1994

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Recommended Citation
Newlin, Lyman (1994) "Papa Lyman Remembers / A Love/Hate Relationship," Against the Grain: Vol. 6: Iss. 4, Article 20.
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1649

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Papa Lyman Remembers

A Love/Hate Relationship
by Lyman Newlin (Book Trade Counsellor)

and Roger Shugg and from marketing directors William (“Chip”) Wood and Penelope Kaiserlian. A commission salesman, Jack Clapp, who also represented other university presses, was a regular caller at the Minneapolis Book Store. He was a fan of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. I remember his excitement once in hearing Artur Schnabel play a Beethoven piano concerto but he proceeded to fall asleep during the same concert at the playing of a Schnabel symphony. History proved Jack was not alone. I believe the memory of Schnabel as a great musician rests on his playing, not on his composition.

After Chicago, my next, and perhaps fondest, memories are from my association with the University of Minnesota Press. When I went to Minnesota in 1944, the Press was in the hands of four wonderful, capable women. Margaret Harding was director. I believe she was one of the earliest female university press directors. Helen Clapesattle, Helen MacDonald, and Jane McCarthy were on Margaret’s staff. Clapesattle, who succeeded Harding as director, had written in 1941 a widely sold book — The Doctors Mayo. Later she became Mrs. Roger W. Shugg. “Scotty” MacDonald later became marketing director at Texas and then Michigan. Late in life, she married Henry Wiggins, an assistant director at Columbia. From Scotty, I learned more about the basics of university press marketing than from any other person. She died as a result of an accident in 1969, soon after she and Wiggins moved to Princeton, where they were Newlin family neighbors since we had recently moved to Freehold, less than twenty miles away. Jane McCarthy was a marvelous book designer as well as a redhead who was mentioned in a Mademoiselle list of attractive businesswomen. She won several awards and could have served as head designer of any mainline commercial publisher. I treasure several of her books, especially those by Francis and Florence Jaques.

My most recent close association was with Rutgers, where I spent five years as marketing consultant during the late seventies. Herbert F. Mann was director. Unfortunately, his administration was a rocky one terminated in the early 1980s. While at Rutgers, I worked with three people who have steadily climbed the ladder of publishing success. Joseph J. Esposito was a part time student worker. After stints at several New York publishers, Joe is now president of G&C Merriam. Marlie Wasserman, ex-Rutgers Associate Director, is now a leading acquisitions editor at Routledge. Thomas Radko, another ex-Rutgers editor, is now director of the rapidly expanding University of Nevada Press. Wasserman and Radko are products of the University of Chicago Press.

Modesty does not prevent me from recounting the fact that I did a bit of acquisitioning at Rutgers. I was instrumental in reviving a book that had been out of print for several years — Christmas Trees for Pleasure and Profit — which is still in print 15 years later. During our years in New Jersey, my wife and I belonged to the Pinelands Cultural Society in Waretown (in case you don’t know where Waretown is, it’s about ten miles east of Apple Pie Hill). It was my ambition to publish a collection of American folk songs which were played, sung, and danced at the Society’s gatherings. Merce Ridgway, one of the musicians who traced his ancestors to Pre-Revolutionary days, and his wife, Arlene, promised to assist. There were many delays, but Arlene, who from her Brooklyn girlhood had been collecting recipes from her friends and neighbors, suggested that she could easily produce a regional cookbook. After tasting some of these dishes, I agreed. The result was Chicken Foot Soup (New Brunswick, 1980, 211 pp.). The entire first printing of 3,000 softcover copies was refused by the Press’s production staff because of binding defects. Finally, by early 1981, the binder came through satisfactorily. This title is now out of print, but if you want to learn how to make muskrat stew, pickled bay scallops, or, for that matter, chicken foot soup, let me know and I’ll fax you the recipes. I was also instrumental at Rutgers in the publication of the revised edition of Sea Bright Skiff by Peter F. Guthorn, a prominent surgeon whose avocation was studying the New Jersey shore and early American maps. This title was reprinted.

“Perhaps there is no better index of the real character of any university than the catalog of its press.” This quote from Dean Gordon J. Laing concludes Roger W. Shugg’s “Brief History of the University Press: Publishing at Chicago,” an essay which introduces a catalog created to celebrate the press’ seventy-fifth anniversary.

That’s a rather broad statement with which I cannot agree. With a background of a sixty year love-hate relationship with most American university presses, I would paraphrase Dean Laing’s statement but I’m not sure how. In these reminiscences, I’ll try to explain my dilemma.

My first experience with a university press was with Chicago. As business manager of Follett Book Company, I had considerable contact because we were actively promoting their “New Plan Texts series” to school libraries in our catalog, A Guide to Good Reading. The series took its name from President Robert Maynard Hutchins’ revolutionary “New Plan” of organizational changes at the University of Chicago. Theoretically books would be written in Hutchins’ three pet disciplines — Art, Literature, and Science. But as I recall the titles produced were mostly in the sciences. Bartky’s Highlights of Astronomy (1935, 280 pp., $2.50); Cronen & Krumbein’s geology text Down to Earth (1938, 502 pp., $3.75); and a physiology text by Carlson & Johnson, Machinery of the Body (1937, 580 pp., $4.00) are some examples. Astronomy professor Walter Bartky was an avid book collector and it was my privilege in later years to talk with him about books on his frequent visits to Kroch’s & Brentano’s.

Over the years, I learned a great deal from Chicago directors Rollin Hemens and Roger Shugg
by Schiffer Publishing in 1983 and is, I believe, still in print.

That's about enough of my love affair with university presses. Now, let's go back to about 1967. At that time, I was manager of the Richard Abel & Company office in Zion, Illinois. Fred Gullette (who was a vice president and general manager of Abel's midwestern affairs) and I visited the University of Wisconsin, Madison, library to talk about a university press approval plan. Louis Kaplan, the director with whom I had published Review Index during my Follett days, introduced us to Frank Bright, the technical services head and his staff. It was a great learning experience for us.

The staff had recently queried over sixty university presses as to how Wisconsin could obtain books and information about new publications. About half of the presses addressed did not bother to respond. Of those which did respond, less than half offered any facility to automatically supply their titles on standing order. For that matter, most did not even have an automatic notification system for new titles.

It was clear from our Wisconsin experience and conversations with several other librarians that most university presses were not prepared to adequately avail themselves of the exploding buying power of existing academic libraries, to say nothing of the creation of over fifty new academic institutions per year during several of the later 1960s.

It should be pointed out that the University of Chicago Press' reply to Madison was encouraging. I was still an outsider (my Rutgers experience was yet to come) and I naively believed that university presses would welcome with open arms the Abel University Press Approval Plan which, as the name implies, promised libraries all new titles almost as soon as they were off the presses. And most university presses did welcome this innovation. As publishers' liaison for Abel, I personally visited almost every university press in existence from 1968 to 1974.

But some staff members of the Association of American University Presses were suspicious and would never fully tolerate my presence at annual meetings. They could not understand that a company which was buying hundreds of copies of each new university press title could want to be around at annual meetings and keep in touch. There seemed to be a paranoid notion that I would pull out a sample kit and try to sell directors a barrel of sweeping compound or a carload of seventy pound varnished stock. As a result of this stand off, Horace Coward, then marketing director at Yale and still a sales representative for several university presses, decided that I should follow the example of a "camp follower." Thereafter, Abel representatives were denied official entrance to AAUP goings on, but attendees were always welcome and frequently did visit the hospitality suite we had engaged in a nearby hotel. I must add here that in later years AAUP welcomed Fred and me as representatives of his Book News Publishing Company as long as we paid the fee to rent a table for several hundred dollars. Truthfully, in retrospect, it was more fun to be one of the "unwashed" than it was to be one of the "washed" as a member of the Rutgers staff!

In spite of the AAUP headquarters' haughty facade, the Abel Company and staff had an excellent relationship with all presses — at least until financial problems set in. As I have previously written, "the darling of the sales managers [Yours Truly] soon became the bête noire of the credit managers." (See my article in Scholarly Publishing, July 1975.) I have never understood how it became so easy for most presses to forget the tremendous

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boost that Abel gave to their sales: the creation of the U.P. Approval Plan—a vehicle for an unprecedented increase in sales that is still employed by most of the major vendors of books to academic libraries.

I cannot deny that several university presses were not paid for all sales to the Abel Company. But it was a cheap lesson. They have forgotten what Abel taught them about distribution. Over the past nine years, I have spent a sum of money on college education for two sons that is greater than the “Abel loss” of any university press. The university presses learned a lot more from the Abel experience than they lost.

Furthermore, a knee-jerk reaction seized most presses after the Abel failure. Drastic discount changes were made, almost all of which affected the very same vendors which were and are still their main buyers. A dual-discount system was inaugurated by many presses whereby the retail book trade, which at best constitutes only a small percentage of their potential market, is given a much larger discount than library vendors, which constitute the largest purchasing segment of almost every university press. Although I am no longer connected with a general vendor to libraries, I am conscious as a parent of a college student, about ever-increasing costs and I realize that these short discounts are passed on to libraries and constitute just one reason that the costs of higher education are escalating much faster than the cost of living.

And this brings me to the subject which is really the worst of the “hate” factor—the fact that university press discounting is based on the “what the market will bear” theory. The presses know that the library jobber must deal in their merchandise, so they shorten jobber discount. Worse is the policy of outlandishly boosting the list price (and often shortening the discount) on cloth bound editions because they know that most acquisitions people were advised in “Bookbuying 101” in library school that cloth binding outlasts and is to be preferred to paper binding. So the presses double, triple, quadruple the list price of their cloth bindings that cost no more than two or three dollars. Thus you see a university press recently offering a lead title at $29.95 (long discount) paper. This same title cloth bound lists at $125 (short discount) in spite of the fact that the cloth binding costs the publisher less than three dollars. Let it be said here that this lopsided discount structure and the over-pricing of cloth bound books constitutes a diablerie resorted to by practically no commercial publisher. Is it any wonder that university presses are not among library vendors’ favorite characters?

Perhaps I have solved my dilemma. I will advise the ghost of Dean Laing (1859-1945) that I could have agreed with what he wrote when he wrote it because university presses had not yet, to my knowledge, sullied the reputations of their host institutions with duplicitious pricing schemes. The character of a university whose press is guilty of such practice should be measured by a different yardstick. If this is not possible, perhaps a name change for the press should be considered.

Let’s be thankful that due to budget pressure some librarians are starting to look even more closely at pricing disparities. And many jobbers have responded to librarian pressure by adopting notification slips that list both cloth and paper prices as well as instituting approval plans that take these disparities into account. Finally, my love/hate relationship might be resolved. If university presses would change these foolish ways, I would love them even more!

Bibliography

Special thanks are due Penelope Kaiserlian, Associate Director, University of Chicago Press, for furnishing some of the above material. —LWN

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The Square at 34 Union Square East to concentrate on book jobbing exclusively.

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 70s, all advertising was in Frank Short’s capable hands. Having spent virtually his entire life in the book business, and in the employ of B&T, Short’s knowledge of book publishing and bookstores and librarians, was virtually encyclopedic. I worked alongside him in 1959 and 1960, frequently lunched and traveled with him, and we sometimes shared a room while attending various publishing and library conventions. I found his memory of publishing names and dates, of publishing mergers, of the histories of both publishing companies and their executives a continuing source of amazement. Short could recite from memory and often in great detail the careers of many of the big names in publishing and their varied connections along the way up the ladder. He worked without assistance and was in contact with or personally called on all elements of the book publishing industry involved with popular fiction and nonfiction. He was widely known and respected by those with whom he worked throughout the industry. In his later years, when his age slowed him down, he did most of his calling and contacting by telephone. While the B&T offices remained in New Jersey, Short worked out of the offices of the owners of B&T’s Parents Magazine Institute, then located at 52 Vanderbilt Avenue in The City, so that he could be close to the center of American trade book publishing activity.

In late 1969, nearly nine years after I had severed my association with B&T, I was employed by a book publisher in the same New York City office tower where Parents Magazine was located and where Frank Short worked. I’d run into him from time to time in the building lobby or on the elevators. One day, Short phoned me and invited me to join him for lunch. Over lunch, he told me of the planned end of publication for The Book Buyer’s Guide. There were tears in his eyes as he spoke of the upcoming event as the end of his career. I recall him saying something like: “If I leave it now, I’ll have nothing to live for.” I assured...