

DESIGNERS AND ENGRAVERS OF TYPE.*

BY WILLIAM E. LOY.

NO. XXVI.—JOHN M. WEHRLE.

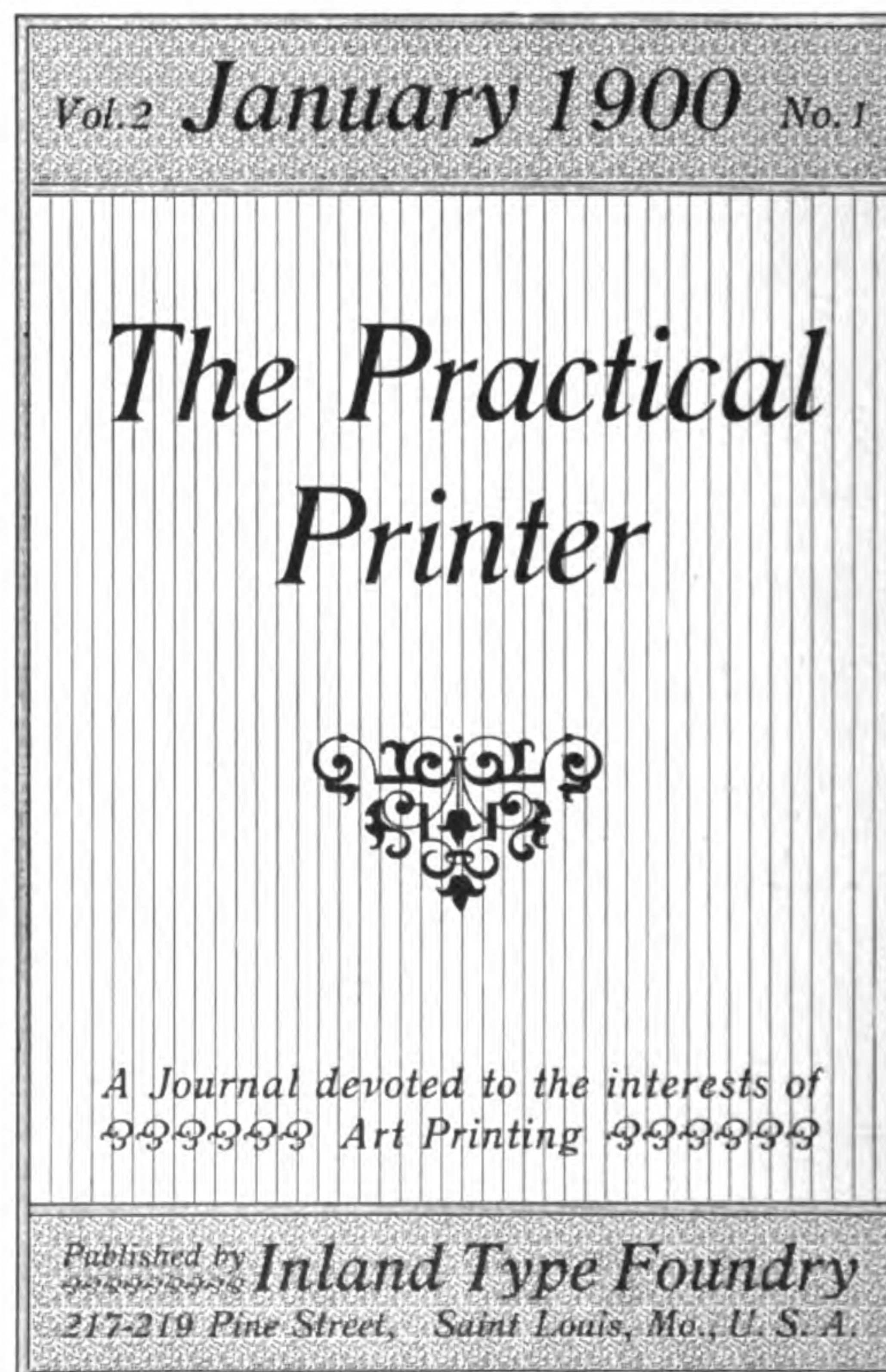
THE truth of the terse but expressive "dead and forgotten" comes home with peculiar force to the searcher after information about the individuals who have developed the art and craft of typefounding. Although the death of John M. Wehrle, the subject of this sketch, occurred so recently as May 16, 1875, the recollection of his fellow-workmen and associates is only a faint one, little more than a tradition. The time and place of his birth are unknown to all persons who knew him as an engraver or cutter, but as to his ability there is but one opinion. He had no superior and few equals in the mechanical and artistic skill with which he wrought out the designs or suggestions furnished him. He has left behind him at least two striking examples attesting this fact. It was he who engraved for George Bruce's Son & Co. the series of four sizes (great primer, double pica, double great primer and four-line pica) at first known as Ray Shaded, but now designated in the specimen book of that foundry as Ornamented No. 1552. It can be said that this was an epoch-making face of type, and gave an impetus to designing and engraving which filled the typefounders' specimen books with innumerable styles of ornamental faces and compelled the printer to purchase extensively in that direction. It enabled the skilful compositor to rival the productions of the lithographer, a position which he held until recent years. Ray Shaded was such a decided novelty in type that every printing-office making any pretenses to the better class of work put it in and used it until it was worn out. The character of the type is indicated by its name, but the younger generation are not so familiar with it as their seniors. The design is a plain roman character, slightly condensed, with a carefully cut ray shade on the right. The other really noted production of Mr. Wehrle was the Penman Script, brought out by the Bruce foundry about 1871. He cut the first size only, the double pica, but this was the pattern for his associates and successors who worked up the other sizes. He had for his model the various school writing-books of that period, which had been very carefully designed by such noted penmen as Spencer, Payson and others, and afterward lithographed. While the Penman Script has many of the features of these various text-books it had its own characteristics, which may be said to be the individuality of Mr. Wehrle translated into type metal. There has never been anything attempted by any other foundry which could quite equal this series in beauty and gracefulness, though there may be other scripts of greater utility to the busy printer. It was supplied with a liberal allowance of ligatures and terminal ornaments, which permitted a very close imitation of ornamental script engraving.

The little known about John M. Wehrle has been obtained from Julius Herriet, Sr., W. F. Capitaine, J. W. Phinney and V. B. Munson. It is pretty definitely known that he was a native of Switzerland, but what particular locality or city is not known. Nor is it definitely known when he came to America. Before engaging with the typefounders of New

*In sending this instalment of the series of articles on "Designers and Engravers of Type," the author states that while Mr. Wehrle was one of the most interesting characters who followed this calling, he left little trace of his personal history. Mr. Loy writes: "There is no photograph of Mr. Wehrle extant, and Mr. Herriet says Mr. Wehrle was never inclined to sit for a portrait. It is not likely his family, if they could be found, would have one. I find the difficulties almost insurmountable in gathering information about many of these characters, and even when living they are sometimes hard to approach. There are two or three more important ones and I am hurrying them up, as the series must soon close." Readers of THE INLAND PRINTER have undoubtedly felt under obligations to Mr. Loy for placing on record the history of these men, and will appreciate the help he has been to the craft in searching out this information and presenting it to them in such a readable and careful manner.—EDITOR.

York he had lived in the South, where he was for a time an overseer on a plantation. His love of country life was so strong that he made his home on a small farm near Plainfield, New Jersey, and here he spent all his spare hours. His first employment in New York was with Farmer, Little & Co., but later he was employed at the Bruce foundry, and it was here he lost his life in May, 1875, by an accident. He was engaged by Mr. Bruce to cut on steel, and much of his work was so done. He was good on romans, and had the reputation of cutting the best counters of any cutter of his time. So particular was he on this point that he was known among his fellows as "the counter-cutter." His later work was done on soft metal. At first he worked in the engraving room with Mr. Herriet, Sr., but he conceived the idea of working on his own account, and opened an office for that purpose. He soon gave it up, however.

In reviewing the work done by Mr. Wehrle it is sufficient to say he cut the Penman Script. That certainly is a monument to the name of any cutter. The Ray Shaded attained equal popularity, but it has long since practically gone out of use. No doubt if one could identify other designs, they would be found to have the same care in their manipulation. There was in New York at the time Mr. Wehrle flourished a number of designers and engravers, and they were either Germans or Scotchmen. While there was no antagonism between the two races, they naturally affiliated according to nationality. Among his associates he was congenial but reserved in his manner, and was never inclined to talk about his own achievements or his personal history. Those who remember him have only words of praise. He was a gentleman of wide information and reading, and was familiar with the literature of the French and German tongues.



COVER-DESIGN.

Arranged for two printings.

If you have good judgment, run your business to please yourself. If you haven't, get a partner and please him. Don't try to please everybody. Don't try to please a few.—S. O. E. R.