

THE CRABGRASS PRESS
OF
PHILIP L. METZGER



Department of Special Collections
KENNETH SPENCER RESEARCH LIBRARY
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas
1987

*This small tribute to the memory of
Philip L. Metzger and his Crabgrass Press
is issued on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition
drawn from the Crabgrass Press Collection
presented to the Kenneth Spencer Research Library in June 1987
by Louise A. Metzger and Philip A. Metzger.*

“The decision to set up my printery was not the result of conscious planning; it snuck up on me when I wasn’t looking. For several years I had been boring friends with talk about buying a printing press. Finally it got too much for one of them in the printing business who confronted me one day with an ancient and honorable but still beautiful Old Style C & P 7 x 11 treadle press and told me to put up or shut up. So I put up. Once I got the press home there was no stopping me. Lead and slug cutter, a mitre, a folding machine, a 24-inch paper cutter, a stapling machine, over 100 fonts of type, slews of ornaments and fleurons, mountains of paper, oceans of ink, and two California type cabinets soon followed.” So began the Crabgrass Press of Philip L. Metzger in the late 1950s as recounted in Bill Haywood’s *It’s a Small World* in 1960.

Growing up in Chicago, Phil had always had an eye for fine printing and longed to own a printing press, but the realization of such a dream was beyond his family’s limited means. “My parents were immigrants from Germany, and my Dad was in the meat business in this country,” he told the *University of Chicago Alumni Magazine* in 1980. “I had to fight to go to high school, and fight to go to college, because I was supposed to be a meat-cutter.” Phil attended the University of Chicago, graduating AB in History in 1938 and AM in School Administration in 1939. He was a high school teacher prior to World War II. During the war he served in

Air Force personnel administration, advancing from private to major. He left the Air Force in 1946 and became Employment Manager for the Standard Transformer Co. of Chicago, in 1947 he became Director of Industrial Relations Research for the National Metal Trades Association in Chicago, and in 1951 he became Supervisor of Employment for the Kansas City Power & Light Co., bringing his wife, Louise, and two sons, Philip and Joel, to Tomahawk Road in Prairie Village. At KCPL he subsequently became Supervisor of Labor Relations and Employment, Personnel Director, and finally Vice President.

Phil bought the Old Style Chandler & Price treadle press in 1957 and in doing so founded the Crabgrass Press. A second press was acquired soon after, a 7 x 11 clamshell treadle jobber dating from the late nineteenth century. Phil's centerpiece was a demy folio Albion hand press purchased from Don Drenner in Coffeyville in January 1970. The press was manufactured in 1900, one of the last ever built by Hopkinson & Cope who first began building the Albions in the 1820s. It is one of the classic nineteenth-century iron hand presses and can produce work of superb quality. The first Old Style Chandler & Price treadle press purchased in 1957 was sold in the early 1970s and a larger motorized 8 x 12 Old Style C & P was purchased in its stead. The 1970s also saw two other changes: the 7 x 11 clamshell press was sold, and a motorized Vandercook proof press was purchased. In 1976 Phil retired and devoted himself completely to printing. When the Press was founded in 1957, he had first begun printing on the original Old Style C & P "using old, worn type donated by an amused but sympathetic commercial printer." Soon, though, he began to acquire a great many fine fonts and ornaments, mostly from German, French, Dutch, Italian, and English type foundries. Indeed, by 1981 his types were characterized as the finest collection of foundry types in the country.

In 1963 Phil met a young German, Harald Peter, who was head of the Hallmark Graphic Design Department. Peter had come from the Akademie für das graphische Gewerbe of the University of Munich where he had studied graphic design and calligraphy with Georg Trump, Eduard Ege, and Hermann Zapf. Phil had been naturally attracted to the Trump and Zapf type faces and had already purchased several fonts. The two men quickly became friends and set out to plan new projects. Their first collaborative book was *Six Poems, 1966 Hallmark Honor Prizes*. Harald Peter designed the small book and Phil handset it in Diotima, a type face designed by Gudrun Zapf. In fact, Phil was the first printer in the United States to use Diotima. The book was printed offset in an edition of 2500 copies. In Phil's copy, now in the Crabgrass Press Collection at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library, Peter wrote the following note: "Phil: thank you for your essential help in making this book—Harald." Peter also designed Phil's 1968 *Six Poems*, the 1965 honor

prizes, which he printed for the Society of Private Printers. This book was set in Zapf Sistina and Palatino. Characteristic of most of Phil's books was his elegant use of color. For example, in *Six Poems*, the title and section titles were printed in red, the rest in black. As usual the pressmark was also printed in color. The 1969 *After gray days* was similarly treated in two colors and Zapf faces. In almost all of his subsequent publications Phil chose to print in either Trump or Zapf type faces.

In 1965 Phil and Louise visited the Klingspor Museum in Offenbach am Main, an institution devoted to modern printing. Even though the museum was closed for renovation, Phil talked his way in and spent four hours in the collections. When Hermann Zapf was leaving Germany to visit Kansas City as a consultant to Hallmark in 1966, he was told at the Klingspor Museum about Phil, an avid American printer who lived in the Kansas City area. Naturally, Zapf looked him up, and they became fast friends and saw each other regularly, both in the United States and Germany, long after Zapf's formal connection with Hallmark ended in 1972. Indeed, Zapf even called his new home in Darmstadt "the European branch of the Crabgrass Press International." In 1975, as a keepsake for the Typocrafters visit to Kansas City, Phil printed *A Small Portfolio in Honor of Hermann Zapf*. It consisted of nine leaves printed in two colors and set in Zapf's Palatino, Optima, Sistina, and Virtuosa, and Gudrun Zapf's Diotima and Smaragd. Rick Cusick did the design and calligraphy for this exceptional piece. In many ways *A Small Portfolio* was an indication of the great things to come in the *Orbis Typographicus*.

Phil described the *Orbis Typographicus* in 1980 in the following terms: "Over the past ten years, Hermann Zapf as designer and Philip Metzger as printer have worked together on the production of this portfolio of twenty-five quotations. It has been a happy collaboration motivated by a mutual interest in how hand-set type looks as printed on a hand press, and for the sheer pleasure, as each of them has found the time to work on it. The quotations are from the writings of Thomas Alva Edison, Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, and such whose comments on the Arts and Sciences seem especially apt. The type faces used more or less in experimental typography come from the cases of the Crabgrass Press. All but a few are printed on mould-made and hand-made papers from England, France, Germany, Italy and Japan and, in three cases, from the United States: two on Worthy Hand & Arrow paper, which has not been made for years, and one on a sheet by James Yarnell of Wichita, Kansas [made] specially for this undertaking. Most are printed in two or more colors."

In the summer of 1980 Zapf and Metzger began to plan a new project of twenty poems. At the end of the year Zapf wrote Phil with a number of concrete suggestions and the "Poetry Project" was begun in

the new year. In July Phil arranged for special handmade paper from Twinrocker with Zapf and Crabgrass Press watermarks. The project was suspended on Phil's sudden death on September 17, 1981.

"I am often asked for the genesis of the name of my press. The homeowner knows that if he neglects his lawn it will soon be overrun with crabgrass. Since acquiring my press I have spent little time on the lawn. Ergo: the Crabgrass Press." Three pressmarks have been used at the Press. The first, consisting of a diagonally ligatured CP over a sprig of crabgrass, was designed by William F. Haywood in 1958. The second, consisting of a horizontally ligatured CP with a sprig of crabgrass projecting into the counter of the C from the lower bow of the P, was designed by Harald Peter in 1966. Harald Peter also designed the last and most successful mark in 1968. This rebus, crab—grass—press, was cut in wood by the well-known artist Fritz Kredel.

Phil produced a relatively small number of major projects, and he was probably happiest working on a piece of ephemera, a Christmas card, an invitation, or a broadside with which he could quickly achieve an interesting effect. He was thus able to experiment, and with such small pieces he could afford to fail occasionally, but he was always learning and more often than not producing typographically stunning pieces. Phil admitted that he was weak on design, and that it was his wife Louise who made a major contribution to design on many projects. The family Christmas cards, a case in point, were a cooperative venture between Phil and Louise. The two chose an illustration together, a plate was made and the image printed on the front of the card. Louise would then color the engraving by hand and Phil would finally print the inside of the card. With the assistance of his two sons, Philip and Joel, Phil did a good deal of job printing which helped to support the fine printing. For example, over a number of years the Crabgrass Press supplied printed prize ribbons for Kansas City area swim meets. Even after the boys left home, Phil continued to print business cards and invitations.

While many other contemporary fine printers outstripped Phil in terms of the number of books produced, few if any could claim to have surpassed him in terms of quality. In 1969 fellow printer Bill Jackson of the Four Ducks Press in Wichita characterized Phil as "the most hard-core private pressman in the country . . . His library of fine types is probably unmatched by any of the private presses active today."

RICHARD W. CLEMENT
November 1987



BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE CRABGRASS PRESS

I. Major Publications

- 1963 **Lincoln as seen by C.C. Brown.** Edited by Wayne C. Temple.... The Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas, 1963. 17, [3] pp.; two colors; 18.7 x 12.6 cm. Colophon: "The text of this booklet was hand set in 12 point Bulmer Italic.... In addition, Oxford Italic and other sizes of Bulmer are used throughout. The papers are Lee Corsican Text, Tiara; and Strathmore Beau Brilliant, Riviera Rose cover. Approximately 300 copies were printed for distribution to the editor, to college and university libraries having Lincoln collections, and to friends of the Press." Printed by Philip A. Metzger.
- 1966 **Six Poems, 1966 Hallmark Honor Prizes.** University selections in the Third Annual Kansas City Poetry Contests. [20] pp.; two colors; 18.4 x 13.3 cm. Colophon: "Copyright 1966 by Hallmark Cards, Inc., Kansas City, Missouri. Handset in Diotima type and printed offset on Strathmore Impress paper. Designed by Harald Peter. Printed in a single edition of 2500 copies." Not a Crabgrass Press book, but hand set by Metzger.
- 1967 **Three Poems, Gunnar Ekelöf.** [12] pp.; 24.5 x 17.5 cm. Title page verso: "Copyright 1967 by Muriel Rukeyser and Leif Sjöberg. Terrence Williams, Publisher, 830 Missouri Street, Lawrence, Kansas. Designed by J. Carlos Moore." Colophon: "Handset in 10, 16 and 24 punkt Diotima by the Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas."
- 1968 **Six Poems.** The Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas, 1968. [16] pp.; two colors; 19 x 13.5 cm. Colophon: "Type handset in Sistina and Palatino.... Book designed by Harald Peter. Printed by Philip Metzger at the Crabgrass Press.... Edition of 250 copies with those numbered 1 to 40 set aside for the members of the Society of Private Printers."
- 1969 **After gray days and Other Poems, John Knoepfle.** [8] pp.; two colors; 22.8 x 14.6 cm. Colophon: "This insert [for the *Missouri Library Association Quarterly* XXX, no. 1 (1969)] was designed and hand set by Philip Metzger who, along with his private pleasure, The Crabgrass Press established in 1957, is located in Prairie Village, Kansas. The poems were set in the Optima type face and other matter in the related Palatino type face...."
- 1969 **The Twins** [by Mona Van Duyn]. Folded broadside; two colors; 58.2 x 23.6 cm. Colophon: "This broadside was designed by Philip Metzger at the Crabgrass press in Prairie Village, Kansas. It was hand set in Codex.... This insert [for the *Missouri Library Association Quarterly* XXX, no. 4 (1969)] is printed on Hamilton Andorra Ivory text. An additional 100 copies were printed on a Japanese hand-made paper for private distribution." In actual fact only 15 of the 100 additional copies were printed.
- 1972 **Regarding calligraphy, Egdon H. Margo.** [6] printed leaves, [4] blank leaves; two colors; 18.5 x 13.8 cm. Cover title: *I gather that you are interested in Calligraphy?* Colophon: "'Regarding Calligraphy' is taken from a letter sent to Rick Cusick by Don Margo on February 6, 1969.... Fourteen copies have been printed on Hosho Japanese hand-made paper and eighty-five on Warren's Olde Style text. Body copy was set in 12 punkt Trump Mediaeval and the title in 24 punkt. Rick Cusick calligraphed the first sentence. Printed by the Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas. December, 1972."

- 1974 **The Alphabet Is...**, by **Victor Hugo**. The Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas, 1974. [8] leaves; two colors; 11.4 x 9.1 cm. Colophon: "Designed and printed at The Crabgrass Press in Prairie Village, Kansas & completed in early 1974. Hand-set in 10 punkt Trump Mediaeval & 20 corps Cristal. Of an edition of 250 copies, 200 are on Kilmory Text with Carrara Cover; the balance on hand-mades, mostly Japanese Hosho, in Fabriano wrappers."
- 1974 **Regarding Calligraphy, Raymond F. DaBoll**. [8] pp.; two colors; 17.8 x 13.4 cm. Colophon: "Title page illustration: Ray DaBoll. Calligraphy and design: Rick Cusick. Set in Trump Mediaeval. Twenty-five copies were printed on Japanese Hosho and 150 on Warren's Olde Style Text at the Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas. March, 1974."
- 1974 **An Exuberance of Ornaments for DWH**. A testimonial to David Winston Heron from the Friends of the Library at the University of Kansas in recognition of his part in the establishment & conduct of this Society and of his valuable & valued service as Director of Libraries, 1968-1974, presented at the Spring meeting of the Friends on the evening of 26 April 1974 on the campus of the University of Kansas. [8] leaves; eight colors; 21.1 x 15.5 cm. Colophon: "This booklet, saluting Dave Heron, Printer, Librarian, and adopted Kansan, as he returns to the Golden West to further his career in his native California, was conceived, designed and printed by the Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas. Hand-set types were used throughout and, in the order of their appearance, with their designers, are: Ondine, A. Frutiger; Erasmus Initials, S.H. de Roos; Trump Mediaeval, Georg Trump; Bulmer, William Martin; Romane, Jan van Krimpen; Palatino, Hermann Zapf; Oxford, James Ronaldson; and Perpetua, Eric Gill. A variety of American, English, German, French, Swiss & Dutch designed ornaments or fleurons were also used to carry out the theme of this booklet. Ten copies were printed on Japanese Hosho hand-made paper and the covers on French Arches and Les Annonay papers; five for the Friends of the Library and five for the printer."
- 1974 **The Petite maison of Naschtchokine**. [1] colored plate, vi, [2], 5-20, [4] pp.; two colors; 12.5 x 10 cm. Preface and translation from the French by Louise Allen Metzger. Colophon: "Designed and printed at the Crabgrass Press in Prairie Village, Kansas in an edition of 250 copies. The type face used is Trump Mediaeval. The title page was designed and the Russian calligraphed by Rick Cusick. September 1974."
- 1975 **A small portfolio in honor of Hermann Zapf**. The Typocrafters, 1975. [9] unbound leaves; two colors; 20.2 x 14.4 cm. Colophon: "This Portfolio is issued in an edition of 125 copies for the meeting of The Typocrafters in Kansas City, Missouri, October 17-19, 1975. Eighty-two copies were done on dampened, hand-made Bird & Bull paper, a gift of the maker, Henry Morris, and 43 on Japanese Hosho paper. Rick Cusick did the design and calligraphy, and Philip Metzger the printing at his Crabgrass Press. Hermann Zapf's Palatino, Optima, Sistina, & Virtuosa, and Gudrun Zapf's Diotima & Smaragd were the typefaces used. Louise Metzger made the portfolio covers."
- 1978 **Words on Paper**. 16 pp.; four colors; 11.4 x 6.3 cm. Colophon: "One hundred fifty copies of this booklet were printed by the Crabgrass Press of which seventy are for The Society of Private Printers' Infant's Library and the remainder for friends. The typeface used for the text is 10 point Palatino and for the cover 16 point Sistina. The text paper is Warren's Olde Style. Phil L. Metzger, 4900 Tomahawk Road, Prairie Village, Kansas USA. MCMLXXVIII."
- 1980 **The Glenn Bookshop, 1933-1980, by Ardis Glenn**. A Talk sponsored by The Friends of the Library and presented November 9, 1980 at the UMKC Library. Title page verso: "University of Missouri-Kansas City, Friends of the Library, Publication Series Number 2. Copyright 1980 by Ardis Glenn." 29, [3] pp.; two colors; 21.5 x 14.1 cm. Colophon: "This address by Mrs. Ardis Glenn was designed by and printed at the Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas in an edition of 500 copies. Caslon Old Face type was used for the text and Caslon Open Face for the cover and title page. The paper is Kilmory Text and Kilmory Cover." Composed on Linotype.

- 1980 **Oldrich Menhart. Evening Conversations of the Booklover Rubricus and the Printer Tympanus.** The Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas: 1980. Translated by Philip L. Metzger. 59, [5] pp.; two colors; 18.1 x 10.8 cm. Colophon: "... This edition of 100 copies is printed on Ingres paper with hand-set Trump Mediaeval type. The frontispiece is a linocut by Bill Jackson; Rick Cusick's calligraphy for the title page headline is based on some of the design characteristics of Menhart's calligraphy and letterforms. The binding is by Fritz Eberhardt. [Erratum: Trudi Eberhardt's name should have appeared with that of her husband, Fritz, as an equal in the binding of this book.]"
- 1980 **Marks by Rick Cusick & Remarks about Aspects of Graphic Design by Noted Authorities Past and Present.** 1980, The Typocrafters, Toronto. [28] pp.; six colors; 18 x 12.7 cm. Colophon: "There are one hundred copies of this booklet, of which forty are reserved as a Keepsake for the Typocrafters at their 1980 meeting in Toronto, Canada. The design & Calligraphy are by Rick Cusick. Phil Metzger printed this joint effort with the Trump Mediaeval typeface on Warren's Olde Style paper in the month of August, 1980 at his Crabgrass Press."
- 1980 **Orbis Typographicus, Thoughts Words and Phrases on the Arts and Sciences, Experimental typography designed by Hermann Zapf, Composed and Printed by hand by Philip Metzger.** The Crabgrass Press, MCMLXXX. [29] leaves; 30.5 x 22.8 cm. Colophon: "This portfolio shows the result of a happy collaboration of more than ten years motivated by a mutual interest in how hand-set type looks in an experimental way. Typefaces used are from the collection of the Crabgrass Press. A variety of American, English, French, German, Italian, and Japanese hand-made and mould-made papers were used. The printing was done by hand, with in many instances the possibilities of a number of impressions per sheet. From a limited edition of 99 sets...."
- 1981 **Organic Compact, Selected Remarks of Judge John W. Oliver of the United States Court of the Western District of Missouri.** 89, [3] pp.; two colors; 20.8 x 13.2 cm. Colophon: "This publication was designed by and printed at the Crabgrass Press, Prairie Village, Kansas in an edition limited to 100 copies and an additional five copies out of series. Caslon Old Face type was used for the cover, title page and section titles. The paper is Becket Text and Becket Cover." Composed on Linotype by M&M Typesetting.
- 1982 **Observations of a "Resolute Outsider," Excerpts from the writings of Paul Standard Presented in commemoration of his eighty-fifth birthday.** The Typocrafters. Chicago. 1981. 23 x 10 cm. Colophon: "There are 180 copies of this booklet, forty of which have been set aside as keepsakes for the Typocrafters. 95 copies have been printed on cream-colored Fabriano rag paper; the rest on white bond paper. The type is Trump Mediaeval. This project represents the final collaborative effort of Rick Cusick who edited, designed and provided the calligraphy, and Phil Metzger who set and printed part of it before his death on September 17, 1981. Grateful acknowledgement is given Garrett Boge who completed the major portion of the printing, and Louise Metzger for allowing the use of the facilities at the Crabgrass Press."

II. Smaller Printed Pieces

Surveying the output of Philip Metzger's Crabgrass Press, one is tempted to characterize it as a "jobbing studio," responsible for a great flood of small pieces of extremely high quality. Several items appeared in *It's a Small World*, Bill Haywood's annual celebration of the work of fine private presses. Phil printed many small broadsides of poetry, humor and literary quotations, as well as a whole range of personal items for the Metzger family: party invitations, announcements, and greeting cards for Christmas, Valentine's Day and birthdays. The general run of what might be called "job printing" from the Press maintained the same excellence and flair shown in the more specialized work, and included business cards, stationery, invitations, announcements, certificates, prize ribbons and bookplates. The small sampling included in the current exhibition offers a kaleidoscope of type styles, colors and illustrations: the masterly hand of Philip Metzger can be seen in every piece.