A History of Sans-Serif T~~t~~ype

by Franklin Baskerville

In typography and lettering, letterforms like ~~a~~sans, *sans-serif,* or *gothic*~~, or simply sans letterform~~ ~~is~~are ~~one~~sone that do~~es~~ not have extending features called "serifs"~~"~~ at the end of strokes. The term comes from the French word *sans*, meaning "without." ~~" and~~ The origin of the word "S~~s~~erif" is~~of~~ uncertain ~~origin~~, though it is possibly from —

the Dutch word *schreef* meaning "line" or "pen stroke." *Sans-serif* fonts are often used for headings rather than for bod~~ies of~~y text. They are also used to convey simplicity, ~~and~~ modernity, and~~or~~ minimalism.

~~Letters without serifs have been common in writing across history.~~ Today, *sans--serif* fonts have become the most prevalent for text displays~~display of text~~ on computer screens[1]. On lower-resolution digital displays, fine details like seraphs may disappear, or be too large.

The Origins of Sans Serif L~~l~~etterforms

Letters without serifs have been common in writing across history. Printing in the Latin alphabet was originally "serif" in style, imitating the forms of manuscript lettering. The earliest printing typefaces, which omitted serifs, were not intended for ~~not to~~ rendering contemporary texts, but to represent inscriptions in Ancient Greek and Etruscan. ~~Thus,~~ Thomas Dempster's *De Etruria* ~~regali~~Regali ~~libri~~Libri *Vii*~~I~~ (1723) for example~~,~~ used special typefaces intended for the representation of Etruscan epigraphy. ~~A, and a~~round 1745, the Caslon Type F~~f~~oundry made Etruscan types for pamphlets written by Etruscan scholar John Swinton.[31]{Q:Is this quoting a specific text or page?} Another niche use~~d~~ of a printed *sans-serif* letterform, from ~~in~~ 1786 onward, was a rounded *sans-serif* script font developed by Valentin Haüy to enable visually-impaired people ~~for the use of the blind~~ to read with their fingers.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, neoclassical architects began to incorporate ancient Greek and Roman designs in their designs. The British architect John Soane~~, for example~~, commonly used *sans-serif* letters on his drawings and plans. The lettering style apparently became referred to as "old Roman" or "Egyptian" characters.

In London, "~~:~~Egyptian~~"~~" lettering became popular for advertising, apparently, because of its mesmerizing effect on the public. The h~~H~~istorian James Mosley~~, has~~

~~written~~noted that "in 1805 Egyptian letters were happening in the streets of London, being plastered over shops and on walls by signwriters, and they were astonishing the public, who had never seen letters like them and were not sure they wanted to."[2] A depiction of the style was shown in the *European Magazine* of 1805, however, the style did not become used in printing for some more years. Around 1816, William Caslon IV produced the first *sans-serif* printing type in England for Latin characters. But no examples of its use have been found. Its popularity ~~flaged~~flared until *sans-serif* typefaces again began ~~again~~ to be issued by London type foundries from around 1830 onward. These were quite different in design, arrestingly bold and similar in aesthetic to the slab *serif* typefaces of the period.

——————————*Sans-serif* lettering and fonts were popular for~~due to~~ their clarity and legibility at a distance, both in advertising and display use, when printed very large, or very small ~~.~~(t~~T~~he same considerations drive their popularity in digital media today.) Because *sans-serif* type was often used for headings and commercial printing, many early *sans-serif* designs did not feature lowercase letters. Simple *sans-serif* capitals, without the use of lower-case characters, graced Victorian tombstones. The term *grotesque* (from the Italian word for "cave") became commonly used to describe *sans-serif*~~s~~. ~~The term grotesque comes from the Italan word for cave,~~ i~~I~~t was often used to describe Roman decorative styles found by excavation, but ~~had~~ acquired the secondary sense of something malformed or ~~monsterous~~monstrous.

——————————The first use of *sans-*-*serif* ~~as a~~in running text is believed to be the short ~~–~~ booklet, *Feste des Lebens und der Kunst: E*~~e~~*ine Betrachtung des Theaters als höchsten Kultursymbols* (Celebration of Life and Art: A Consideration of the Theater as the Highest Symbol of a Culture), by Peter Behrens, in 1900.

——————————Throughout the nineteenth, and early ~~20th~~twentieth centuries, *sans-serif* ~~typefacs~~typefaces were viewed with suspicion by many printers, especially those of fine books, as being fit only for advertisements.~~,~~ Indeed, many of the common *sans-serif* types of the period now seem somewhat lumpy and ~~eccentricly~~eccentrically ~~-~~shaped. In the 1920s, the master printer Daniel Berkeley Updike described *sans-serif* fonts as having "no place in any artistically respectable composing-room," and to this day most printed books use *serif* fonts for ~~the~~ body text~~s~~.

Modern Sans-Serif Type

2 James Mosley, "The Nymph and the Grot: An Update," Type Foundry blog, January 6, 2007, http:// typefoundry.blogspot.com/2007/01/lymph-and-grot-update.html, accessed May 23, 2017.

Through the early ~~t~~Twentieth century, ~~an increase in popularity of sans serif fonts took place~~the popularity of *sans-serif* fonts increased as more artistic and complex designs were created. Humanist and geometric *sans--serif* designs were shrewdly ~~were~~ marketed in Europe~~a~~ and America, as embodying classic proportions while presenting a spare, modern image. While he disliked *sans-serif* fonts —

in general, the American printer J. L. Frazier wrote of Copperplate Gothic in 1925 that "a certain dignity of effect accompanies . . . due to the absence of anything in the way of frills," {Q: This would need a citation}-making it a popular choice for the station~~ea~~ry of professionals such as lawyers and doctors.

~~In the post-War period, an increase of interest took place~~After World War II, interest in "grotesque" *sans- serifs* grew. The l~~WL~~eading type designer Adrian Fru~~tiiti~~ger wrote in 1961 ~~on~~about the design of a new face, Univers, on the nineteenth--century model: "Some of these old sans serifs have had a real reconnaissance (Q: Did the text mean renaissance?) within the last twenty years, once the reaction of the 'New Objectivity' had been overcome. A purely geometrical form of type is unsustainable."[3]

By the ~~nineteen-sixties~~1960s, neo-grotesque typefaces such as Univers and Helvetica had become popular through. These typefaces reviv~~ing~~ed the nineteenth-century ~~grotequues~~grotesques, while offering a more unified range of styles ~~than on previous designs, allow~~ allow~~ing~~ ~~a wider range of~~ text to be set artistically ~~through~~by setting headings and body text in a single ~~font~~typeface. For example, the Linotype version of the Frutiger type family, named for its designer, includes nineteen different weights and styles for various uses.

The relative merits of *serif* and *sans-serif* typefaces are ~~for various purposes are~~ still hotly debated for many reasons. Fans of the elegant *serif* faces, used in many twentieth-century printed books, lament the tyranny of screen-friendly fonts like Calibri and Arial. Numerous studies have asserted the superior legibility of ~~both~~each style~~s~~, though the most significant factor affecting legibility may be the reader's familiarity with the typeface.[4] Wikipedia itself—in —

a reversal of the tradition of using a *serif* type~~face~~ for body text and a *sans-serif* typeface for headings—compromised in its 2014 design makeover by using Hoefler Text, a *sans-serif* face, as the default for its articles but Linux Libertine, a public-domain serif font, for its own logo.

[3.] Heidrun Osterer and Philip Stamm, Adrian Frutiger: The Typefaces; The Complete Works, ed. Swiss Foundation Type and Typographie (Basel: Birkhaüser, 2014), 88 (e-book).
[4.] See Alex Poole, "Which Are More Legible: Serif or Sans Serif Typefaces?," Alex Poole blog, February 17, 2008, http://alexpoole.info/blog/which-are-more-legible-serif-or-sans-serif-typefaces/, accessed May 23, 2017.