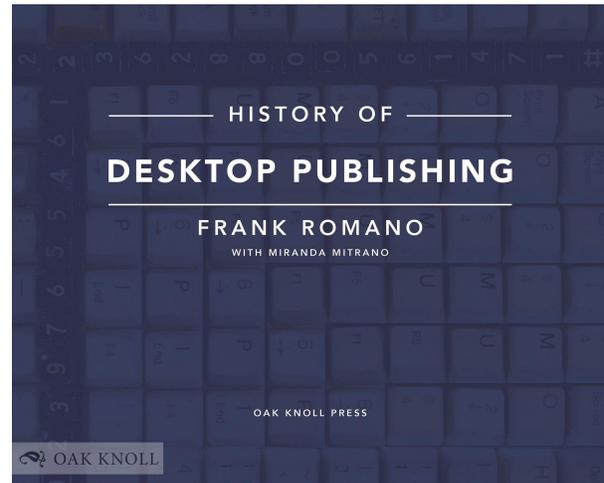

**Book review: *History of Desktop Publishing*,
by Frank Romano**

David Walden

Frank Romano, *History of Desktop Publishing*.
Oak Knoll Press, 2019, 400 pp. Hardcover, US\$75.
ISBN 9781584563808.

oakknoll.com/pages/books/133473



With the *History of Desktop Publishing*, Frank Romano has completed a trilogy of books covering the history of typesetting from hot metal (*History of the Linotype Company*), through phototypesetting (*History of the Phototypesetting Era*), and now digital desktop publishing. (The first of these was reviewed in *TUGboat*.¹)

The three publications are an astonishing effort — 480, 340, and 400 pages of a unique and fascinating story published in 2014 and 2019. It is hard to imagine another person better positioned to recount this history and share recollections than Frank Romano. He began his career in printing and publishing at Mergenthaler Linotype Company in 1959, worked at several other companies involved with typesetting and publishing, edited or published several trade-press publications, collected a massive library of books, journals, and newsletters and other artifacts about printing and publishing, co-founded the Museum of Printing,² wrote or co-authored dozens of history and tutorial books, and consulted and lectured widely about printing and publishing. Romano also has had a decades long affiliation with the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), where TUG plans to hold its 2020 annual conference. In particular, Romano was Melbert B. Cary, Jr. Distinguished Professor of Graphic Arts from 1992 to 1998, an RIT position Hermann Zapf and Charles Bigelow have also held.³

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Figure 1: Table of contents of *History of Desktop Publishing*

Desktop publishing history. The desktop publishing (DTP) book is based on Romano’s personal journey over nearly 60 years; Romano has called it a time capsule of what he has seen and materials he has collected. The book is nominally about a dozen years from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, but Romano provides lots of background material of what went before.

Because the book is based on Romano’s experiences, the desktop publishing systems from different companies get different levels of treatment, as can be seen from the page numbers in the above table of contents (with page numbers). For instance, Interleaf is not covered as extensively as FrameMaker. \TeX gets little more than two-and-a-third of the book’s narrow short columns in a chapter covering typesetting in the pre-WYSIWYG era.⁴

It is not possible to summarize an author’s thesis for this book. Rather, Romano is presenting “everything” he saw or has done, and not a succinct overall story. He says, “This is my story of the people, companies, technologies, and devices that defined desktop publishing for just over a decade. It is an amazing ride. Come along and relive it.” (It occurs to me that one reading approach is to read a chapter a day as a way “living through” the era and in so doing develop my own mental picture of

the era.) While most of the story is narrated in the third person, quite often Romano relates things more personally (“I . . .”) — a style I like.

The book has hundreds of photographs and other images, numerous charts and lists, and many sidebars — all providing a reader with insight into desktop publishing history. To see examples of typical pages, go to the publisher’s page for the book (oakknoll.com/pages/books/133473), click on the book cover image on the right of the page, and then navigate among the half dozen sample pages.

Romano’s son Richard is credited with a significant contribution to the book — a nearly 100 page list of all of the product announcements in *TypeWorld* from 1983 through 1995. I see these pages as a marvelous resource for anyone wanting to follow the chronology of development of desktop publishing. The archive of *TypeWorld* issues from which this list was drawn is in the Romano Library at the Museum of Printing. It would be an even more valuable resource if a computer searchable copy was available. This is an instance where I wish a data CD came with a book; paying full price for a hardbound copy of the book and a searchable *TypeWorld* list would be easy for me to justify. (By the way, Romano is very welcoming of researchers who visit his library at the Museum of Printing.)

This book lists a secondary author: “With Miranda Mitrano”; she did the “book design” which I take to mean final composing in InDesign (Romano did the writing and draft composing in QuarkX-Press). The dedication is to Jonathan Seybold for his bringing the major desktop publishing players together.⁵ Barbara Beeton gets a special thanks after the dedication, and Kim Pickard is thanked for photographing items from Romano’s collection.

In his review of the prior Linotype book,¹ Boris Veytsman complained slightly about the format of that book — 10 1/2" by 8 1/2" landscape view (as shown in the cover image at the beginning of this review) and with three narrow columns of ragged right text. (The phototypesetting and Linotype books have the same shape and column characteristics.) Romano uses landscape mode because of the number of images he wants to show across one page (for example, top left of next page).⁶ Once in landscape mode, it makes sense to have three narrower columns than two wider columns, and with narrower columns ragged right makes sense.

As Boris Veytsman said in his review of the Linotype book,¹ Frank Romano’s *History of Desktop Publishing* is an essential book for anyone studying the field and for many just generally interested in the history of printing and typesetting.⁷ You will



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find information in this book on and around desktop publishing that you are unlikely to find anywhere else — certainly not all collected in one place.

Phototypesetting history book. Romano's previous book, *History of the Phototypesetting Era*,⁸ also deserves a few words. Romano calls the book a "time capsule for a bygone era" and, as with the desktop publishing book, states that the narrative is primarily based on his personal recollections.

Romano notes that this book is based on his 54 years of participation in the printing and publishing industry but the actual book was a collaborative project. In the fall quarter of 2013, Romano served (for the third time) as a "Research Professor from Industry" in Cal Poly's Graphic Communication Institute which has a "learn by doing" teaching philosophy.⁹ The book design, prepress, and printing work was done by students with the book being printed in the university's graphic communication laboratories (160 pages on one type of press and 188 pages on another press, presumably to give the students broader experience). Thirteen students are listed as co-authors of the book. Frank's son Richard Romano is listed on the title page for "editorial services", son Robert Romano is listed for "schematics", and Museum of Printing co-founder Kim Pickard is listed for "original photography".

This book is dedicated to John W. Seybold (father of Jonathan, the dedicatee of the desktop publishing book), "a true pioneer in automated typesetting", and there is a half page sketch of Seybold's contributions as the industry developed.¹⁰

Romano says the book covers the period roughly from 1945 when phototypesetting first became available until 1985 when the last phototypesetter was built. However, six of his first seven chapters cover typesetting and printing history before the first pho-

totypesetter, and there is plenty of background description in the rest of his 28 chapters. The book is not just about the evolution of phototypesetting technology; it also covers development of the industry, specific companies, and specific machines. The book contains viii pages of frontmatter, 308 main pages divided into 28 chapters, a 16-page index, a 14-page chart of second and third generation phototypesetters from 1952 to 1985, a one-page-26-item bibliography, and a page with a colophon and afterword. Within the book are numerous other charts and diagrams and hundreds of photographs and other images. There is so much detailed content that some readers may not easily get the overall picture of the era. John Seybold's book *The World of Digital Typesetting*¹¹ has a bit more of a tutorial feel to it than Romano's book does; and, ending as it does with 1984, covers the same period as Romano's book. It might make sense to read the two books in parallel.

In any case, as with my view of the desktop publishing book and Boris Veytsman's review of the Linotype book, I see Romano's phototypesetting book as being an essential resource to anyone studying the phototypesetting era or the history of printing and typesetting more generally.¹²

Given the value of Romano's phototypesetting and desktop publishing books, I must now order my own copy of the Linotype book which I had previously only looked at in the gift shop and bookstore at the Museum of Printing.

At present, the Linotype book is available from its publisher, Oak Knoll, or via people selling through Amazon. The phototypesetting book is available on Amazon from third-party sellers. The desktop publishing book is available from publisher Oak Knoll directly or via Amazon. I presume all three books are on sale in the gift shop of the Museum of Printing in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

Oak Knoll Press. Romano's desktop publishing history book was published by Oak Knoll Press. Learning a bit more about the press and the bookstore with which the press is associated may be interesting to people interested in fine book publishing, the used book business, and, in particular, books about books.

The url oakknoll.com takes one to the website of both Oak Knoll Press and Oak Knoll Books. The former is "publishers and distributors of fine books about books since 1978". The latter is a bookseller of rare and out-of-print books, particularly books about books. Three sources of more information about Oak Knoll are a book by founder Robert D. Fleck,¹³ a similar history on the Web,¹⁴ and an

interview of him.¹⁵ Since Fleck’s death in 2016, one of his sons runs the company; the Wikipedia entry for the company is also informative.¹⁶

The press does a good bit of co-publishing—jointly publishing with a company or institution that develops a new book. In this way Oak Knoll expands its list of publications while avoiding increasing book development costs; the financial results are split under an arrangement that benefits both entities, and visibility of the book and its distribution is expanded. (It seems that Romano’s desktop publishing history was at least somewhat of a co-published book as, in addition to Mitrano preparing a designed book in InDesign, Romano says he and Mitrano did the prepress for the book.)

In the fall 2019 Oak Knoll Press catalog I find books distributed for:

- Grolier Club
- Cotsen Children’s Library, Princeton University
- Edizioni Valdonega, Verona, Italy
- American Antiquarian Society
- Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia
- Penn Libraries/Kislak Center
- Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University
- Smithsonian Institution
- Thomas Fisher Library, University of Toronto
- AdVenture SA, Athens, Greece
- Center for Book Arts
- CODEX Australia
- CODEX Foundation
- Verso
- Douglas Stewart Fine Books

The same catalog lists Oak Knoll Press books about bibliography, bookbinding, book collecting and bookselling, calligraphy and writing, fine press and artists’ books, illustration and design, libraries, papermaking and paper decoration, printing history and publishing, type and typography, and more books about books.

Other Oak Knoll books recently reviewed for this journal include Nancy Stock-Allen’s book about Carol Twombly¹⁷ and Jerry Kelly’s biography of Herman Zapf.¹⁸

Notes

¹ *History of the Linotype Company*, reviewed by Boris Veytsman, *TUGboat* 36:1, 2015, pp. 58–59, tug.org/TUGboat/tb36-1/tb112reviews-romano.pdf

² museumofprinting.org/libraries

³ Romano also served as Roger K. Fawcett Distinguished Professor of Digital Publishing from 1998 to 2005, at which point he became a professor emeritus. In 2002 he had turned over the position of administrative chair of RIT’s School of Printing Management to a new chair

as part of the school’s renaming to the School of Print Media, with the goal, according to Romano, of increasing “the benefits of an RIT education to the printing and publishing industries” (tug.org/1/romano-chair). He is now professor emeritus. He also received RIT’s Cary Award (tug.org/1/romano-cary-award) and a special recognition award (tug.org/1/romano-special-recog).

⁴ A complementary treatment of DTP history may be found via history.computer.org/annals/dtp.

⁵ For more about Jonathan Seybold, see “Seybold Seminars” on page 225 of “Studying the histories of computerizing publishing and desktop publishing, 2017–19”, David Walden, *TUGboat* 40:3, 2019.

tug.org/TUGboat/tb40-3/tb126walden-history.pdf

⁶ Frank Romano email of 2019-11-25.

⁷ Historians would be aided by maximum accessibility into the book. However, it is impractical for the book’s current index to comprehensively index such a massive amount of content. Ideally a way could be found for the entire book (not just the *TypeWorld* part mentioned above) to be searchable by people who own a copy—without sacrificing the publisher’s and author’s income. I suspect this capability can be developed relatively inexpensively. For instance, the book could have a url in it. At the url is a form into which a search term is typed, but not a PDF of the book. Executing the search returns a couple of lines from the book and a book page number for each found instance of the term.

⁸ *History of the Phototypesetting Era*, Graphic Communication Institute at Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo, California, 2014.

rit.edu/press/history-phototypesetting-era

⁹ cla.calpoly.edu/news/2015/frank-romano.

¹⁰ For more about John Seybold, see “Rocappi” on page 219 and “Seybold Reports” on page 224 of the paper cited in note 5. Together John and Jonathan influenced the course of publishing technology for three decades.

¹¹ computerhistory.org/collections/catalog/102740425

¹² As I said about the desktop publishing book (note 7), I hope at some point the phototypesetting book becomes available in searchable PDF form to better enable use of the resource.

¹³ *Books about Books: A History and Bibliography of Oak Knoll Press, 1978–2008*, Oak Knoll Press, 2008. oakknoll.com/pages/books/99582

¹⁴ Oak Knoll Books, tug.org/1/fleck-web-history

¹⁵ Robert D. Fleck interview, Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of America.

youtube.com/watch?v=auKxVJpipig

¹⁶ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak_Knoll_Books_and_Press

¹⁷ tug.org/TUGboat/tb40-3/tb126reviews-stock-allen.pdf

¹⁸ tug.org/TUGboat/tb40-3/tb126reviews-kelly-zapfbio.pdf

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