

An Innovative Entrepreneur

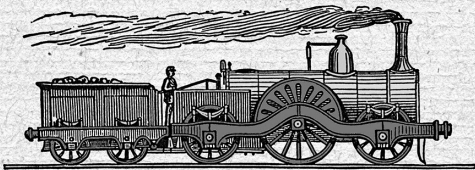
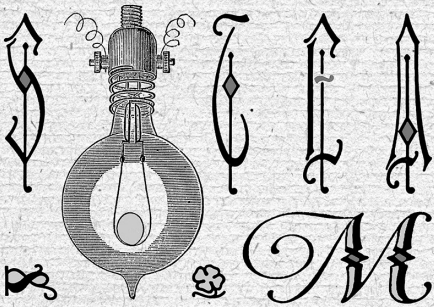
RESEARCHING BOOKPLATES OFTEN takes me down rabbit holes about their owners, but every once in a while I get the opportunity to peek behind the curtain of bookplate creation. When I began working with a bookplate awarded to William Price by the Catholic Commercial Academy of Montreal, I began the usual process of investigating the various people and organisations involved in the award. However, what caught my interest was the small text printed at the bottom of the bookplate, separate from the main text and elaborate border: "GEO, E. DESBARATS PRINT." It doesn't happen often, but in this instance the bookplate creator had signed his name.

George-Édouard-Amable Desbarats, also known as George Edward, was born in Québec on April 5, 1838. His grandfather, Pierre-Édouard, was a co-owner of the Nouvelle Imprimerie. George Edward's father, George-Paschal, then took over the business, becoming the Queen's Printer in 1841. Shortly afterwards, George Edward began his own path of education, eventually studying law. However, when George Edward was called to the bar of Lower Canada, he instead decided to work with his father's printing company, Desbarats et Derbishire. After the death of his father in 1864, George Edward inherited the company with a new partner, Malcolm Cameron, and the two moved to Ottawa on Sparks Street to serve government printing needs.

Desbarats et Derbishire was quite successful, but was burned to the ground on January 20, 1869, in the aftermath of the assassination of George Edward's friend Thomas D'Arcy McGee. Despite this hardship, Desbarats continued his printing work through a press he had established in Quebec five years earlier with engraver William Augustus Leggo Jr. Leggo and Desbarats proved to be productive partners; Sir John A. Macdonald named Desbarats the first official printer of

Dingbats

ORNAMENTS & *fanciful initials*



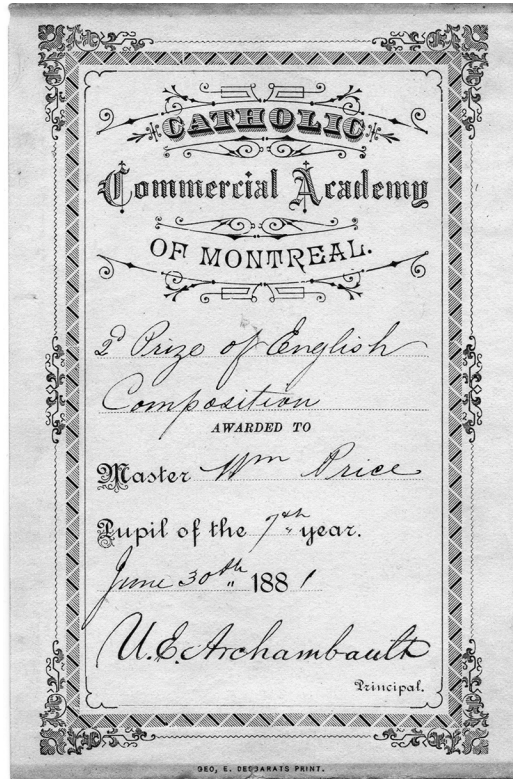
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Canada on October 1, 1869, but due to the workload Desbarats resigned in 1870 and continued his work in Montreal. Leggo and Desbarats would go on to create several innovations in printing technology, including their first patent for leggotype, a method of photo-engraving that reproduced line drawings and engravings. Desbarats implemented these innovations in his print practice; when he launched the *Canadian Illustrated News*, it was the first publication of its kind to use full-page photo-mechanical engraving. Desbarats and Leggo would continue to develop new print techniques, such as granulated photography and photolithography, which they would then implement in various print periodicals. Claude Galarneau, discussing Desbarats' work in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, notes that these methods "formed an integral part of the technical advances made in mass communications during the 19th century."

Despite the long-lasting influence Desbarats had on the world of printing, his business continued to struggle. Because of the small print circulation in Canada, Leggo and Desbarats moved to New York and founded the *New York Daily Graphic*, the world's first illustrated daily, in 1873. The following year, Leggo and Desbarats ended their partnership and Desbarats focused on printing in Montreal. He founded the Burland-Desbarats Lithographic &

Publishing Co. with George Bull Burland in 1874, which printed Canadian periodicals. The cost of these publications proved burdensome, however, and Desbarat filed for personal bankruptcy on May 31, 1875. He retired from Burland-Desbarats in 1876, opened a business with his son in 1877, started the Desbarats Printing Co. in 1878, and joined the Artotype Printing Co. in 1879. In 1884 he became a joint manager of the Canada Bank



Note Engraving & Printing Co., returning to periodicals in 1888 alongside his son with the *Dominion Illustrated*. It was the first weekly in Canada that used halftone engraving for its illustrations. Desbarats experimented with print techniques throughout his entire professional life. He died in Montreal on February 18, 1893, but as of 1970, the Desbarats Printing Co. still employed seventh-generation Desbarats in Canada. An innovator, Desbarats left a lasting legacy on print and communications.

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The Rare Books and Special Collections Bookplate Collection can be accessed from the UBC Library Digital Collections and Services site, <http://digitalcollections.library.ubc.ca>.

