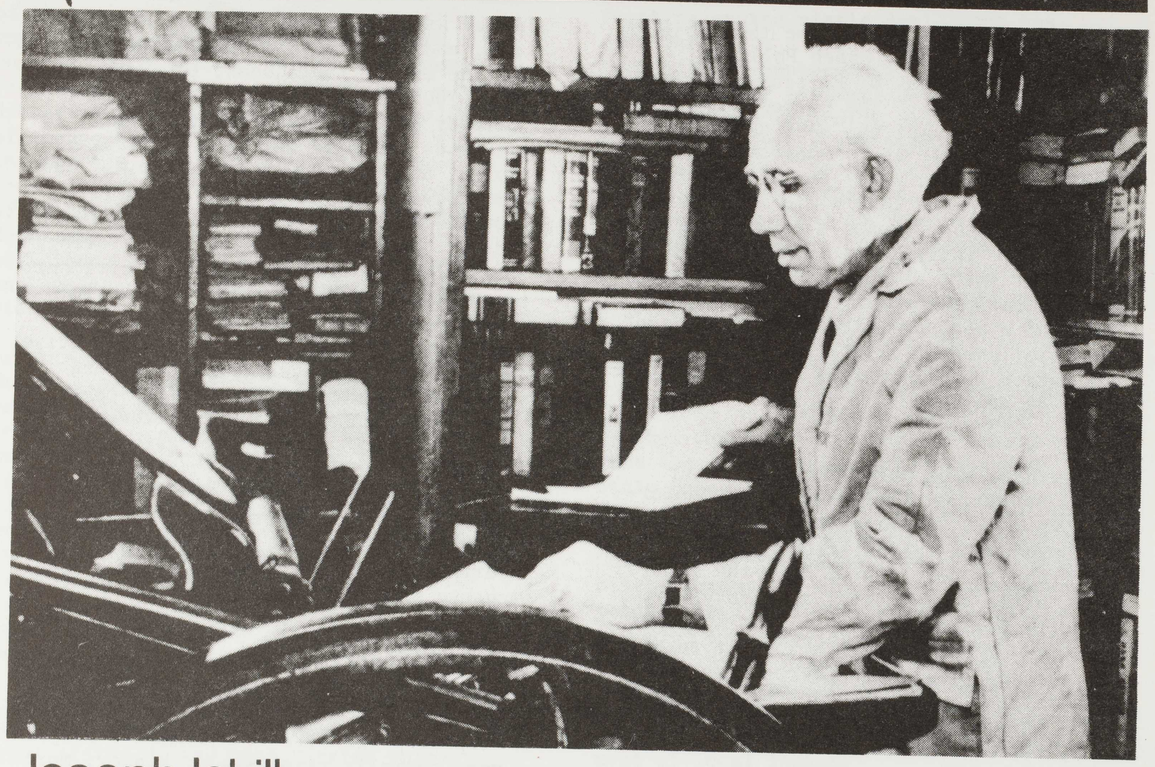
HISTORY NOTES



Joseph Ishill

Joseph Ishill was born in 1883 in the Rumanian province of Moldavia, and is best remembered for the series of high quality limited editions of anarchist and libertarian writings that he privately produced. Growing up on a small farm, Joseph suffered both from Rumania's rampant anti-Semitism and from belonging to "the downtrodden and exploited peasant class."

Apprenticed at the age of fourteen to a printer in the city of Botosani, Ishill quickly developed a passion for that craft which never left him. He later wrote that "I began to see the world of recognizable dreams. I had found my vocation." He began at an early age to produce literary works. During his twentieth and twenty-first years, Ishill was drawn into the circle of anarchists around *The Review of Ideas* in Bucharest, a journal started by turn-of-the-century Rumania's most prominent anarchist, Panit Musoui.

Soon after participating in a demonstration against the death sentence imposed upon Francisco Ferrer, Ishill left Rumania never to return. Upon arriving in New York late in 1909, he found work as a typesetter. He attended anarchist meetings there just as he had done in Bucharest. In 1910 he began going to Emma Goldman's lectures, and was a frequent visitor to the Ferrer Center after it opened in 1911.

Shortly after the Stelton Colony grew out of New York's Ferrer Center in 1915, Ishill moved there, continuing like many of the colonists to commute to work in New York. He resurrected and installed in a corner of the Colony's farmhouse an old hand printing press, and began to teach the children the printers' art. With Ishill's help, they produced a small monthly magazine called *The Path of Joy*. Ishill also printed *The Modern School* on the same old press, making it, in William Thurston Brown's words, "the most artistic magazine in the entire radical movement."

On thanksgiving Day, 1916, Ishill traveled to New York to attend a benefit ball for the Stelton School, where he met Rose Florence Freeman, a gifted lyrical poet characterized by a Harvard critic as "a feminine Walt Whitman." They fell in love, and Rose became his lifelong companion and coworker.

While they were at Stelton, Ishill began work on the series of private editions that would occupy him for the rest of his life. Late in 1916, he brought out an edition of Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol* with a special foreword by Frank Harris. This was quickly followed by three volumes of poetry, two of them by Rose.

The couple left Stelton and moved to an apartment in the Bronx early in 1918 so that Ishill could be closer to his place of employment. They missed the countryside, though, and in September of the same year bought a three room bungalow in Berkley Heights, New Jersey. In the course of the next few years, Ishill added several rooms to the house and built a basement in which he installed his printing press.

They spent over forty years in Berkley Heights, during which time Ishill devoted all of his free time to the old press, producing many "books of the rarest beauty and inspiration," as Leonard Abbot called them. The small press in Berkley Heights basement produced gems of the typographers' art admired by conniseurs of fine printing and those who shared his anarchist ideals. The libertarian authors of these works, as well as many of the artists involved, were mostly friends or correspondents. He produced some 250 books and pamphlets, all of his own choosing, seldom printing more than 200 copies and often fewer. These small editions were as a general rule presented as gifts to friends and to libraries around the world rather than being sold. Rudolph Rocker, who visited the Ishills in 1926, said that Ishill had his own little world in Berkley Heights which he "ruled as a magician of the graphic art."

Throughout his life, Ishill corresponded with many more prominent anarchists than those represented in his hand-printed books. He sold the bulk of the resultant collection of letters and manuscripts to Harvard University in 1960, which thereby gained one of the richest archives of anarchist writings in the United States.

Joseph Ishill died in Berkley Heights on March 14, 1966.

The Emancipation Collective wishes to acknowledge Paul Avrich's The Modern School Movement (Princeton University Press, 1980) as the sole source of information for this History Note.

AFFILIATES

MID-ATLANTIC REGION

"Emancipation", Box 840, Ben Franklin Sta., ton, D.C. 20044

MID-ATLANTIC REGION

"Emancipation", Box 840, Ben Franklin Sta., Washington, D.C. 20044

Kronstadt Books, Box 40920, Palisades Sta., Washington, D.C. 20016

Anarchitecture, Box 840, Ben Franklin Sta., Washington, D.C. 20044

Merry Sage Collective, Box 40920, Palisades Sta., Washington, D.C. 20016

Research Group One, 2743 Md. Ave., Baltimore, Md. 21218

SMAC
St. Mary's City, Md.

Rascal, 436 Pa. Ave.
Morgantown, W.Va. 26505

Certain Philadelphia Anarchists, % Wooden Shoe Books, 112 S. 20th St., Philadelphia. Pa. 19103

Friends of Liberty, P.O.Box 57,
West Nyak, N.Y. 10994

Libertarian Book Club, 339 Lafayette St., #202,
New York, NY 10012

A Distribution, 325 E. 84th St., #4-C
New York, NY 10028

Mackay Soc., 227 Columbus Ave., #2-E
New York, NY 10023

A Political, P.O.Box 828, H&Ws College
Geneva, NY 14456

GULF COAST REGION

Kitchen Sink News, P.O.Box 4927
Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 33338

MID-WEST REGION

Bayou La Rose, P.O.Box 6130, Kansas City, Kan. 66106

ShiMo Underground, 603 Stuart St.,
Kalamazoo, Mich. 49007

Resurgence, P.O.Box 2824, Sta. A, Champaign, Ill. 61820