



PERISCOPE

**A Quarterly Newsletter sponsored by the
Mississippi Council of the Blind, Inc.
Spring, 2022**

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Tax deductible contributions may be sent to:

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Anyone wishing to remember the MS Council of the Blind in a last will and testament may do so by including a special paragraph for that purpose. If your wishes are complex, please contact MCB for clarification.

Contributions to the James Doyle Case Memorial Scholarship Fund or to the Carter Gable Memorial Technology Assistance Fund should be appropriately marked, and sent to the above address.

Phone MCB at 601-672-0973.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

by Alison Smitherman

Welcome to the Spring, 2022 issue of the Periscope. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and that you find it both informative and entertaining. I wish to thank those of you who

contributed articles for this issue, as well as those who formatted and distributed the newsletter for mailing. Without your hard work, this newsletter would not be possible.

The deadline for submitting articles for the Summer, 2022 issue of the Periscope is **May 21, 2022**. If you would like to submit an article for the Periscope, you may send it to me by email or regular mail, on or before the deadline date. If you need assistance with writing your article, please feel free to call or text me. All my contact information is listed on page 1 of this newsletter.

A couple of quick reminders: When emailing articles to me, please indicate in the subject line that it is an article for the Periscope; otherwise, I might assume it is for my personal reading enjoyment and nothing else. Also, if you submit an article from a third-party source and permission to reproduce is required, please get permission from that source to use the article in our newsletter prior to sending it to me. Obtaining permission often takes time, and by the time the article gets to me, I might not have enough time to get permission before the Periscope goes out for publication.

Thanks for all you do to make our newsletter the best it can be.

Happy Spring!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Ralph Smitherman

Hello, MCB members and friends. I hope all is well with everyone. I wish to thank you for your continued support and interest concerning our organization. I know that we have not met for a weekend convention at a local hotel since 2019; although, we did meet in October, 2021, at the home of Eddie Turner, for an afternoon party and state business meeting. At some point, we hope to have a regular state convention.

Pam Dollar, Executive Director of the Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities, will keep us updated on legislation concerning blindness issues. Fortunately, we can meet by Zoom, which makes it easy for all concerned.

ACB will hold its legislative midyear meetings on a virtual platform during the month of March. When updates are available, I should be able to send them to our google group; so, keep checking your e-mail inbox!

As everyone knows, ACB, along with several special interest groups, holds many community calls each week. The subject matter varies widely. I encourage everyone to participate in

whatever interests you. Some topics include: recipes, book clubs, knitting, Bible trivia, and grade three Braille. By joining the calls, new friendships can be made.

The MCB Board met in January, 2022, and is scheduled to meet again in April, 2022. All members are welcome to join the call. Of course, we meet by Zoom; and, the next meeting is set for April 23rd.

I want to encourage everyone to renew their dues for 2022; and I thank everyone who has already paid their dues. It is because of our membership that we as an organization can function properly. Remember, dues are only \$10 per year.

I wish to thank the MCB Board and all Committees for their continued efforts on behalf of MCB! It is a pleasure to work with a Board who has the interest of this organization foremost.

By April 1, 2022, the ACB Board will determine whether or not the summer convention will be held in person or by Zoom. If we meet in person, of course, we will meet in Omaha, Nebraska, and there will be the opportunity for those who do not attend in person to meet by Zoom. As you know, the last two years, namely, 2020 and 2021, our parent organization has met virtually; and, it was my pleasure to represent MCB as delegate. Zoom is convenient; however, it is also nice to meet face to face.

On a personal note, over the past several national conventions I have made many new friends; and, we know how important that is!

In closing: stay safe, stay connected, stay involved.

MCB BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

By Jane Peets, Recording Secretary

The MCB board met on 01/22/22 on the Zoom platform. The treasurer's report was accepted as distributed via email. All committee reports were accepted.

Chapter reports were given. The Hazlehurst Chapter reported that they will disband because of dwindled membership. Their funds will be transferred to MCB.

The P.O. Box will be closed in Jackson and a new P.O. Box will be opened in Clinton for the convenience of the treasurer, the new address to be announced.

A one-day convention/picnic will be held in September, particulars to be announced in the future.

The next state board meeting is scheduled on 04/23/22 at 10:00 a.m. on the Zoom platform.

JACKSON CHAPTER NEWS

by Jane Peets

Hello everyone. The Jackson Chapter continues to function despite the current conditions we are all living through. We had our first board meeting of 2022 on January 18 by conference call. Our first social will be on February 26 at 11:00 a.m. at Piccadilly off I-55 North. Our next board meeting is scheduled for March 15 at 07:00 p.m. by conference call.

We were sorry to hear of the dissolution of the Hazlehurst Chapter. I would like to assure our friends in the Hazlehurst area that they will receive a cordial welcome should they wish to join the Jackson Chapter. The more the merrier. I wish you all a beautiful spring from your friends in the Jackson Chapter.

HISTORY OF THE PERKINS BRAILLER

Submitted by May Davis (with permission)

The Perkins Brailler, viewed by many as the premiere mechanical braille writer in the world, was first produced in 1951. The quality and reliability of the Perkins Brailler has kept it in demand and production, with only minimal improvements over the decades. Its success lies in two foundations. The remarkable precision of its design and production, and the bold, financial commitment of its producers. The leadership and trustees of Howe Press and its parent organization, Perkins School for the Blind, understood the need for the new brailler, and supported it unfalteringly through 15 years of design, preparation, and expenditures that committed more than half of the capital of Howe Press.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRAILLE WRITERS

Invented by Louis Braille in the 1820s, braille is a tactile writing system of raised dots. It was a breakthrough for people who are blind because, unlike earlier embossed-letter reading systems, braille can be used to both read and write. It is read quickly with the fingers, but writing braille manually with a slate and stylus the device used by Louis Braille, is rather slow.

As braille and New York Point, another raised-dot writing system, became prevalent in the last half of the 19th century, attempts were made to invent machines to speed up the writing process. However, none of these braillers were sturdy or economical enough to find popular usage.

It wasn't until 1892 that Mr. Frank Hall, superintendent of the Illinois School for the Blind, invented a brailier that was the first to find general acceptance.

Many of the earlier designs held the paper flat in a frame, with embossing heads that moved over the surface of the paper. Others punched rolls of paper tape which were awkward to work with and store.

Hall's invention was shaped like a typewriter, with a 6-keyboard mounted conveniently on the front. Each of the 6 keys corresponds to one of the dots in the braille cell. The machine also had a roll-up carriage that accommodated 11-inch-wide paper. This model was popular well into the 20th century.

In the first decades of the 20th century, Perkins School for the Blind designed and manufactured several models of braille writer. They were similar to the Hall, in that they had typewriter-style keyboards and moving carriages. However, these had some drawbacks. Because the machines were individually made the tolerances were not very accurate. They required frequent repair, the cast iron frames broke easily if dropped, and they were noisy and expensive.

In 1931 Perkins School for the Blind welcomed Dr. Gabriel Farrell as its new director. Dissatisfied with the indifferent quality of the Perkins machines, Dr. Farrell ordered the Howe Press to cease production of its braille writers. However, he remained determined that Perkins would someday design and produce an excellent machine. In the absence of a skilled person to design it, this remained an unreachable goal for several years.

THE BEGINNING OF THE PERKINS BRAILLER

David Abraham was a native of Liverpool, England, who had been a member of the Royal Flying Corps during WWI. While working in his family's chair rail manufacturing business, he had designed and built machines for turning the wooden rods more effectively than ever before. Soon after he brought his family to the U.S. the Great Depression started. Although he was a highly-skilled craftsman, he was forced to take whatever employment he could find.

In the early 1930s he was working on the road crew on Charles River Road which runs between Perkins and the river. He had noticed the Perkins School sign near the road, and one day he came in, asked for and received employment as an instructor. He served as a teacher in the Manual Training Department, and in the summers worked in the maintenance department. His skill and ingenuity as a carpenter and machinist caught the attention of his supervisor, Nelson Coon, who suggested to director

Farrell that he might be the ideal person to design a new brailier. Mr. Abraham agreed to take on the formidable task.

The requirements for the design were detailed in consultations with Dr. Edward Waterhouse, assistant manager of the Howe Press. Working during his spare time David Abraham spent countless hours in his basement workshop testing design ideas. In 1941, after several years of solitary labor, he finally presented the prototype to Perkins. Ingeniously and scrupulously designed, it is essentially identical with the Perkins Brailier still in production more than 70 years later.

What's so special about the Perkins Brailier?

Mr. Abraham and Dr. Waterhouse had created a list of specifications that would make the Perkins Brailier the best machine available. Mr. Abraham managed to incorporate all of the features, plus a few more, into his design. The Perkins Brailier is easy to use. The touch is so light that very young people, and those with little strength can use it without strain. The machine is tough and hard to break, and much quieter than other brailiers available at the time. Paper can be quickly and easily inserted, and the spacing mechanisms are swift and simple to operate. When the operator reaches the bottom of the page the mechanism prevents the paper from falling out. It is so accurate in its spacing that previously embossed paper can be reinserted

and a single dot added to a specific cell without damaging existing work. The braille has no projecting carriages or parts because the embossing head is inside the case and moves across the paper.

These features made the Perkins Braille reliable and easy to use, and it remains unsurpassed to this day.

MANUFACTURING THE PERKINS BRAILLE

Everyone at Perkins was delighted with Mr. Abraham's model. Unfortunately plans to produce it had to be postponed because manufacturing materials and production were devoted to the war effort. As soon as WWII ended, the Perkins School for the Blind trustees agreed to subsidize the manufacture of 1,000 brailles. However, preparing for production was a daunting process, and it would be five years before the first braille was finally available to the public.

The Howe Press, including the machine shop that would manufacture the brailles, was situated in cramped and inadequate quarters in south Boston, miles from the main site in Watertown. The first order of business was relocating the workshop to the Perkins campus. It took a while to prepare the new workspace, close down the old shop, and get everything set up in Watertown.

Designing the braille to be simple to operate meant that it was complicated to construct. Mr. Abraham often said proudly that the braille has more precision parts than a wrist watch. Tooling up with the exactitude demanded in the production of these machines added years to the preparation process. Additionally, manufacturing materials were still hard to obtain in the post-war years. Further slowing the process was Mr. Abraham's perfectionism. He insisted in experimenting with various ways of manufacturing and assembling the parts, not satisfied until he was certain he had hit upon the best method and materials.

This careful groundwork and attention to detail created the foundation of the Perkins Braille's long-term success. The quality of material, exactitude of design, and precision in manufacture are what makes the Perkins Braille so sturdy and reliable in its performance.

When the trustees of the Perkins School had authorized the manufacture and sale of 1,000 brailles, there was absolutely no guarantee that there would be a market for the machines. It was the task of Dr. Waterhouse, now manager of Howe Press, to promote the braille. Between 1946 and 1950 he traveled to conferences all over the country to display the prototype, mostly to teachers and students. The model was enthusiastically received by those who experimented with it. When production began there were already 1,500 orders for the new machine.

However, this was still a very perilous financial decision, according to Dr. Waterhouse, “for there were at least three risks we had to run. The first involved costs; until we made some machines, we could not be certain of our price estimates. The brailier might be so expensive that it wouldn’t sell. Second, there is always a difference between quantity-produced articles and a so-called ‘handmade’ prototype. The finished models might be inferior in operation and not give satisfaction. Third, A new model might reach the market which would be better than ours and put us out of business.”

By the time the first brailiers were ready for sale, Howe Press had spent over half of its capital endowment. However, the trustees’ risky investment was a sound one. From the day the new brailier became available, the Press was unable to manufacture them fast enough to satisfy the demand.

THE PERKINS BRAILLER IN THE 21st CENTURY

These days, anyone who has access to a computer can use special software and a braille printer to produce braille very quickly. Electronic braille notetakers are extremely light and portable. Why is there still a demand for these mechanical devices?

The answer lies in their ruggedness, reliability, and simplicity of operation. Most people who are blind in the U.S. have a Perkins Braille in their home for basic messages and note taking. Few would ever give it up, and use it in conjunction with more modern technology.

There is nothing more tough and dependable in a school environment, and the braille has found a place in classrooms throughout the world. Many developing countries struggle to provide education for their children. Children who are blind find that resources and skilled teachers for their education are even more scarce. As a result, these children are often left uneducated and illiterate, becoming adults unable to find employment or to contribute to the support of their families.

In such places brailles are a powerful tool in gaining literacy and education for people who are blind. They are particularly useful in places without a reliable source of electricity. Perkins, in partnership with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, is committed to fighting illiteracy by donating brailles to schools with limited financial means. Access to the braille enables the children to both read and write braille, entering the workforce fully literate and independent.

The Perkins Braille contributes in another way to the independence of people with disabilities in developing countries.

Assembling the brailers is a source of livelihood for many people in India, Brazil and South Africa. Not only are the brailers useful as finished products, available at lower cost because they are assembled locally, but their assembly provides jobs for people who would otherwise struggle to find a livelihood.

From its beginnings in David Abraham's basement workshop in Watertown, Mass., the Perkins Braille has attained a worldwide reputation for its quality and reliability. More than 70 years after the machine was first produced, the Perkins Braille continues to play a part in bringing education, literacy and independence to people throughout the world.

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.” – Helen Keller