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# The Pastime Printer

HANDSET AND PRIVATELY PRINTED BY STEVE L. WATTS, FRONT ROYAL, VIRGINIA

Number 1

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## Greetings:

HERE beginneth another adventure in our retirement living at Skyline Bend in the Blue Ridge Mountains. When we came here two years ago there were predictions that the tedium of quiet existence in the boondocks would send us skyhooting back to our accustomed orbit. Such was not the case, for life at The Good Old Farm has kept us so busily interested that letters from solicitous friends and kin go unanswered for a rainy day that cometh not. This, then, is an omnibus missive to allay apprehension that shack-happiness or the vicissitudes of life in the wilderness could account for our unusual silence.

PASTIME PRINTER will be gotten out for our friends as frequently as the moving spirit allows. Readers unfamiliar with a printer's terminology, seagoing slang or GI French, German and Spanish will find a few uncommon words to surmount. Typophiles may marvel at the outdated faces and eccentricities of composition, but we shall do the best we can with the tools we have, all for the fun of it, making no pretension to superior typography or literary elegance. We shall talk about type and the use of type. Some of it will be a little heavy on the historical side, but stuff for the amateur printer and type lover not easily found elsewhere.

### *Kerning and Non-kerning Type Faces*

The dictionary defines a kern as that part of a type which overhangs the shaft or shank, as in an italic. These kerned letters constitute the greatest single source of annoyance in a letter foundry, while broken kerns have spoiled many a piece of printing when the top of an 'f' or the tail of a 'y' disappeared in the course of a press run.

Why, then, do not typefounders eliminate troublesome kerned characters? Aye, there's the rub!

Before the turn of the nineteenth century, those types we now classify as oldstyle were used almost exclusively. Companion italics for oldstyle romans were made to look like lettering with a quill pen, imitating the bastard script employed by penmen for legal documents and records. To simulate the characteristic flourishes, long 'ascenders' and 'descenders' of that period, type was made with numerous kerned characters for close fitting. Otherwise, to obtain the desired effect, a 'fount of letter' should have included a multiplicity of double-letter logotypes for which there was no room in the case.

So-called 'modern' types came into general use in the early years of the past century. Italicized words in body matter and the 'long s' that looked like an 'f' both went out of style along with pigtail hairdo and knee breeches. But the changeover was not instantaneous, and no doubt the foundries had calls for oldstyle characters for a long time afterward. Then the growing popularity of imitation penmanship script types, with curlicues and acute slope, necessitated the adoption of 'wing' bodies. These are still used for Bank Script, Royal Script, Excelsior Script and others that remain a necessity for printed invitations.

Wing-body scripts generally require casting on a slow, hand operated or partially mechanized sidewinder machine. After casting, the sprue or 'jet' is broken by hand. Every

piece of this type requires hand rubbing and many fitting operations so that any letter will work without interfering with its neighbors in a composed line. Consequently, the selling price of script type is about double that of plain faces made on automatic casting machines.

Wing-body scripts are fragile and letters easily broken. At one time the better printers used felt-lined cases for scripts. Some printers in Germany have angled cases not unlike those for Ludlow matrices in which script and text types are kept on their feet to prevent damage in the case.

Type foundries have endeavored to make satisfactory non-kerning italic and script faces to sell at plain type prices. A good example is ATF Adscript, used in 48-point at the masthead of THE PASTIME PRINTER. Acceptance of non-kerning script and semiscript faces by the trade has been disappointing. Similarly, faces made on angle body to permit close fitting without kerns were not acclaimed by typesetters, presumably because letter-spacing is difficult.

*To get copies of this sheet whenever printed in the future, sans obligation, drop a postal card with your name and address for our mail list.*

### **Ye Country Editor Once Said:**

This printing business isn't all that it's cracqued up to be. We ordered several phonts oph very nice type, but the outphit came without any ephs or cays. This maxe it hard, but we will try to get along without them as best we can. We don't lique the loox oph this cind oph spelling any better than you, but mistaques will happen and iph the ph's and c's, and the x's and que's hold out, we shall ceep (sound the 'e' hard) going aphter a phashion till the new sorts arrive. It's no joque.

—*Anonymous.*

## SKYLINE BEND SCUTTLEBUTT

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By way of orientation at this our point of departure, let it be said that 'scuttlebutt' is Navyese for *the word*, good or bad, as the case may be. Skyline Bend, Virginia home of the Watts family, is an old mountain farm in the big bend of The Skyline Drive, on the western slope of Blue Ridge, overlooking Shenandoah Valley. Front Royal, where The Skyline Drive begins, is eleven miles northward from our place. The village of Browntown, two miles *down*, is the nearest postoffice, but most of our mail comes to Box 226, Front Royal. The elevation at Skyline Bend is 1400 feet. Lat. 38—48 N, Long. 78—12 W. No telephone and no r.v. Here is life in the country without farming.

Skyline Bend was acquired in 1948, on our return from Army service in Germany. We are not native Virginians. The Commander and I are Easterners, but we lived on The Coast for twenty years between wars. Our kids, Don and Nancy, are *Californios*. We resided in Seattle when the Second War sent Don to the South Pacific in the Navy and Pop into the Army. We all got together here when Don wound up his long active service with a round-the-world cruise on the aircraft carrier *Rendova*.

While Pop worked for ATF at Elizabeth, the others put in a rugged year at 'Boondockerschloss' without central heating in winter. Electricity and running water were got in, while all hands painted up a storm. Don razed a dozen unsightly outbuildings and pushed back the wilderness in all directions. Twelve rooms and *path* became eleven rooms and bath, yet still naught but Franklin stoves for heating.

Mutinous mutterings spurred Pop into finding family quarters in Jersey. Don went to work for UAL at Newark airport and Nancy started with Amsterdam Continental. Peace reigned at Skyline Bend until Pop retired in 1954.