Printers’ Marks

Shortly after the invention of the printing press during the 15th century, printers began the custom of using a cut displaying a personal emblem or device called “Printers’ Marks”. This mark used by the printer as a kind of “trade mark” on the work he had printed was placed at the end of the book following the colophon (a written paragraph prepared by the printer indicating the title and author of the book, usually the printer’s name, place and date of publication and often the editor and the patron who made possible the publication of the book). Today the colophon has been replaced by the title page.

The symbolisms of the emblems found in the Printers’ Marks are numerous and varied. Many are imitations of coats of arms and heraldic devices, some are pictorial representations of the printer’s name, others were “punning” devices based on the printer’s name. The orb and cross design were very popular as were various forms of shields and marks which depicted the printing press or printing implements. Animals, birds, fish, trees and flowers were other sources of symbolism often used with repeated geometric designs. Most of the devices were accompanied by the printer’s initials either obvious or concealed in the design.

Although there are some 1,500 fifteenth and sixteenth century Printers’ Marks, Mr. Clarence Donath, architect for the Aurora Town Public Library, selected 13 to be used in the top panels of the windows of the Reading Room and Meeting Room of the library.

Images of printers’ Marks reproduced from A Study of Rare Books by Nolie Mumey (Clason Press, 1930)
Window #1
Printer: Mace Panthoul
Date: 1501

Window #2
Printer: Valentin Schumann
Date: 1502
Window #3  Printer: Renatus Beck  
Date: 1511

Window #4  Printer: De Liesveldt  
Date: 1528
Window # 5
Printer: Richard Grafton
Date: 1537

Window # 6
Printer: Erhart Oglin
Date: 1505
Window # 7
Printer: Gian Giacomo Di Legnano
Date: 1503

Window # 8
Printer: Hugh Singleton
Date: 1548
Window # 9

Printer: Jannot De Campis
Date: 1505

Window # 10

Printer: John Delot
Date: 1495
Window # 11

Printer: John Guyart

Date: 1528

Window # 12

Printer: Nicolas Jenson

Date: 1528
Window # 13

Printer: Wygand Kohn

Date: 1523