Louis Turns 200

At the age of 15, using only six dots, Louis Braille invented a universal means of literacy still used by blind people around the world today. Such an accomplishment calls for celebration, and National Braille Press has been busy making certain his 200th birthday will be suitably honored. Our celebration centers around a Louis Braille Bicentennial Traveling Exhibit, an international website, LouisBrailleBicentennial.com, and bicentennial items that are available for purchase and for educational outreach.

We commissioned artist Judith Krimski to design a new image of Louis that would respect his place in history and illuminate the vitality of his vision today (otherwise, the only authentic image we have is from his death mask). Krimski chose the silhouette, a common form of French portraiture two hundred years ago, still used today—think of those famous iPod commercials of dancing silhouetted figures. But to capture Louis Braille’s genius, Krimski ignited a “fire in his head” by painting Louis’s naturally curly locks in vibrant colors—orange, purple, lime, teal—giving the image a decidedly current look.

A beautifully sculptured tactile version of this Louis Braille icon has been handcrafted by tactile artist Ann Cunningham, and will be made available for sale in a limited edition. In addition, Diane Raeder has helped us design a festive (continued on page 2)
Dear Readers,

During this historic election year there have been many promises of “change” from both political parties. If National Braille Press had a dollar for every time the word “change” had been mentioned in commercials, we would have an endowment the size of Harvard by now.

Nonetheless, National Braille Press has made a number of changes over the past few months—changes that have improved efficiencies, and streamlined production to reduce expenses. Staff positions have been restructured, redefined within departments, and we have added new and improved fringe benefits for our dedicated employees.

As we look strategically to the future, there are traditional and technological opportunities we are implementing that will increase our revenue, while delivering important mission-related products for our consumers.

One of our production challenges has been the lack of transcribers, proofreaders and tactilists to keep up with our production demand. This is such a highly specialized niche that we have decided to be proactive about it. This fall we have launched National Braille Press’s Center for Braille Innovation with a 24-week transcriber training course that will teach braille, and introduce future transcribers to tactiles and the technologies associated with braille and tactile-graphic production. There are 17 students that enrolled in this inaugural course. At its completion, the class will take the Library of Congress certification test, and the Press will hire the best candidates, assisting with job placement for the others.

The Center for Braille Innovation will also explore groundbreaking technologies and how they can improve tactile-graphic production. Similarly, National Braille Press is exploring methods of developing affordable braille literacy products for families.

One thing that won’t change at National Braille Press is our commitment to high quality, affordable braille books and publications. It should be noted that our reputation for consistent quality is not due to technology, equipment, or software. It is our staff. I see it every day at work. Our employees are proud of our mission, and they should be congratulated for their dedication, and resiliency under pressure. Take a tour at the Press, and you will see for yourself.

Best wishes,

Brian A. MacDonald
President

(continued from cover)

website at LouisBrailleBicentennial.com. We hope you will visit the site and take an active part in the worldwide celebrations. The website also provides a sneak peek at the Louis Braille Bicentennial Traveling Exhibit, a twenty-panel, freestanding exhibit that will travel across the country— to schools, libraries, museums, and organizations—throughout 2009.

Braille’s Bicentennial is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to educate the public about the man and his code.

There are countless inexpensive ways to participate: Wear a Bicentennial print/braille lapel pin; order a set of Bicentennial note cards to send to friends and family (blank inside); donate a Bicentennial poster to a local school or library; give out print/braille Bicentennial bookmarks; or sport a print/braille keychain. All these commemorative mementos are available at LouisBrailleBicentennial.com. But whatever you do, celebrate Braille.
New Braille Resources for Cancer Patients

When Sue Ammeter was diagnosed with breast cancer, she began to search for brailled information about the disease. She found nothing. She called the American Cancer Society and was told they had been advised, by an “expert,” that people don’t read braille any more. Consequently, they decided against brailing the dozens of free booklets and brochures they make available to the public in print.

Sue’s next call was to National Braille Press. After hearing her story and sharing her frustration, we understood the need for post-diagnosis cancer materials in a format accessible to blind consumers. Sue wanted something comprehensive yet brief. A thorough search on the Internet led right back to the doorstep of the American Cancer Society. Now available in braille from National Braille Press are: *For Women Facing Breast Cancer*, and *After Diagnosis: Prostate Cancer*. The booklets serve as a reference or resource, or as an overview—either way, having the good information will help patients make informed decisions about their health care. In keeping with our pricing policy, both booklets are available free of charge, as they are in print.

Interview with Sue Ammeter

**Q:** How do you feel that your request for information about breast cancer in braille has resulted in National Braille Press offering two health publications this month?

**A:** Really excited. This is a terrific opportunity to educate blind people about health issues and it’s needed. This is just a beginning to what we can do to better educate blind people so that they can get good medical information on the same basis as sighted people.

**Q:** What other types of health information would you like to see National Braille Press produce in braille?

**A:** Information on diabetes, which is the leading cause of blindness today. And more information on other types of cancer, like colon cancer, as well as information on heart disease. That would be a good start.

**Q:** Have you heard any comments about these books from other braille readers?

**A:** Everyone is really excited. People tell me that they wish they had had this information before when friends and family had cancer.

Donations Matter

Nearly one-half of National Braille Press’s operating budget comes from charitable support from individuals, corporations, and foundations. In this economic climate, we need to join together to support the causes we care about, and we hope you will continue to choose National Braille Press. Every donation makes a difference to our ability to provide blind children and adults with the literacy materials and information they need to be independent and informed citizens of the world. If you have not already made your annual donation, please consider using the enclosed reply envelope.
** Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association **

** partner ** (noun) - a person who shares or is associated with another in some action or endeavor; sharer; associate.

During a recent visit to National Braille Press, a member of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association reminded us of the adage: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” An organization committed to helping people help themselves, Mass Charitable provides nonprofits with the equipment that they need to be effective and provides tools that enable people with disabilities to work independently and succeed in their chosen professions.

For many decades, Massachusetts Charitable has invested in the mission and staff at National Braille Press. One-third of the employees at the Press are blind or visually impaired and use a wide array of adaptive technology to do their jobs effectively. Mass Charitable directly supports these individuals, who hold positions from production to management, through grants for equipment such as screen readers, braille notetakers, and computers that accommodate adaptive devices. These specialized tools are vital to the success of National Braille Press and its commitment to hire and promote blind employees.

Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association has also played a critical role in modernizing National Braille Press. Our braille production process depends on a wide range of machinery. Gifts from Mass Charitable have upgraded or renovated equipment in every production area at National Braille Press.

While embossers, collating machines, and other equipment are behind the scenes at our manufacturing facility, the ultimate gift from Mass Charitable is to our braille readers. Dependable machinery ensures that production continues seamlessly and allows us to produce braille materials, including children’s books, textbooks, and computer manuals. Every braille book that we emboss, collate, and bind is marked by the generosity of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association.

—Betsy Rempel

---

** Join the Braille Caravan! **

The hottest item at all three national conventions this summer, The Braille Caravan by Creative Adaptations for Learning, is available exclusively from National Braille Press.

This educational toy consists of 30 non-toxic, plastic blocks. Each block represents the braille cell, designed with six black pegs that can be pushed up or down to form dots 1-6. Using their finger, a stylus, or pencil, a young child can easily make letters, words, or whole sentences by manipulating the six dots on each block, and joining them in a “caravan.”

Built like a toy, this tool encourages young blind children to experiment with braille at an early age; introduces braille to sighted parents in a friendly, non-threatening way; and helps people who need to learn braille later in life, even those with reduced tactile sensitivity.

Each set contains 30 “refreshable” braille blocks, a canvas carrying bag, a print Activity Guide, and an English Braille Symbols Chart. Our goal is to get this tool set into the hands of very young children, so the Braille Caravan costs only $30; a very competitive price for such a comprehensive braille learning device.