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MY DAD – MASTER PRINTER!

My dad was born in Clayton, Illinois in 1885. He was the third son in a family of four sons and a younger daughter. His mother died when he was quite young and he was practically raised by house-keepers as his father was a candy and ice cream maker who peddled his wares at county fairs, chautauquas and the like, so was away from home a lot. He struggled to stay in school through the eighth grade – but I do not recall him saying he ever graduated, as he said he finally became at odds with the 5th or 6th housekeeper his father had hired to care for them, and ran away from home. A series of odd jobs led him from town to town. Finally he landed in a town in Nebraska where he was hired as a “printers devil.” The job consisted of doing all the dirty jobs the printers did not have the time to do. He learned to sort the type and put it in the proper squares of the type cases - he learned to sort the slugs and liners – eventually he became fascinated with setting the type into lines and putting the lines of type into the forms from which the finished pages were printed. After a number of years experience he became a bonafide printer. Job after job finally let him to Gower, Missouri where he worked on a newspaper, The Gower Enterprise.

It was during this period of his life that he met and married his wife Ammy Gray and moved to St. Joseph. During the next five or six years of his life he worked on the St. Joseph Gazette. He quit that job one fine day when his boss refused to let him take an afternoon off to attend a baseball game.

After the baseball game was over and he’d gotten that out of his system he was hired by the Combe Printing Co., one of the largest printing plants in St. Joseph. This job was terminated by an illness that necessitated his having to give up indoor work – so he moved to a 10-acre farm on Riverside Road. He became a farmer of sorts for the next 10 years, but as his health improved he yearned to return to his real love – the printing business – so he sold out his farm, which had grown to almost 200 acres on the Leonard road just a short distance south of Mitchell Avenue, known as the Davies Place.

With the cash from his farm sale he purchased a one-room print shop at 324 So. 4th St. in St. Joseph in 1924. By this time his family had grown to two sons and two daughters and all were in grade school, except the first born son. He was then in high school and able to work in the print shop and became a pressman – operating the one and only press that came with the shop. It soon became a family shop as Mother soon learned to set type and do bindery work.

My dad was an exceptional printer and businessman – his business grew by leaps & bounds, so that by the time I was ready for College in 1931 all of the children were working after school and summers at the print shop and it had expanded to three adjoining buildings: 320-322-324 So. 4th. It was a family business and we all had a vested interest in it. My older brother was in charge of the press room – my younger brother was the linotype operator, my younger sister did the bindery work, I became the office girl and helped make layouts for jobs, and my mother continued to do the hand setting of type for headlines, social printing jobs, etc. Dad was the chief of it all. With Dad’s supervision and guidance his shop outgrew the three buildings, so in 1945 he purchased a much larger building across the street and one block south. Much larger presses and two new linotypes were now in operation – Dad was in his all time high as an accomplished printer, and had become well known in St. Joseph as a producer of fine printing.

Then came the modernization of the printing industry and the “quick printing” innovation (or off-set printing as it was called) came into being. This called for a lot of new equipment – complicated photography and make-ready and different types of equipment to print with. Dad was not one to be out done, so he made the needed changes and kept up with the trade. Years had added age to him and more and more of the work was being done by his two sons. All of his eight grandchildren had worked at the business sometime during school vacations and after school times. He continued to run a family oriented print shop. There was no retiring for him though, and he ran the business with an iron hand and an even stronger will, up to the very day of his death in November of 1967 at the age of 82.

He was one of those workmen that loved his profession and had great pride in his work. He was truly a master printer – My Dad, Logan E. Wing Sr. – owner & operator of the Wing Printing Company of St. Joseph, Mo.