Against the Grain

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International Dateline

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Yankee Book Peddler, Inc.

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It was snowing feet and feet. The televisions were all talking about the snow up North. Computers went down; cars skidded; people couldn’t get to work. Still, your crazy editor bugged Glen Secor for International Dateline! And here it is! Thank you, Glen. You put up with a lot for all the glory. — KS

A note from the Section Editor

The International Dateline section is off to a good start. In this issue, we have outstanding contributions from our British Correspondent, Liz Chapman, and our European Correspondent, Gilles de La Rochefoucauld, as well as an excellent article on the African Books Collective, Ltd., a non-profit cooperative set up by eleven African publishers to promote the sale of their books worldwide. I am still interested in hearing from others in different parts of the world who would like to be correspondents for International Dateline. Or perhaps you want to suggest someone? You can reach me at 603-746-3102 (phone); 603-746-5628 (fax); or e-mail: gsecor@office.ypb.com

Since the launch of this section in the November issue of ATG, we have seen the passage of NAFTA in the U.S. and the completion of the Uruguay Round of the GATT talks. If you followed the frantic final weeks of the GATT negotiations, you know that U.S. intellectual property owners, including film studios, music studios, and book publishers, were at the center of what became a storm over trade in cultural industries. In the end, the U.S. did not get what it wanted in terms of intellectual property protection or access to foreign cultural markets. I suspect that these issues will be prominent in bilateral and multilateral trade talks for some time to come.

U.K. CELEBRATES NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK

by Liz Chapman

OXFORD, U.K. — Under the direction of the Library Association, the U.K. celebrated National Library Week in style during the first week in November. Librarians took part in all sorts of stunts and several changed places with celebrities. Renowned violinist Nigel Kennedy was probably the most famous person seen at the circulation desk during the week. The national heritage Minister opened a brand new library in Croydon (despite other members of the government verbally threatening the free public library service only the week before). There were plenty of radio and television tie-ins, too, with Channel 4 doing dramatised excerpts from books each evening. National Library Week is not celebrated annually in the U.K., although it is hoped that future such events will be held in order to capture the national imagination on behalf of academic libraries, as well.

BOOKSELLERS RELIEVED TO ESCAPE VAT, BUT FACE NEW PRICING THREATS

by Liz Chapman

OXFORD, U.K. — Booksellers and libraries are breathing a collective sigh of relief, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not impose the EEC value added tax on books. He did reserve the right to put VAT on books and any other goods at any time, so the booksellers’ campaign against the tax must continue.

On the price front, Costco have entered the U.K. market and are discounting net books, much to the concern of publishers. Tesco, a large supermarket chain, are now selling books and have joined the Booksellers Association, to the apparent concern of many of the Association’s existing members, who see their market slipping away.

BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE AND BIBLIOTHEQUE DE FRANCE MERGE

by Gilles de La Rochefoucauld (Aux Amateurs)

PARIS, France — Effective 1 January 1994, Bibliotheque Nationale (BN) has merged with Bibliotheque de France to form Bibliotheque Nationale de France (BNF). The new entity will be managed by Emmanuel Leroy-Ladurie, the current director of BN.

This merger combines two of France’s most significant cultural institutions. Bibliotheque National was founded by King Francis I in 1540, under the name of Bibliotheque du Roi. Bibliotheque de France is one of the most important architectural and cultural projects achieved under the mandate of President Francois Mitterrand.

The goals of BNF, as set by the government, include “fulfilling the general missions of a National Library, including copyright (covering all the fields of human knowledge) … allowing access for all people to collections … (and) setting up networks with French and international libraries, using the newest technologies to store and communicate information.”

Beginning in July 1994, people will begin moving from the current location of BN (central Paris, close to the Palais-Royal gardens) to the new BNF building in the eastern part of Paris. When BNF officially opens in late 1996, half of the BN staff will have moved. By the turn of the century, nearly 3000 people are expected to be working at BNF.

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AFRICAN BOOKS COLLECTIVE:
An innovative book supplier
by Mary Jay, Consultant to African Books Collective

Background
Acquisitions of African-published books have long been a problem in the North: libraries, scholars, and other book buyers outside Africa have encountered great difficulties arising from the lack of distribution networks. A small number of commercial distributors have provided a valuable service, particularly in the acquisition of government documents, grey literature, and other ephemera. But for those books bought locally in Africa by dealers, the publisher does not benefit from the foreign exchange earnings.

African publishers themselves have long been concerned about the lack of effective overseas distribution networks. The scale of the bureaucracy in handling export orders, and the difficulties of handling small orders, has often meant that orders remain unprocessed. African publishers face great hurdles in building a flourishing publishing industry: they are struggling with the severe economic conditions prevailing in the continent; they are too rarely able to rely on the backbone of the textbook market because of the dominance of the multinational publishers, and sometimes government monopolies; they suffer from the severe inadequacy of communications and infrastructure; their domestic distribution channels are often weak, with few libraries and booksshops; literacy is low in many African countries; the prices of books are out of reach of the mass of the population; and the reading habit is not firmly entrenched. The publishers need hard currency earnings from the export market to help their publishing houses to grow, and thus to contribute to an educated citizenry and national development.

African Books Collective, Ltd.
Establishment and aims
Whilst, however, the problems have been identified on many occasions, African publishers individually do not have the substantial resources needed to promote and market their books outside Africa. And so, in 1985, a group of 11 like-minded African publishers came together to see whether they could tackle jointly what they could not do individually. At that meeting, the publishers decided to set up African Books Collective, Ltd. (ABC) as a self-help initiative to promote, market, and distribute their English-language books in Europe, North America, and in Commonwealth countries outside Africa.

The unique nature of ABC is that it is owned and governed by the founding member publishers, and it is non-profit making on its own behalf. Member publishers enjoy more favourable terms than those available under conventional commercial agreements, with some 60-65% of net proceeds from sales being returned to publishers in hard currency every six months. By buying member publishers’ titles directly from ABC, the customer has the benefit of the quickest and most direct service, and the satisfaction of knowing that the major benefit from the sale goes to the African publishers rather than to a commercial organization.

In addition to distributing member publishers’ titles, ABC has a mission to disseminate African culture, heritage, and scholarship more widely. In furtherance of this broader goal, ABC is engaged in many related activities, including book promotion events and outreach activities for African authors and publishers, producing resource materials, assisting in rights negotiations, and acting as liaison with other African and international bodies in the representation of the publishers’ interests.

Funding and premises
Until such time as turnover is sufficient to meet ABC’s overhead costs and the preferential terms which members enjoy, donor funding is needed to bridge the gap. The publishers have secured support from major donors, including currently the Rockefeller Foundation in the U.S.

ABC has offices in central Oxford in the U.K., with a showroom displaying all titles stocked. The distribution service is fully controlled by ABC, which retains its own rented warehouse twenty miles outside Oxford. Books are on consignment, meaning that they remain the publishers’ legal property until they are sold.

Membership and services
Membership has grown to 41 members from 12 African countries. Joint catalogues are extensively mailed; twice-yearly main catalogues of all new titles and select backlist; subject catalogues; and colour-illustrated catalogues for multicultural collections, including children’s and folklore titles, as well as some general titles covering African heritage and culture.

The number of titles stocked has more than tripled since the start of trading, and now stands at over 1100, with 200 new titles being added every year. These titles include a very diverse range of academic and scholarly publications, bibliographies and reference sources, a strong list of over 200 African fiction works, a substantial number of children’s books, and titles of wider interest on African life and culture.

Customers enjoy the benefit of centralised billing and shipping for 41 African publishers, whose books are now as easily available as those of a British publisher, since they are warehoused in the U.K. North American customers can pay in U.S. dollars. Other services include Blanket Order plans and a “New Title Information on Cards” service for regular customers.

Conclusion
African published books have a vitally important contribution to make to a culturally diverse world. They help all children, including those of African heritage, to derive learning enjoyment and respect for other cultures. Scholars benefit from having access to the fruits of African scholarship. ABC’s task is to “mainstream” African books, which should be treated in the same way as books from the U.K., U.S., or anywhere else. Our hope is that more book buyers, and particularly public and school libraries in the U.S., will become aware of the exciting range of publications distributed by ABC, thus contributing to a truly multicultural society and to the strengthening of African publishing.

For more information about ABC’s services, please write to: African Books Collective, Ltd., The Jam Factory, 27 Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1HU, England. Tel: +44-(0)865-726686. Fax: +44-(0)865-793298.
EXCHANGE RATES IMPROVE OUTLOOK ON PRICES FOR FRENCH MATERIALS

by Gilles de La Rochefoucauld

PARIS, France — In the past two years, many librarians have complained about the high cost of European materials. Everyone knows the main reason: the low value of the U.S. dollar (USD) compared with most European currencies. Fortunately, this has been changing and the purchasing power of American libraries for European titles should improve dramatically in the coming months.

For example, the main issue affecting the amount of expenditures for French journals and books is the value of the USD versus the French franc. In the fiscal year beginning July 1992, the value of the dollar jumped by 22%, while the inflation rate on books and journals was 3%. Analysts expect the dollar to gain another 7.5% in the fiscal year which began July 1993, with inflation of 2.5%. These factors combine for a net increase in the purchasing power of the USD for French materials of 19% in fiscal 92/93, and 5% in fiscal 93/94.

Beyond July 1994, one can only guess at the change in purchasing power of the dollar for French materials. It would seem that we can expect roughly a 10% increase in the value of the dollar, which would combine with continuing inflation of around 3%, for another 7% decrease in the cost of acquiring French materials. €

On the Road

A glimpse at “Life in the Trenches” —
"On the road again/ Just can’t wait to get on the road again . . . ."
Column Editor, Don Jaeger (Alfred Jaeger, Inc.)

Jim Boyer was formerly a regional sales representative for Ballen Booksellers International for many years. Prior to that he was with Kraus Periodicals and Reprints, Majors Book and Springer Verlag. Due to health reasons, Jim had to retire a few years ago, but we understand he’s coming along well. I’m still waiting for the story from the salesman who had tattle-tape sewn into his briefcase that set off the security device in every library he visited. What about the International reps who visit libraries in Europe and Asia? Surely you have some interesting travel stories?!?

All stories, all anecdotes, all shared experiences are welcomed. Fax them to 516-543-1537, or mail to my attention at Alfred Jaeger, Inc., 66 Austin Blvd., Commack, NY 11725-9009. — DJ

On the Road
by Jim Boyer

A traveling man has many stories and life on the road holds many pleasant memories for me, as I found librarians are intelligent and a pleasure to be with. I have two stories to relate.

First — many years ago I had an appointment at the Furman University campus library in Greenville, South Carolina at 4 P.M. and then a later appointment at a major hospital in the area. After discussion with the librarian, I asked to use the telephone to call my office in New York. The librarian stated the telephone was in the men’s facilities. About 5 o’clock after using the telephone et al, I left the men’s facilities and discovered I was locked in the library. I searched for another telephone but ended up back in the men’s room where I called the librarian at the hospital to change my appointment. She was very understanding and said that this was her late day. I proceeded to explain I didn’t know when I would get to her library that evening, and she continued to be so understanding that I finally had to describe my situation. When I finally confessed that I was locked in the library at Furman University, she thought the situation was hilarious. I did find a couch, many books, and a vending machine. The security guard did not answer the phone until about 6 P.M. I explained the problem and he stated that I was a student pulling a joke and hung up the phone. I called back and insisted he open the library and rescue me which he finally did. Needless to say, security thought it was very funny. With my wider vision now, I know I should have spent the night in the library with its collections and become much smarter.

In my second story, I traveled with Warren Eisenberg after a convention in Dallas, Texas. The next day we visited Texas A&M University and had a nice lunch with the librarians. Warren insisted we had to get to Austin that night for our appointment the next day, as he had a dinner date with a librarian who I will call Ginger. I let Warren drive. At excessive speed we made it to our hotel by 6 P.M. He stated Ginger would meet him downstairs at 7 P.M. and did I want to come along. I said no, I would take a shower and order room service. Warren left all dressed up in a three-piece suit and no tie. I stated it was a conservative city and that he should take a tie, but Warren said no. Unfortunately when he left, I did not lock the door. Instead, I turned on the TV, took off my clothes, and prepared to take a shower. About half an hour later, the door opened and Ginger came in first with Warren behind her. Guess what? They had come to get a tie! When they spied me “ex clothes,” Warren said “oops, Ginger, you better stay outside.” She allowed as how it was too late. She had seen everything.

The next day in the library Ginger remarked how different I looked with clothes on. Needless to say I could have killed Warren. Years later, we laughed about it.

Life on the road. Fun and games. €