

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom.
Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Eighty

Ottmar Mergenthaler

LESSON IDEA

To discuss the importance of inventors to our country, using as an example Ottmar Mergenthaler, the originator of the linotype machine.

PREPARATION:

Read a brief history of printing in an encyclopedia. Pay particular attention to Johann Gutenberg's invention of movable type to aid in understanding Mergenthaler's contribution to the printing industry.

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AS WE GO about our everyday affairs we seldom think about our surroundings. We take for granted that the school bus is going to get us safely to school and home again. In the evening, when we wish to relax, we take it for granted that our television is going to come on when we flick the switch.

Seldom, if ever, do we take time to ponder this important fact: Almost everything around us — whether a TV set, or a lamp, or a bowling ball — was once an idea in an inventor's head. Nothing in our homes "evolved" by itself. Every object had a creator — a man who once sat at his desk and used his own creative imagination to visualize what he wished to produce. He sketched a design on a scratch pad, studied what other men had done in the same field in the past, and finally constructed a working model of his invention — hoping to sell it to the public.

It is important to realize that throughout history, countless men and women have used their imagina-

tions to create new and useful products for us. And each year, new inventors improve what someone in the past originally designed. This entire process — the transforming of ideas into products and the continuous improvement of those products — is what progress is all about.

WHAT SORT OF person is an inventor — the man who uses his creative imagination to devise worthwhile products for his fellow man? If asked to characterize the typical inventor, we would say that, first of all, he is a man who believes totally in what he is doing; and secondly, he is so resolute that nothing will stop him from completing his invention once he has set his mind to it. [Ask family members if they think such determination is a beneficial character trait. Is it always good to be positive about your beliefs?]

Let's consider how determination and self-confidence worked in the life of Ottmar Mergenthaler, the inventor of the world's first automatic type-setting machine.

Ottmar's career was decided by his parents when he was still in his cradle; they *knew* he would become a teacher. After all, his father was a teacher in their tiny village of Bietigheim, Germany. And his mother also came from a family of teachers. So, of course, it was settled. This new member of the family, born on May 10, 1854, would be a teacher when he grew to manhood.

But Ottmar, even as a young boy, showed more

