

Please - please NOT "the" instead of "she"

45 IRVING STREET      WILLIAM ADDISON DWIGGINS      DISK SIX

Note: The following essay on William Addison Dwiggins and his studio at 45 Irving Street was written in its entirety by Dorothy Abbe, an associate of Dwiggins who now works and lives in his studio.

"The studio," as it is called, was built in 1937 from plans drawn by William Addison Dwiggins for his design for a building situated on the side of a kettlehole. This location was particularly suitable for his purposes as it necessitated two floors, each with ground-level entrances --to his work room above, to a fully equipped marionette theatre below. In addition, it was directly across Irving Street from his home on Leavitt Street.

According to Harvard's Philip Hofer in The Dolphin, 1935, Dwiggins was "a man who is America's one true modern typographer and by far the outstanding book decorator and calligrapher; a mechanical wizard, type designer and specialist in advertising layout; an illustrator, mural painter, costume designer and sculptor; a playwright, satirist, and perhaps beyond even the best of his art --a thinker and a poet in prose." To this artistic talent one would add a sensitivity to the vicissitudes of life hardly to be endured unless united to an exceptionally joyous disposition, generous and understanding, so humanely disposed toward others.

Dwiggins was born in Martinsville, Ohio in 1880. After the death of his father in 1890 his mother returned to Cambridge, Ohio. In 1902 he went to the Frank Holme School of Illustration in Chicago where he became interested in lettering through the teaching of Frederic W. Goudy. In 1904 Goudy, having moved his Village Press to Hingham, Massachusetts, invited Dwiggins to join him, the attraction being an active Arts and Crafts movement. In 1906 Goudy moved to New York, whereas Dwiggins remained in Hingham until his death in 1956.

Dwiggins soon made the acquaintance of leading printers and designers in Boston who quickly recognized his talent as a calligrapher. He did some book decoration for D.B. Updike of the Merrymount Press but most of his work until the early twenties consisted of lettering and calligraphy for advertising, while at the same time he took a great interest in book design. His humorous pamphlet, An Investigation into the Physical Properties of Books, published in 1919, consisted of a report by an imaginary committee which found that "All Books of the present day are Badly Made." It was a turning point in the publishing business. Although by the mid-twenties he was devoting himself entirely to book design, in 1928 his years of experience in advertising culminated in Layout in Advertising; reprinted in 1948, it is still of value today.

A chance remark in Layout in Advertising led to the design of his first type face for the Mergenthaler Linotype Company in 1929, an association which lasted to the end of his life. Five faces were published, Caledonia and Electra being the best known; five faces were issued in the pilot size for experimental use; several others remain in various stages of completion.

His work as a book typographer extended from the mid-twenties through the early fifties, during which period he designed more than 300 books for Knopf, as well as fifty or so for other publishers. Many of his books are decorated with ornaments derived through his unique use of the stencil; others are enhanced by his frequent use of calligraphy for display lines on title pages, chapter openings, etc.

It was during the thirties that he created his marionette theatre. He was not interested in marionettes per se but rather for the opportunity for wood carving, stage, and costume design, lighting, play writing, mechanical devices, etc., all of which provided an outlet that the graphic arts could not supply. This material, including some fifty marionettes, is

in the Boston Public Library, along with his typographic work, type drawings, and furniture of his construction.

In addition to the book on advertising, he wrote, among others, Towards a Reform of the Paper Currency in which he pointed out deficiencies in the design of U.S. stamps and paper money, appending graphic examples to show how it might be improved. World War II prevented a follow up by the government. WAD to RR, the calligraphic text in the guise of a letter, explains how to go about designing a type face. Marionette in Motion, with calligraphic text and accompanying diagrams, describes the Puterschein system of marionette construction, Puterschein being his oft-used pseudonym. He also wrote numerous articles related to his work, as well as a few imaginative short stories.

During his life there were exhibitions of his work in New York and Boston; honorary membership in the American Institute of Graphic Arts, New York, as well as being the recipient of its Gold Medal; honorary membership in the Society of Printers, Boston, and the Double Crown Club, London, among others. In 1947 he received an honorary degree from Harvard University; in 1949 he was made a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Boston.

During the last ten years of Dwiggins' life I lived at his home and worked with him at the studio. In 1962 I purchased the building from Mrs. Dwiggins, and, in anticipation of living there, built a two-car garage. In 1965 the proscenium and all the marionette equipment was stored upstairs in order to remodel the lower floor for living quarters. The upper floor remained the same.

The following bibliography was compiled by Dorothy Abbe, an associate of William Addison Dwiggins, who now lives and works in his studio.

Books by Dwiggins:

An Investigation into the Physical Properties of Books, pamphlet privately printed, 1919.

Layout in Advertising, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1928; revised 1948

Marionette in Motion, Puppetry Imprints, Detroit 1939.

MSS by WAD, The Typophiles, New York 1947

Towards the Reform of the Paper Currency, Limited Editions Club, New York, 1932

Books about Dwiggins:

The Dolphin, Number Two, Limited Editions Club, New York, 1935. "The Work of W.A. Dwiggins," by Philip Hofer, pp. 220-256

Postscripts on Dwiggins, Essays and Recollections, The Typophiles, New York, 1960

William Addison Dwiggins, by Dorothy Abbe, pamphlet, The Boston Public Library, 1974