

Fifty Years of Picture Making

AT THE close of 1937 The Tribune's engraving department was fifty years old. And as an interesting companion fact, the head of that department, Louis Racicot, on the same date had been with the paper fifty years. The arrival and installation of the department and Mr. Racicot were like twins—coincident and simultaneous. Both came to The Tribune in Christmas day, 1887.

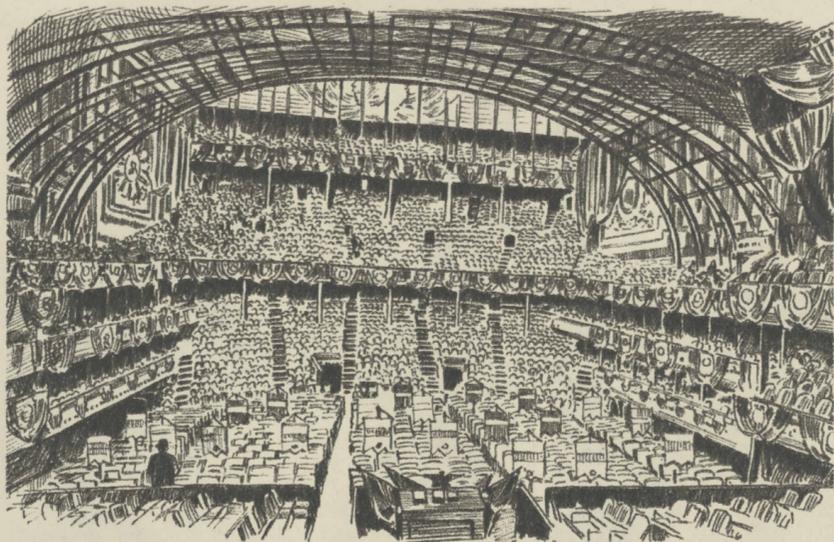
Tribune Engraving Department and Louis Racicot—Their Story

Since Mr. Racicot continues at the head of the department, they are seemingly one, inseparable and indivisible. Moreover, his term of service on the paper stretches over a longer period than that of any other present employé. He remains today alert to the needs and interests of "the house," as he has always called The Tribune.

At the beginning of 1887 Mr. Racicot was an apprentice engraver in a Chicago commercial house, the sole and only assistant to D. La Pointe, his chief. In that year pictures in the paper were a comparative rarity. Indeed, more of them appeared in the ads than in the news columns. They were sometimes wood engravings, sometimes line drawings prepared by the chalk plate process. Such as it was, the work was done outside the office. There were in Chicago commercial wood engravers doing our occasional work, and there was Harold R. Heaton, The Tribune's first employed artist. He produced chalk plates for the paper in his own home. The chalk plate was made on a steel base the height of type, coated an eighth of an inch deep with a plaster of paris composition. The drawing was made on this surface and a needle cut the drawing into the metal.

Toward the end of 1887 a few portrait pen drawings (zinc etchings) appeared in the paper signed HRH (Mr. Heaton). Then, at Christmas time, Messrs. La Pointe and Racicot, both French boys, were employed, and the zinc etching department of The Tribune started. The two boys had been neighbors in French Canada, born on farms close to the south shore of the St. Lawrence river just across from Montreal. When he grew up, La Pointe, the elder of the two, came to Chicago and connected himself with a commercial engraving plant at 57 West Washington street. The Tribune was among its customers.

Mr. Racicot as a lad worked in a grocery store in the city of Montreal, but the work was hard and he was ambitious. One day he carried a bushel of potatoes into the home of Mrs. La Pointe and was moved somehow



Outstanding illustration of The Tribune of 1898 was this pen drawing of the Auditorium theater interior, executed by Harold R. Heaton (HRH), the first artist employed by the newspaper. A five-column zinc etching was made of the drawing, and from that was printed the picture, on June 17 of that year—the year that the Auditorium was hurriedly opened for the G. O. P. convention which nominated Benjamin Harrison for President.

to ask her to write to her husband, now in Chicago, and ask if there would be a chance for Louis if he should come to this city. Without delay La Pointe replied, telling the young friend to come along. He added (in French), "If we starve, we'll starve together."

Thus it was that Chicago annexed Mr. Racicot, who couldn't speak any English. That was nearly a year before The Tribune employed him, and in the meantime he was an apprentice in the plant at 57 West Washington street and learning to speak our language. In mastering it he retained and still retains an accent which has always been charming to his co-workers.

As this narrative suggests, the year 1887 was an important one in the history and development of The Tribune. Pictorially the paper practically dates from that time, and that is where one takes up the record of newspaper illustration. Its progress, as shown in the files from that time on, is interesting and continuous, but its development was not rapid. In 1888 we find more of HRH's small portraits—line drawings. The outstanding illustration noted in that year's files was printed on June 17, a five column zinc cut from a pen drawing of the Auditorium theater interior executed by HRH. That was the year the Auditorium was hurriedly opened for the G. O. P.

convention which nominated Benjamin Harrison for President.

In the exciting week of that convention The Tribune's news columns were more profusely illustrated than ever before. But the pictures were all pen sketches of leaders, delegates' groups, and at the end, two column pictures of Gen. Harrison and his running mate, Levi P. Morton.

In the years 1889 and 1890 the illustrations continued to be zinc etchings of line drawings—small portraits, more numerous, but still the characteristic pen work of Heaton.

In 1891 George A. Coffin, a marine artist, had a few pen sketches in the paper, and Heaton kept up his work. Coffin was the first newspaper artist in Chicago to sketch our warships in the '90's—ships of the White Fleet that was built in the Cleveland administration when William C. Whitney was secretary of the navy, and ships that constituted the fleet which engaged the Spaniards during the war of 1898. A Coffin line drawing of the battleship Maine had appeared in The Tribune before the ship's sinking in 1898. The etching was in our cut "morgue" (a pine wood shelf in the telegraph room) and it was promptly mounted and used

again just after that fateful day in Havana harbor.

But we have been forging ahead of our story to cover the art work of Mr. Coffin. In 1891, his first year here, there was the first mention of the World's Fair with a sketch of the projected administration building. In 1892 small line portraits continued the order of the day, but at Christmas time there appeared an ambitious effort, a full page

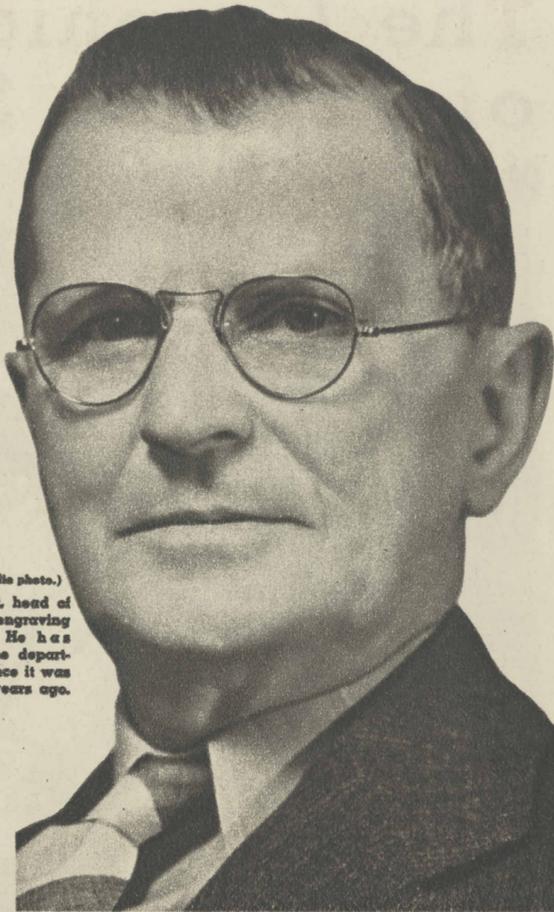
drawing (pen work by Heaton) illustrating a Christmas poem.

The World's Fair of 1893 afforded scope for more pictures as well as for an abundance of "fine writing." Ross board drawings were first used; an effect similar to the Ben Day screen. And in the next three years the art effects in the paper were similar—pen and ink drawings and ross board illustrations.

It was in 1897 that half tones first appeared in the paper, as well as the work of a greater variety of artists, Maratta, Carter, Sewell Collins, and Gus O'Shaughnessy among them. The half tone process first enabled the paper to reproduce photographs direct without the intervention of the artist.

On June 10 of that year appeared what for the period was a piece of unprecedented enterprise—the fiftieth anniversary number of the paper, with two special color sections which were printed outside in a commercial shop. One of the four column half tones (not in color) presented the Tribune building at Madison and Dearborn streets "at dawn," and observation of the printed effect, dark and barely distinguishable, suggests that the editor chose wisely when he picked the twilight morning hour. With the shallow etching it is likely any hour would have done for the dawn.

The first ambitious attempt at half tone work was on April 1 of that year—a Frederick Remington black page in fine screen. In 1898 William L. Wells joined the staff as head of the art department and drew around him young men, some of whom



(Tribune Studio photo.) Louis Racicot, head of the Tribune engraving department. He has been with the department ever since it was started fifty years ago.

a pink and green were run in the Sunday paper this year. In the autumn of this year (1901) color comics were added to the Sunday paper. Merry Andrew, by Richard Henry Little, and a feature called Animal Land adorned a new three and four color magazine section. This progress was

and it was in 1914, just as the great war started, that the paper installed its first rotogravure press, built in Mülhausen, Germany. This roto process to an extent revolutionized newspaper picture printing, and along in 1922 and 1923 color-roto was introduced. About the same time color became a more pronounced feature of life all around, and The Tribune became the leader among all newspapers in promoting and developing color advertising in daily and Sunday issues. The marvelous progress in this art in the last decade is familiar to the contemporary newspaper readers.

Two years ago The Tribune established a color engraving department. Given impetus by the increasing use of newsprint color work—advertisements and front pages of various Sunday sections—growth has been rapid. The staff of this special department now numbers sixteen, under the direction of Patrick A. Bresnahan.

Through it all for just half a century Mr. Racicot has been head of the engraving department of the paper. He had been here only five years when Theodore Schultz joined him. Mr. Schultz for twenty years had special charge in the roto plant. He is now retired on pension because of ill health. Since his retirement Gordon McDonald has been roto foreman. Ferdinand Otto, still working in the etching plant, has been here thirty-seven years. Joseph M. Hough, who came thirty-two years ago, is still here, general foreman. Frank and Robert Racine, both now pensioned, came with Mr. Racicot thirty years ago. Next of those still on The Tribune's rolls was William J. Barrett, active after twenty-eight years of service, and now night foreman. Others who have been in the engraving department twenty years or more and are still there are (with the date of their arrival):

Gilbert Bosse, August, 1917; Edward F. Classen, March, 1910; Leo Duryea, January, 1915; Fred Hunkler, October, 1911; Pat Lynch, July, 1915; Herb MacKenzie, October, 1913; Edward Nowy, January, 1914; Frank Rebscher, October, 1911; Steve Sawalski, September, 1917; August Wegner, January, 1914.

The Ben Day branch of the department was headed from the first by E. Ackerman, who is still there after thirty-seven years. Ray Mehren is the other Ben Day man who has served there over twenty years.

Aside from Mr. Schultz and the Racines, two others are on the pension list of the paper—Olaf Isaacson, who started work here in 1913, and Samuel Stiles, who came in 1915. Mr. La Pointe left the paper years ago and Mr. Racicot does not know whether he is still alive.



George A. Coffin's famous picture of the U. S. S. Maine. He drew this picture at the time he was reproducing in Illustrations America's then great White Fleet. When the battleship was blown up in Havana harbor on Feb. 15, 1898, the cut was resurrected by Tribune editors and used again.

later achieved fame in art work, Al Levering, R. J. Campbell, and Oscar Caesar among them. It was the year of the Spanish war. Warships and patriotic flag sketches were in vogue. Wash drawings, ross board, pen and ink work, and more half tones. Progress of the latter toward acceptable results was slow.

Ben Day was introduced in 1899. In this year also four full pages in line work were made to run in two and three colors in Ben Day flat work. Plates were made outside the office and then run on black presses. On Oct. 8 the last work of Harold Heaton was printed. He had a falling out with the management, but stayed a year more on salary, living out his contract.

In 1900 a color press was ordered, to be installed in 1901 in the temporary plant at Market street fronting on the river between Madison and Monroe. This was during the construction of the new building on the site at Dearborn and Madison streets. Some two color pages in

continued in 1902 with four color comics, a four color magazine section with a series of reproductions of Gibbs and Remington paintings. On July 23 of this year The Tribune dedicatory issue—the new building—was printed. The same type of comics followed in 1903 to 1905. One noteworthy event of 1903 was the addition to the staff of John T. McCutcheon, who thereafter furnished a daily and Sunday cartoon for the paper, and whose work is familiar to all literate people in America and to many abroad.

It was in 1906 that a series of comics by German artists was issued. Jugend had attracted the editor's attention. A small tabloid section came on in 1907, and also the comic, Ople Dildock, by Howarth. Then Clare Briggs was brought over from the Hearst papers in 1908 with the feature, Danny Dreamer, and sporting page sketches.

Bonny Royal, in the magazine section in 1908, had a richly colored topical series in four colors. Thereafter there were continually improving illustrations,



The first engraving department of The Chicago Tribune. At that time there were three men employed in the department, two of whom, Fred Bosse (left) and Theodore Schultz, are shown. Today the department employs 182 men.