



# Recasting a Craft: St. Louis Typefounders Respond to Industrialization

*Robert A. Mullen*

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In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, type for newspapers and books was set one letter at a time, and the manufacturers of the metal type used in the printing trade were called typefounders. This prominent yet rarely documented industry was essential to the development of modern American publishing and was particularly prevalent in St. Louis. In *Recasting a Craft: St. Louis Typefounders Respond to Industrialization*, Robert A. Mullen recognizes the city's significant contributions to typefounding and details how the craft fundamentally changed through mechanization, growth, and the creation of a large conglomerate.

Like many trades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were eventually lost to industrialization, the typefoundries of St. Louis grew from small shops to factories with organized labor. Mullen describes three distinct periods of the industry that emerged in St. Louis's typefounding trade: the early struggles in establishing the industry there, the period of intense competition and creative enterprise, and the proliferation of new companies that appealed to those customers who felt alienated by the monopolizing older companies.

Mullen discusses at length the technological, social, and demographic foundations of the immense growth of the trade in the nineteenth century, identifying the changes in typographical design and the demand for it in the new era of advertising. He also profiles the workers, working conditions, and labor issues—such as the failed industry-wide strike of 1903—that emerged as the craft of typefounding entered the industrial age. More than two hundred type designs that originated with the St. Louis firms are listed in an appendix with examples of each face. The volume also contains a list of the catalogs of the St. Louis typefoundries known to exist in the public and academic libraries of the United States.

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