

Type Case Vandalism: A Moral Tale

by Sky Shipley, Skyline Type Foundry

The Maestro closed his eyes for a moment of final focus. then took a deep breath and strode confidently out onto the stage. His audience immediately broke into strong and cordial applause. He bowed courteously with a cool half-smile and moved toward the Steinway Concert Grand as the house lights were slowly brought down. The audience grew quiet, anticipating the musical mastery about to commence. As he settled on the piano bench, unconsciously adjusting his starched cuffs, Maestro once again closed his eyes and breathed deeply. He then slipped a hand into his satin Tuxedo coat and from the breast pocket withdrew a fat black felt pen. With certainty of purpose, he uncapped the pen, and beginning at the left end of the keyboard, proceeded to methodically write the notes on each of the keys.

Sound unlikely? Well, this absurd scenario is essentially no different than a letterpress printer inscribing the characters in each box of a type case. Ladies and gentlemen, this is vandalism, pure and simple. It is the mark of an ignorant amateur*—as is referring to a *type case* as a "drawer" or "tray".

**I, like everyone, began as an ignorant amateur in that I had little knowledge or experience in the craft, and was doing it for love and not money. As used above, however, the term denotes something entirely different, and negative: a dullard doing slipshod work.*



Skyline Type Foundry

Why is this a bad thing? If you're a compositor and printer of even modest experience, no explanation is necessary—any more than for the frivolous parable above to an accomplished musician. For folks new to letterpress: suffice it to say that the "lay of the case" is *not* difficult to learn, and any distracting marks will just slow you down. Here are links to several diagrams of the case layout. By all means post one nearby for reference as you first learn to compose type. You'll be surprised how quickly your hand knows the lay, and you'll no longer need a crutch.

California Job Case

<https://skylinetype.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Case-Layout-California.jpg>

California Case (Schematic)

<https://skylinetype.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Case-Schematic.jpg>

Cap Case (Double, Triple, or Quad)

<https://skylinetype.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Case-Layout-2-3-or-4-Cap.jpg>

Two-Thirds Size Case

<https://skylinetype.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Case-Layout-Two-Thirds.jpg>

One of the things I've been doing all my adult life is buying, selling, repairing and restoring type cases. We have some 320 cases of type in the Skyline pressroom (all restored and in their original Hamilton oak cabinets) and a couple of thousand more in the warehouse. Most of those still contain type, and it's an ongoing project to evaluate it font by font, with the serviceable ones cleaned, put in order and routed to [The Junk Bin](#) for sale. The worn, incomplete, corroded or otherwise useless type is consigned to the melting pot for reincarnation into something new and beautiful. All too often the cases have been disfigured as above (with anything from pencil scratches to oh-so-tidy computer-generated adhesive stickers). These cases are evaluated, repaired as necessary, the vandalism expunged, and then they are laid in stock toward assembling a matching set into a cabinet for sale back into the Letterpress community.

. . . and now: a Pop Quiz!

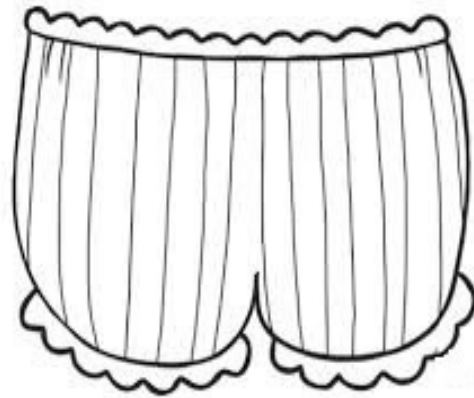
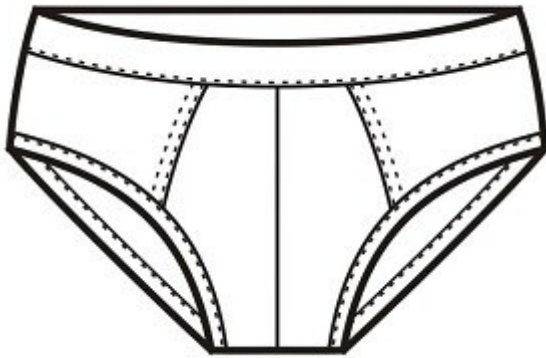
Question No. 1



This is:

- A. A historic artifact meticulously restored to its original beauty.
- B. A blank canvas sorely in need of big, crude labeling in all the little boxes so I can have a clue what the hell I'm doing when I try to mess with all those little tiny letters that go in it.

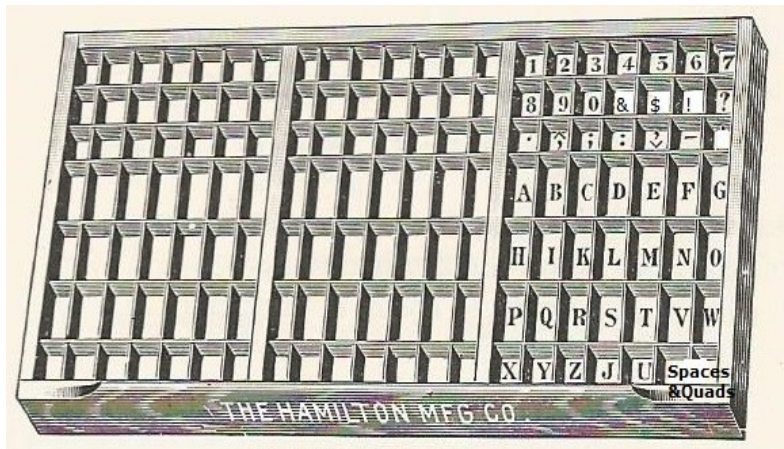
Question No. 2



These are:

- A. Drawers.
- B. Type Cases.

Question No. 3



These are:

- A. Drawers.
- B. Type Cases.

ANSWERS: If there is any uncertainty in your mind, please re-read the article until all is clear.

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