

York Point System of Writing for the Blind

From: *IN MEMORIAM-William B. Wait*; **Outlook for the Blind**,
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William Bell Wait, educator and inventor, was born at Amsterdam, N.Y., March 25, 1839, son of Christopher Brown Wait, 1811-1886, and Betsy Grinnell (Bell) Wait, 1800-1880. His first paternal American ancestor was Thomas Wait, 1601-1677, who came to this country from England, landed at Boston, Mass., in 1634, removed to Rhode Island five years later, where he received a grant of land, and in 1641, was made a freeman at Newport, RI. From him and his wife, the line of descent is traced to Christopher Brown Wait, 1780-1855, and his wife, Polly Van Buren, 1779-1841, who were the grandparents of the subject of this sketch.

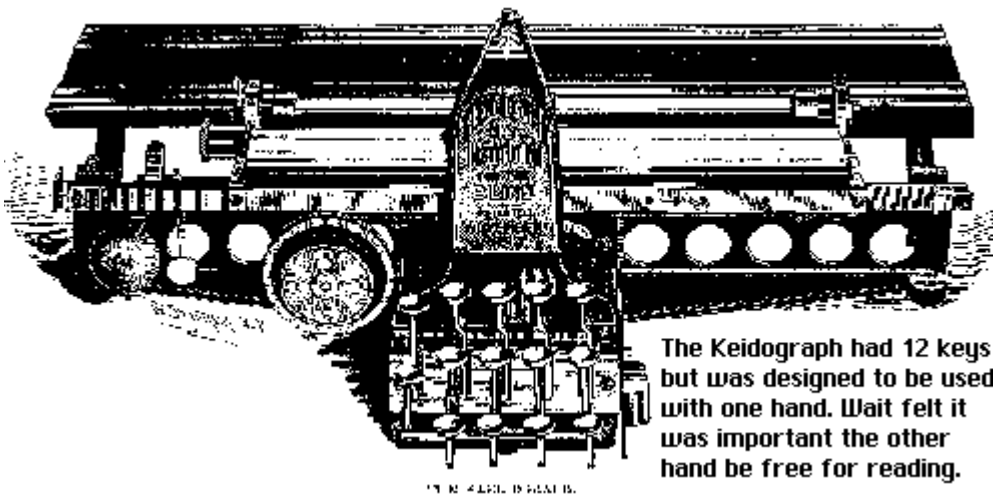
The subject of this sketch received his preliminary education at the public schools of Albany, N. Y., at the Albany Academy and was graduated from the Albany Normal College in 1859. The same year he became a teacher in the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, remaining two years, with the exception of three months' service in the Seventy-first Regiment, New York Volunteers, under the first call for troops, at the beginning, of the Civil War. Subsequently he studied law in the office of Tremain and Peckham in Albany and was admitted to the bar in 1863. In 1863, while acting as first superintendent of the Schools of the City of Kingston, N. Y., a vacancy occurred in the office of Principal of the Institute above named, and in October of that year, he was appointed to fill the place which he retained until March, 1905, when he was appointed Emeritus Principal, which position he held until his death in 1916. Through the efforts of Samuel Ackerly and Samuel Wood, this Institute was founded in 1831, for the education of blind children. From the inauguration of the great work of educating the blind in 1784, by Valentin Haüy, to the present time, the subject of embossed writing and printing as applied to literature and music, has occupied a most important position. The first book in raised letters was published by Valentin Haüy in Paris, 1784-86. Script letters were made in relief slightly raised above the surface of the pages.

Mr. Wait became an earnest advocate of his points as the true basis of tangible printing and writing. He concluded that the number of points to be assigned to represent sounds or letters, should be governed by the relative frequency of the sounds or letters respectively as they occurred in general use. In applying the principle to the vertical rectangle of six points, it became apparent that while a small economy in the number of points might be secured, still no saving of space was affected inasmuch as the type body used for a letter of one point must be as large vertically as that containing six points.

This led Mr. Wait to adopt four base forms, the type bodies having two points vertically and one, two, three and four horizontally, as here shown: : : : : : : : . After much experiment he devised the New York Point System comprising twenty-six capitals, twenty-six small letters, numerals, punctuation marks and short forms for diphthongs, triphthongs, syllables and for words and parts of words in common use.

This he followed by the development of a system of tangible musical notation, which was brought out by Mr. Wait in 1872. It received the approval of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, and wide recognition throughout the United States. The structure of the System he sets forth in "A System of Tangible Musical Notation and Point Writing and Printing for the Use of the Blind."

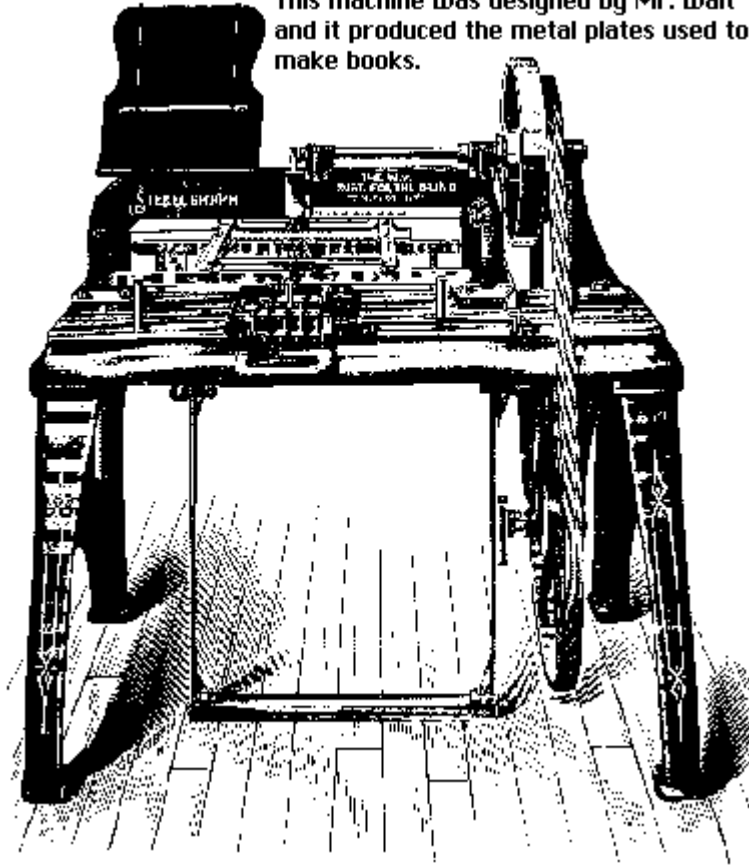
In 1894, after three years of effort, Mr. Wait invented the Kleidograph, a machine for embossing the New York Point system on paper, a practical typewriter for the blind now in general use.



The Kleidograph had 12 keys but was designed to be used with one hand. Wait felt it was important the other hand be free for reading.

Later he invented the Stereograph, a machine for embossing metal plates, to be used in printing books for the blind. The inventions were so highly esteemed that in 1900 the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia awarded to Mr. Wait the John Scott Medal inscribed "To the Most Deserving."

This machine was designed by Mr. Wait and it produced the metal plates used to make books.



Following these advances he took up the problem of embossing the New York Point system on both sides of the leaf, instead of on one side, as had hitherto been the general practice in printing embossed books (in N. Y. Point), and, after a long period of experiment, he produced a printing press of entirely novel construction by which the desired object of two-side printing for embossed plates was fully attained.

He has also devised and patented an improved method of binding whereby the weight of books and cost of materials and labor are much reduced, and the durability and life of embossed books greatly increased. By these improved methods more than fifty percent is saved in the cost of embossed books.

Mr. Wait is the author of "The Normal Course of Piano Technique" (1887) and "Harmonic Notation" (1888), both of which were prepared with special reference to the instruction of the blind, but which are entirely applicable in the instruction of others. He has published many pamphlets on subjects relative to the education of the blind. Of these probably none were more valuable in this line of literature than his three latest: Phases of Punctography (1913), The Uniform Type Question (1915), New Aspects of the Uniform Type Folly (1916). The last work of Mr. Wait was the adaptation of his point system to more than twenty different languages, including Hebrew, Arabic, Japanese and Chinese.

He was one of the founders of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, in 1871, and for, about forty years took a leading part in its affairs. He was one of the organizers of the Society for providing Evangelical Religious Literature for the Blind, in 1874, and until his death was one of its most active supporters.

In 1879, he was one of a committee of five who secured from the Congress of United States the grant of \$10,000 annually for the publication of embossed books for the blind. Mr. Wait had charge of the bill when it was pending in the Senate and his brief but cogent argument before the Committee on Education was adopted by that body as its report in recommending the passage of the measure.

Mr. Wait was a member of the New York Bar; the New York Geographical Society; the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia and of the Sons of the Revolution. In religion he was a Baptist, and in politics an Independent. He was an ardent advocate of Equal Franchise for Women, and believed in State and National Prohibition and universal Free Trade.

He was a man who, having carefully weighed the right and wrong of every question coming before him, determined upon his course and with untiring and unflinching energy went forward unmindful of all opposition.

This characteristic was bound to give him the unqualified success which ever met his efforts. Toward his friends he bestowed unlimited generosity and brotherly kindness; and toward those who honestly differed from him he was ever tolerant.

On December 5, 1894, the Board of Managers of the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind unanimously adopted, the following:

"The Managers of this Institute desire to express and to record their appreciation of the character of Mr. William B. Wait, and of the brilliant work done by him for the benefit of the blind. He has been for thirty-four years a teacher in and Superintendent of this Institute, and during all that time his interest, zeal and industry have been unflagging and his unselfishness most pronounced."

"The New York Point print devised by him some years ago marked a great advance in processes for the use and education of the blind. Had he desired to have the system known by his own name it would have been only natural, but he called it the New York Point." "His recent inventions, the Kleidograph and the Stereograph, promise great usefulness. He alone has produced them but he transfers all his proprietary rights to this Institute to be used for the blind, here and elsewhere, without one penny of pecuniary advantage to himself and the name of the Institute and not that of William B. Wait will appear upon the instruments."

CAPITAL LETTERS.

A	B	C	D	E	F
G	H	I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X
Y	Z				

SMALL LETTERS.

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t
u	v	w	x	y	z				

"Such modesty, skill, unselfishness and devotion to duty are rare, and not to be had for price in the market place. This Board hereby tenders to Mr. Wait its thanks for the very great benefit which he has bestowed upon the unfortunate class to whose service he has chosen to devote his life; and places this Minute upon the records of the Institute as a mark of respect and esteem for him as a man, an educator, and a philanthropist."

On October 27, 1863, Mr. Wait married Phoebe Jane, daughter of Oliver and Phoebe (Babcock) Babcock, of Potter Hill, R. I., who died January 30, 1904. She was a pioneer among women physicians and a leader the profession for many years. Mr. Wait died at his residence, on West 92nd Street, New York City, October 25, 1916, and is survived by a daughter, Mrs. Frank Battles, and Dr. Oliver Babcock Wait, who reside in Philadelphia, and William Bell Wait, Jr., of New York City.