

Raymond Stanley Nelson, Jr.

The Atelier Press

When he was in the sixth grade, Stan Nelson read of how Gutenberg made his type and decided it was something he could do himself. That decision led Stan to a career at the Smithsonian Institution and a life-long obsession with matters relating to the earliest processes employed in the making of type. Now retired (though only 59 years old), Stan resides at Ellicott City, MD, and continues robust activity in making hand molds and cutting type designs with all the requisite files and other hand tools, and on occasion he actually prints items using the hand-cast type which he makes.

His early experiments in making type in his parents' kitchen were disastrous and unsuccessful (further experiments banned). In 1969 while in Austria, he purchased a single leaf from Diderot's *Encyclopedie* (17xx) showing the typefounders' hand mold. That led him to seek out ancient hand molds, study them, and then attempt to make his own. His first success was in 1976 and in that same year, he began work on his first hand-cut letter design, ROBIN, which is displayed in accompanying pages. Since that time Stan has become the international expert on the hand mold and other matters relating to cutting steel typefounders' punches by hand. He's traveled extensively in Europe, studying typesetting artifacts everywhere they could be found.

He has studied with legendary punchcutters in perfecting his skills—people like R. Hunter Middleton (who did many designs for the Ludlow caster), Henk Drost, punchcutter for Joh. Enschede en Zonen, in the Netherlands, and Christian Paput and Nelly Gable, punchcutters at the Imprimerie Nationale at Paris.

Stan's specimen pages reveal his obsession with very early historic printing. His ROBIN type is an authentic Carolingian, the style of letter introduced by Alcuin of York at the behest of the Emperor Charlemagne in 880. His cutting of red and black plain-chant (music type) was inspired by a passage in P. S. Fournier's *Manuel Typographique*, which made it sound easy to do (not so). Stan made a for-the-purpose mold to cast this type, depicted in his own lino-cut illustration.

Completed only recently are Stan's LOMBARDIC INITIALS. His goal was to reproduce an historic type design using traditional (hand) techniques. He says "I can't own the original types, but these are nearly as good."

Stan's equipment centers around a large variety of hand molds, some historic, some recently made by him (he's now made over 30 such molds). He has recently installed an historic "pump pot" (David Bruce's first invention in the 1830s, a predecessor to his pivotal typecaster), which enables Stan to make better type with his hand molds. He also has a Thompson machine, but it takes second place to his more historic processes.

"If letterpress is to survive and to thrive it will need sources of printing type," Stan emphasizes. "Photopolymer has its place and is remarkably useful and convenient, but it will never replace the versatility and mutability of real lead alloy type. When I am printing, I can make changes in the form at any time—hard to do with a solid plastic plate. Some have said that photopolymer will preserve letterpress. I once observed that if you go to Moscow, to Red Square, and visit Lenin's tomb, you can see his body there. It is preserved, indeed well preserved—but Lenin is still dead. We need typefounders and dependable sources of cast printing type. Type is the heart and soul of letterpress."