



A BRIEF HISTORY of LETTERPRESS

Letterpress, one of the earliest forms of printing text on paper, is a form of relief printing where the image surface is raised and the resulting image is pressed into the paper. Johann Gutenberg was the father of letterpress printing in Europe, but the Chinese had developed similar types of relief printing as early as the 2nd century A.D. Most of these early texts were printed from type carved from blocks of wood.

When the art of paper-making was introduced to western civilization in the 12th century it allowed printed texts to flourish. By the 15th century AD, paper was abundantly available throughout Europe. This abundance, along with inventions such as moveable type (characters cast as individual letterforms) and mechanical presses allowed the number of printers and printed materials to soar. Much of this increase was fueled by a rising literate middle class and movements including the Reformation and religious wars.

Today, much remains the same with letterpress printing. Text and image are still printed from a raised surface pressed into the paper. Movable type is still in use. However, the computer revolution has opened many new doors, but the distinguishable characteristics of letterpress remain unchanged. Text and graphic elements can be created digitally on computers and transferred to paper using photopolymer plates and metal engravings. Even with the current renaissance in letterpress printing, one thing hasn't changed...each impression is still printed by hand, one color at a time.

