involved in creating a proper quarto and have taught it to students. Some apprentices have changed their research focus after working in the Bibliography Room—one apprentice added a fine printing component to his dissertation research, for example. The process by which volunteers and apprentices start from individual sorts and build their way up to designing and creating individual broadsides and quartos allows them to think about bibliography from the inside out, rather than the outside in, and makes their scholarship all the richer for it.



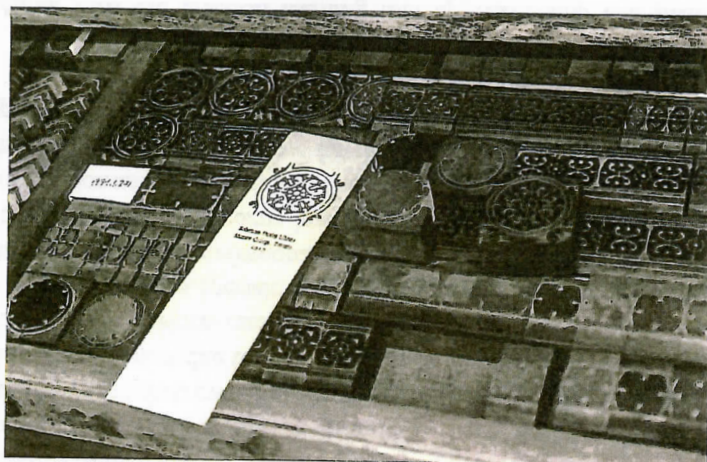
Credit: Don McLeod.

## Notes

1. Massey College Library, <https://www.masseycollege.ca/library/> (accessed February 10, 2019).
2. I am grateful to Massey College Librarian P.J. MacDougall for information about the history of the college presses.
3. Massey College Printing Fellowship Program, <https://www.masseycollege.ca/library/printing-fellowship-program/> (accessed February 10, 2019).



4. Massey College Mission Statement,  
<https://www.masseycollege.ca/about/mission-statement/> (accessed February 10, 2019).
5. A. Collins, J.S. Brown and S.E. Newman, 'Cognitive Apprenticeship: Teaching the Crafts of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics', in L.B. Resnick, ed., *Knowing, Learning, and Instruction: Essays in Honor of Robert Glaser* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1989); B.L. Brandt, J.A. Farmer, Jr. and A. Buckmaster, 'Cognitive Apprenticeship Approach to Helping Adults Learn', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 59 (1993): 69-78.
6. R.S. Kurti, D. Kurti and L. Fleming, 'The Environment and Tools of Great Educational Makerspaces', *Teacher Librarian* 42.1 (October 2014): 8-12.



An impressive array of ornaments. Credit: Chris King.

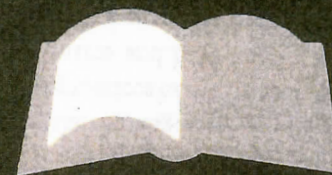


## ALCUIN BOOK DESIGN AWARDS 2018

The Alcuin Society recently held its 37th annual competition, the Alcuin Awards for Excellence in Book Design in Canada, for books published in 2018. The judges, **Raphaël Daudelin**, **Frances Hunter**, and **Mauve Pagé** selected 35 winning titles. The Society would like to congratulate the winning designers: **Derek Barnett**, **Lea Berger**, **Julien Boisseau**, **Robert Bringhurst**, **Tara Bryan**, **Duncan Noel Campbell**, **Stefan Canuel**, **Beatnik Design**, **Tom Devlin**, **Jason Dewinetz**, **Roberto Dosil**, **Julie Doucet**, **Megan Fildes**, **Five Seventeen**, **Jennifer Griffiths**, **Tracy Hurren**, **Tim Inkster**, **Lisa Jager**, **Sean Karemaker**, **Nicole Lafond**, **Jennifer Lum**, **Jason Lutes**, **François Martin**, **John Martz**, **Émilien Masseau**, **Dominique Mousseau**, **Rachel Nam**, **Terri Nimmo**, **Natalie Olsen**, **Elena van Renen**, **CS Richardson**, **Andrew Roberts**, **Rebecca Rosen**, **Júlia Sardà**, **Michael Solomon**, **Jessica Sullivan** and **Sam Tse**.

The Alcuin Society is a Vancouver-based not-for-profit society for the support and appreciation of fine books. Details on the winning books are posted on our web site (<http://alcuinsociety.com/awards/2018-winners/>).

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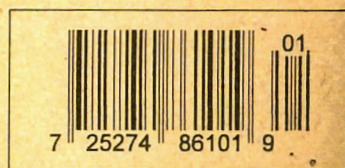


'Though an angel should write,  
still 'tis devils must print.'

—Thomas Moore, Irish writer (1779–1852)

When Carl Beam's large-format photo-serigraph entitled *North American Iceberg* was purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in 1986 it marked the first acquisition of contemporary art for the national collection by an artist of First Nations heritage. A prescient early step, perhaps, towards the reconciliation that now consumes any evaluation of Canadian social justice in the wake of the disaster that was inflicted on the native population by the residential school system. Carl Beam was just one of countless innocent victims of the residential schools, but the power of his witness to the horror has been manifest in the *Columbus Suite*, which he created in 1990 as a counterpoint to the festivities attached to the five-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus to North America, or Turtle Island as it is known to the indigenous population.

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