

# THE ITINERANT PRINTER



**What:** The Itinerant Printer Project

**Where:** Various Cities Across the United States

**When:** Throughout 2017

**Who:** Chris Fritton, Modern Tramp Printer

**News:** The Itinerant Printer Project is Coming to a Close Soon!

The history of tramp printers is a long & storied one, and Chris Fritton, former Studio Director of the Western New York Book Arts Center, has been adding to that chronicle. In early 2015, Fritton set out on an ambitious cross-country journey that has taken him to 45 states, 4 Canadian provinces, and over 135 letterpress printshops; he's already travelled over 45,000 miles & made over 15,000 prints - but it doesn't end there. The trip continues throughout 2017 and will eventually encompass most of the 48 contiguous states & over 140 shops; the project is called "The Itinerant Printer."

Fritton left his position at the WNY Book Arts Center in Buffalo, NY, to embark on the trip; he worked there for almost 6 years. "It was time for me to be a journeyman printer. I never had the opportunity to learn from a diverse group of printers, and it's important to have that experience - but it's just as important to share what I've learned with others and create a nationwide collaboration of sorts."

The Itinerant Printer visits letterpress printshops primarily, producing unique prints at each venue culled from their idiosyncratic collections of antique wood type, metal type, cuts, ornaments, and photopolymer plates. These prints are mailed back to followers and supporters of the project as postcards (and care packages) from the road. He visits universities, book arts centers, private printshops, upstart presses, and well-established presses. "This has proven to be the perfect time" says Fritton, "public interest in analog art is cresting right now and letterpress shops are everywhere."

The project intends to capture the spirit of the analog revival, send real samples of it to people's mailboxes, and convey the ethos of the handmade revival to a broader audience via social media. But it's not just another travel blog - as a culmination, it will result in a coffee table book that features photos of all of the prints, printshops, and people from the trek.

Fritton says "it's also about reviving a sense of adventure in printing, along with the analog sharing of information. It's about going out into the world, seeking work based on your skill set, making something with your hands, and delivering that object to someone. It's about an exchange of ideas, of techniques, of information, of style, and of the consummation of all those things: prints."

The trip is no vacation, however - Fritton estimates that he will cover over 50,000 miles and make over 20,000 prints during the excursion - it poses any number of challenges, from travel logistics to working in unfamiliar spaces. "Creativity within constraint is at the core of this project," he says, "when I walk into each printshop, I don't really know what I'm getting myself into, what I have to work with, and what the people will be like." He has over 140 shops on the itinerary, and more contact him each day.

The project has already taken on great national sponsors like Mailchimp, Van Son Holland Inks, Mohawk Paper, Field Notes, Write Notepads, Porridge Papers and New York outfits like Virgin Wood Type, White Bicycle, Hodgins Engraving Co., and Pistachio Press, but the major source of capital was a successful Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign that Fritton ran himself. He has raised over \$27,000 through the campaign, and will offset more travel and mailing costs with honoraria and speaking fees from schools and universities along the way. The campaign is ongoing and perks can be viewed at [igg.me/at/itinerantprinter](http://igg.me/at/itinerantprinter)

The Itinerant Printer website tracks his progress; it features a travel diary, photos of the printshops, landscapes, and people from the journey: [www.itinerantprinter.com](http://www.itinerantprinter.com)

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