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## April 18

On April 18, 1925, a printer discussed in a radio talk the production of a book which had been printed in his plant. Normally reticent about speaking in public, William Edwin Rudge was perhaps emboldened by the fact that it was also his wedding anniversary.

The Printing House of William Edwin Rudge, then located in Mount Vernon, New York, was one of the notable printing offices of its period. At the particular time, it was at the height of its fame for its production of fine books. In addition it was noted for first class commercial printing, for which there was a somewhat better market.

Rudge, the son of a printer who had operated a very small shop in New York City, had no early love for printing. However, he had, by force of circumstances, become responsible for his family's business at an early age because his father became too ill to continue it on his own. At the age of eleven he had worked in the shop, learning the trade in the fashion of the typical printer's devil. While he found it necessary to leave school in order to help out, he later managed to complete a three years' course in engineering at night at Cooper Union. But increased responsibilities in the small shop interfered with such study, and young Rudge settled down to be a printer.

The quality of printing produced by his shop was quite ordinary and comparable to the output of the countless little plants scattered through downtown Manhattan. In one aspect, however, Rudge slowly acquired a reputation, and this was in his ability to schedule and deliver his work promptly.

Rudge became one of the founders of the Graphics Group which met at the National Arts Club, and included such men as Thomas Nast Fairbanks, Frederic W. Goudy, Hal Marchbanks, and John Clyde Oswald. The intellectual challenge of this group awoke in Rudge a love for the historic values of his craft and a realization that printing could be more than just a livelihood. He enlisted the aid of the best typographic designers. By 1920 he was producing such a volume of top quality printing that he was able to enter over a hundred pieces in the famous National Arts Club Exhibition of that year. Of the thirty-nine medals awarded, his firm won six, with designs commissioned from Goudy, Bruce Rogers, and Elmer Adler.

In 1921 the plant was moved to Mount Vernon. For the next ten years some of the finest printing being produced in America issued from its presses. It was this period that was dominated by Bruce Rogers, who designed eighty books for the firm up to 1931. Among these are several of Rogers' finest books, such as the *Journal of Madam Knight*, *Pierrot of the Minute*, and *Champ Fleury*. The 18-volume *Boswell Papers* was another design of Rogers which was a unique achievement of the firm.

With his reputation fully established and his dedication to fine printing in full swing, William Edwin Rudge died prematurely in his fifty-fourth year in 1931. In its obituary, the *Inland Printer* stated, ". . . we have in the industry men who are printers because they love their work beyond any other activity in life. Printing to this type of craftsman is an art, a passion, a lifework of consuming interest. It was in this group that William Edwin Rudge towered above most printers."

Posted on 18 April 2010 under [A Printer's Almanac](#).

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