

*David Abraham
&
The Perkins Brailler*



David Abraham

Dr. Gabriel Farrell had high standards. The new Director of Perkins School for the Blind wanted a better braille writer-better than those being produced at Howe Press and elsewhere in the 1930s. Besides being noisy and relatively expensive, they were made of heavy cast iron and needed frequent repair.

At that time, Howe Press made very few braille writers. Instead, it functioned primarily as a braille press, hence its name. When Farrell came to Perkins in 1931, Howe Press produced 425,000 pages of braille; when he retired in 1951, production exceeded a million pages.

Despite Howe Press' obvious success in braille production during Farrell's tenure, he wanted the Press to develop and produce a better braille writer that would serve more people and be more durable.

Farrell found the person who would produce this machine in an unlikely place: the Perkins woodworking department, where David Abraham was a teacher.

David Abraham came to Perkins by a circuitous route. Born in Liverpool, England, he was a member of the Royal Flying Corps during World War I. In the Corps, Abraham learned about mechanics and the need for precision and accuracy.

When the war ended in 1918, he carried his skill and these traits to his father's business a stair-railing manufacturer. Abraham simplified the manufacturing process by designing and building machines that turned parts used in the railings.

The United States beckoned Abraham just as the depression began in the early 1930s, making work scarce. Abraham finally found a job on a maintenance crew that was by fate's hand resurfacing Charles River Road near Perkins. Abraham knocked at the Perkins front door and asked for a job as a woodworking teacher. Dr. Farrell hired him shortly thereafter.

Dr. Farrell learned of Abraham's ability with machine design and asked him to design a new braille writer. Dr. Farrell asked Edward Waterhouse, a math teacher, to consult with Abraham.

Abraham, Dr. Farrell and Dr. Waterhouse developed the specifications for the new machine. It needed to: be tough and durable, have a light touch, be as quiet as possible, be easy to use, permit quick paper insertion, offer quick line spacing, and allow previously embossed paper to be reinserted and more braille added without damaging existing text.

Abraham added some of his own features as well. For example, a lever releases the brailled sheet, when it reaches the end of the page.

Without this lever, the paper would fall from the machine and be difficult for a person to find.

David Abraham presented his brailier prototype to Farrell in November 1939. "It came as rather a shock to see the whole thing completed," Waterhouse says. His prototype, which came to be known as the Perkins Brailier, is the same brailier known worldwide today.

However, World War II prevented the Brailier's production. Waterhouse says, "We just locked it up until after the war."

In 1946, Abraham joined the Howe Press staff and resumed work toward the manufacture of the Perkins Braille. Dr. Waterhouse became manager of Howe Press that year as well. "It was an exciting time in my life," he recalls.

In 1951, Dr. Farrell retired. Dr. Waterhouse became the new Perkins Director and the first Braille was produced at Howe Press. Sixty more followed the first one that year. The next year, 800 were manufactured and a thousand the next.

Abraham oversaw production of the Braille for more than ten years, during which time, more than 16,000 machines were produced. Waterhouse recalls, "He had very high standards. He was a solid doer of things and he never did anything twice because he did it right the first time."

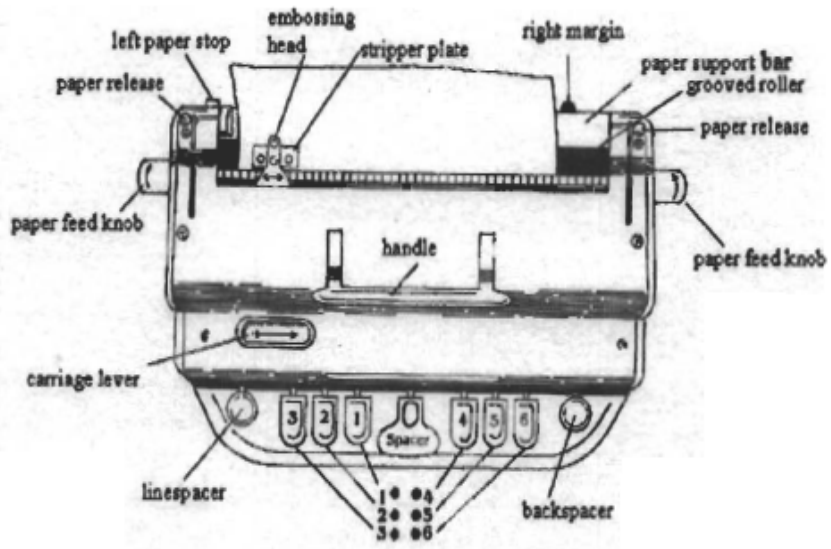
Leon Murphy, Supervisor of final assembly and braille repair at Howe Press, remembers his mentor. "He had high standards and he was very demanding of himself and others. If you did your job right, though, there was no problem." "Abraham was a perfectionist," Waterhouse says, "and he produced the best braille writer ever made."

Abraham retired in the early 1960s, moving to Florida, where he sailed for pleasure. He returned to visit Howe Press a couple of years after retiring. Waterhouse remembers walking with Abraham as he toured the Press, his legacy fully unfolded.

"People were praising him; he was seeing all the work being done and the number of braille writers being produced," he says. "He was like a little boy. He was smiling, he was happy, he was so proud. "I thought to myself as I watched him leave, "I think this is the first time I've seen Abe completely happy."

David Abraham died in 1978 at age 82.

The Perkins Braillewriter



PERKINS
1910



Using the Braille

Inserting Paper into the Braille

- 1 Move Paper Release Knob forward.
- 2 Insert paper, making sure left side is against Left Paper Stop. The paper will only go in a little way. Stop when you feel resistance.
- 3 Move paper Release Knob away from you.
- 4 Roll Paper feed Knob toward you until paper stops rolling.
- 5 Press Linespacer one time to set the paper properly.

How to remove paper from the Braille

- 1 Turn Paper feed Knobs away from you until they no longer turn.
- 2 Move Paper Release Knob toward you.
- 3 Take out paper.
- 4 NEVER PULL THE PAPER FROM THE BRAILLER!! This will cause problems with inserting paper in the future.

If you have trouble inserting paper, try:

- 1** Rolling the paper feed knobs away from you until they stop rolling. Then repeat the inserting process. The student may have pulled the paper out without using the knobs.
- 2** Be sure the paper is against the left paper stop and under the paper check wheel.
- 3** Try rolling the paper in more slowly. Make sure the paper is against the paper release before moving the paper release knob away from you.



Judith Robson
and
Val Hydes
learning how to use a
Perkins Braille

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BlindVoice UK
27 Yarm Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 3NJ

Tel: 01642 803590

Fax: 01642 803591

Email: christine.durnion@blindvoice.co.uk

Email: jill.campbell@blindvoice.co.uk

Website: www.blindvoice.co.uk

Registered Charity: 1078249