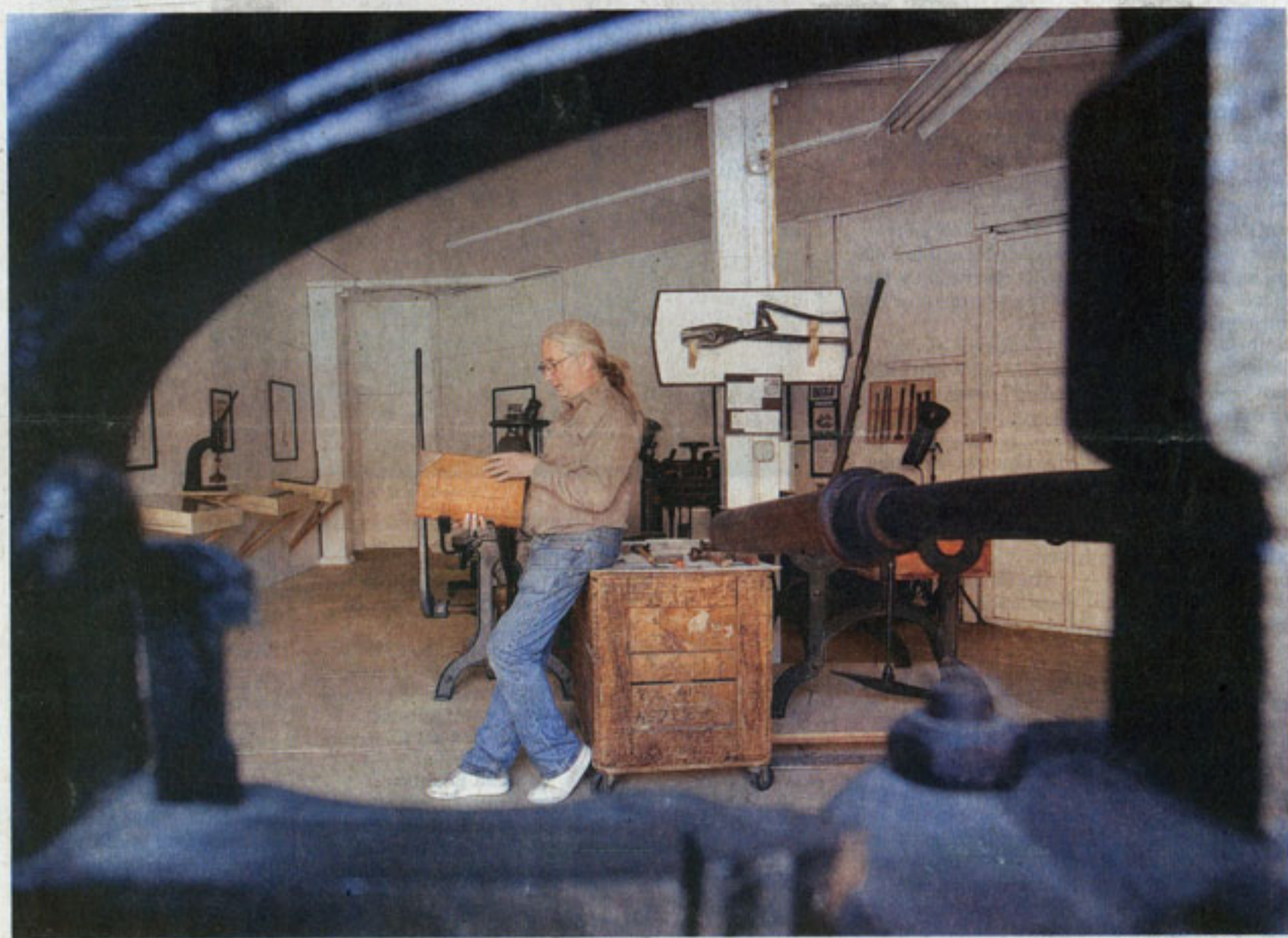


Datebook

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM | Saturday, September 26, 2009 | Section E



Photos by Lacy Atkins / The Chronicle

BOOKS

Bound for new museum

By Sam Whiting
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The American Bookbinders Museum is only open Saturday afternoons. But on any weekday you can go around the corner and find the museum's founder, financier, curator, display builder and text writer.

His name is Tim James, he runs Taurus Bookbindery, and his ponytailed looks are letter-perfect. It doesn't take much convincing for him to put down his tools, grab his keys and give you a tour.

"The concept is that bookbinderies for hundreds of years looked like little shops," James, 57, says, opening the door to his own little shop of a museum, which is marked by a sandwich board on Harrison Street at 16th. Inside are nine

nonelectric pieces of equipment made of wood and metal and resembling antediluvian torture devices.

"Today, paper goes in one side of a machine and books come out the other," he says. "But up to the middle of the last century, there was handwork involved, and we're trying to document that."

A bookbinder's job is to take printed sheets and assemble them inside a protective cover that has been decorated in lettering and artwork. San Francisco once had the largest printing industry in the West, concentrated where the four-part Embarcadero Center is now, James says.



Tim James (top) looks through an old ledger and shows how an 1845 paper slicer works in his American Bookbinders Museum in San Francisco.

American Bookbinders Museum: 1962 Harrison St. Open 12-4 p.m. Saturdays or by appointment. Free. (415) 710-9369; www.bookbindersmuseum.com.

During the 1906 earthquake and fire, 30 bookbinderies burned, according to city directories examined by James. Most came back and were bunched together on both sides of Market Street toward the waterfront, binding up account books for bankers, hotels and shopkeepers.

The trade started moving overseas in the 1960s, and now James counts two hardcover bookbinders

Bookbinders continues on E4

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Books bound in new museum

Bookbinders from page E1

in San Francisco and one in Brisbane.

James' own shop, Taurus, may be more of a museum than his museum. The noise of manufacturing and the smell of glue seeps out a roll-up door on 16th Street. Inside, one artisan is sewing together the folded pages of a San Francisco memoir. Another is constructing the covers out of cloth and board. The green covers are stacked up and another worker is merging them with the manuscript. A fourth applies gold-leaf lettering to the cover.

"We fall into that very small niche of people that do handwork on commercial jobs," says James. This machinery is early 20th century. The old stuff is in the display cases around the corner,



Lacy Atkins / The Chronicle

Tim James stands next to an 18th century press in his American Bookbinders Museum.

which he claims is "the only bookbinders museum in the country."

"There apparently is a very tiny one in a bookbindery in Bath, England" he says.

In the museum sits an 800-pound Imperial arming press from 1832

that James bought and had shipped from France three years ago. Asked how expensive that was, he answers "frightfully," declining to elaborate. James has been working on the museum for 15 years, accumulating paper cutters, paper sam-

ples, lettering tools, contraptions for lining blank paper, photos, manuals, and union pins from the International Brotherhood of Bookbinders.

Earlier this year he attained nonprofit status and started giving tours by appointment. In August he opened to the public. Admission is free and on Saturdays binder Tom Conroy is there working in the traditional fashion. James lives nearby and is prone to dropping in. Just don't ask if he is a printer.

"This has nothing to do with printing," says James, who is tired of the perception that bookbinding is an after-market accessory. "Bookbinders were around for 1,000 years before printers."

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