

Dirk A. Kouwenhoven, 1942–2017

NORTH AMERICA lost a link to the printing traditions of Europe with the death of Dick Kouwenhoven, chair and CEO of Hemlock Printers Ltd. of Burnaby, B.C., on April 25, 2017, a month shy of his 75th birthday.

Born in the Dutch city of Delft on May 21, 1942, Kouwenhoven had among his earliest memories the city's liberation from Nazi occupation. Reconstruction following the war meant good times for his father, a carpenter, and he and his siblings and their friends would often make their way into the shop to see windows and doors being fashioned according to time-honoured techniques. The sights gave him an admiration and love for craftsmanship that stood him in good stead when the direction of his grades prompted his father to point him towards a career in printing.

"My dad deserves much credit for his skills as a career counsellor," he said on receiving a lifetime achievement award in December 2015 from the trade magazine *PrintAction*. "I became an apprentice compositor, signing my life away with a six-year iron-clad employment contract . . . I loved the work, the rapid learning curve, and the camaraderie of the workplace, much more than being a full-time student."

Together with his brother John, he emigrated from the Netherlands to Canada in 1965, and the Monday after arriving in Vancouver, he was at work composing for a local printer. Six months later, the new owner of Hemlock Printers—then operating from a storefront—approached him to manage production.

"He had no previous experience in printing, but he had great contacts in the business community, and could fill that little place with orders, no problem," Kouwenhoven recalls. "All he needed was an all-round typesetter-printer who could make things happen in the shop."

Kouwenhoven eventually acquired a 50 percent stake in the business, then in 1968 became sole owner, incorporated, and began



building the business in earnest. New equipment, a larger premises, and investment in staff followed—a pattern that would underpin Hemlock's growth to become one of Canada's largest commercial printers, with 195 staff and annual revenues of \$36 million.

The investment in new equipment reflected Kouwenhoven's respect for craftsmanship learned as a youth in the Netherlands, and a belief that a trade must live into the future if it is to remain vibrant. A mentor to younger printers, Kouwenhoven was a member of the Alcuin Society from 1985 until his death.

Howard Greaves, former chair of the Society, vividly remembers a visit to Hemlock's expansive, 54,000-square-foot plant in Burnaby when Kouwenhoven showed off the latest Heidelberg presses. His knowledge of the contemporary trade and abiding interest in its history made him an intelligent and engaging conversationalist at Society events, including its annual wayzgoose.

PrintAction recognized Hemlock as Canada's most environment-friendly printer in 2006, specifically noting its recycling initiatives

as well as its elaborate Off Cuts for Charity program, which offered qualified charitable organizations space on existing print runs. The program made better use of resources while investing in community initiatives.

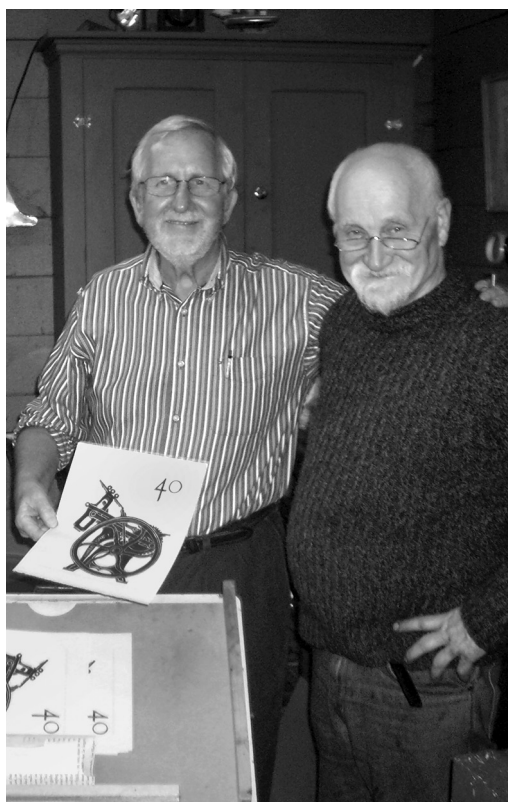
“We are taking action in making the world a better place for future generations. Being recognized for our efforts makes us want to work even harder,” Kouwenhoven said at the time.

Kouwenhoven stepped back from daily management of Hemlock in 2012, appointing his son Richard president and chief operating officer. The firm’s investment in environment-friendly technologies as well as new online platforms that met clients’ evolving business practices continued, however.

Richard Kouwenhoven paid tribute to his father in a note to colleagues. Most important, he said, the family thanked their father for his legacy.

“We shared our deep sadness and appreciation for his amazing vision, energy and leadership that created the special community we experience every day at Hemlock,” he said. “We also thanked him for the legacy that he leaves behind and the wonderful example that he has set for us.”

~ Peter Mitham, editor



Kouwenhoven in his shop in the 1970s (facing page), and with type designer and printer Jim Rimmer (above).

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

The Alcuin Society wishes to welcome the following new members:

Frances McDonnell, Vancouver, BC

Lou Morin, Edmonton, AB

Emma Novotny, Vancouver, BC

Susan Pegram, Vancouver, BC

Guy Robertson, Vancouver, BC

Jeffrey Werner, Vancouver, BC



Alcuin Society membership is open to any individual, institution or organization with an interest in the book arts, the history of books, book collecting and reading. An individual membership is \$50 a year, while institutional membership is \$75 a year. Students may join at the rate of \$25 a year for up to three years. A patron membership is available at the rate of \$125.

Society members within Canada pay in Canadian dollars; foreign memberships must be paid in U.S. dollars. Payment may be made online using PayPal or via cheque or money order made payable to The Alcuin Society, P.O. Box 3216, Vancouver, British Columbia V6B 3X8.