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Papa Abel Remembers — The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fascicle 20: Competition

by Richard Abel (Aged Independent Learner) <reabel@q.com>

T he writing preceding this end-piece is manifestly a history. Ipso facto, the writer was wearing the hat of an historian. This role is hardly surprising for, as openings, the writer was trained as an historian, having found the sovereign means of understanding from the early years, a more-or-less detailed account of how we have gotten into virtually every situation from the most mundane to the larger picture of world history. Secondly, and almost as personally compelling, the writer lived every moment of this history from its first unlikely and shaky venture into an esoteric species of bookselling to its absorption into the Blackwell holdings.

But such a close historical involvement has necessarily led to casting this summation into terms which might well seem to some readers to be prideful recital of a personal achievement. So, this end-piece is added to draw attention to the conscious use of the term “Band” in the title and to recall to the reader’s mind the use of the repeated image of the venture to that of the Greek Argonauts. In short this history would not have happened absent the conjoint knowledge, intelligence, and dedication of the entire crew of that Band, and particularly that of thoughtful input and sheer effort of the band of Branch Managers located across this nation and overseas.

Nor could it have been written absent the input and assistance of those still with us. The memory of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily of any individual is potentially unreliable, subjective, and readily.

And that is the Band’s story, and we have seen that it had more than a toe-hold in language departments, presses focused on African-American history while vestiges of segregation still existed in universities themselves, even areas of science such as human genetics and cognitive science, once both thought of as marginal, were aided by the recognition provided by the presses at Johns Hopkins and MIT. Sometimes accused of rushing to “trendy” areas of scholarship, university presses at their best provide an alternate locus of accreditation for emerging areas of scholarship and scholarly method and, by working across institutional boundaries, help to correct for localized pockets of conservatism. As universities now address their budget crises by combining departments, shuttering interdisciplinary centers, and tightening tenure opportunities, university press imprints will be even more important to innovative and boundary-challenging scholars.

And so university presses will survive and continue to evolve for this reason as well — that while new modes of scholarship continue to forecast “the death of the author,” the author is far from dead. Take it from a university press who consider themselves authors, there will be university presses.

Note: Look for University of California Press director Alison Mudditt’s address in the next issue of ATG. — LS

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Biz of Acq — To Check-in or Not to Check-in

A Survey of Librarians on the Relevance and Necessity of Print Serials Check-in in the 21st Century Library

by Barbara M. Pope (Periodicals/Reference Librarian, Axe Library, Pittsburg State University, 1701 S. Broadway, Pittsburg KS 66762; Phone: 620-235-4884 <bpope@pittstate.edu>)

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Abstract

It is no secret that the world of librarianship, particularly serials and online resources, has become increasingly complicated through the years. Whereas the primary goal of libraries was once ownership of print books and serials, that paradigm is shifting towards access through online serials bundles, individual online subscriptions, aggregated full-text databases, and open access serials. Thus, the serials librarians’ job descriptions that once emphasized print serials check-in now likely also include electronic resource maintenance. In addition, many patrons at academic and public libraries alike gravitate towards online articles that can be downloaded for convenience. Given the changes and increasing emphasis on online access as well as issues such as budget and staffing cuts and providing patron service, we must ask ourselves whether print serials check-in is necessary or sustainable. This study explores the purpose, prevalence, and relevance of print serials check-in in libraries worldwide and asks if change is needed.

Introduction

The decreasing ownership of print serials and increasing online serials access in libraries is not a new topic. The trend began in the 1990s with aggregator databases and has been growing ever since with online serials bundles and individual subscription and open access online serials. This shift towards online access has caused libraries to shift their budgets and staffing around and, for some, to use an electronic resource management system. Many libraries still subscribe to print serials, but some have implemented changes in processing to compensate for staffing changes and patron demands. In this article, this author questions the purpose of serials check-in, whether it provides access to information not available elsewhere, and if there are consequences to ceasing it. Leading the charge behind the movement to abandon serials check-in in favor of simpler, less time-consuming processes are Anderson and Zink, who conducted an experiment to cease print serials check-in in the University of Nevada Reno Libraries. In a 2003 article, they challenge the necessity of serials check-in and emphasize improving patron services, including online serials and database access. Carr also notes that libraries are beginning to realize that many patrons prefer online access and are trying to appeal to that; therefore print serials check-in is becoming outdated and irrelevant. In opposition, Borchert tells about her library’s ceasing serials check-in after data loss in an ILS migration, and the resulting problems and lack of time savings.

There seems to be little doubt that most libraries consider print serials check-in to be essential, because they are still doing it despite the fact that many have access to more online serials than print and that their print and online access may overlap somewhat. As other authors, including Stefancu, have noted, there is almost nothing in library literature about the reason for serials check-in. A literature search confirms this, as this author was only able to find materials on the “how.” Carr agrees that there is no standard reason, but adds that it informs users of library holdings, enables libraries to identify problems, and records serials purchased and received. Anderson and Zink answer the question similarly, but add that assuming that check-in data is essential for patrons is incorrect, because that “is not central to patrons’ concerns.” This author will grant that patrons will likely care more about being able to use an issue than its receipt; however, if the library has serials in different formats in various locations, it is problematic finding it if no one knows if it was received or its location. In addition, Peritore surveyed libraries about the effect of serials check-in on reference services, and the results show that staff and patrons find the data helpful.

In a 2002 article, Anderson gives the rationale for his library ceasing serials check-in and much of the routine binding they once did. He says that the change in processing was due to an increasing amount of online serials access and the need for staff time to set up and troubleshoot it, as well as low use of print, serials check-in not increasing access, and the expense of binding. He adds that some improvements appeared right away, including: issues are no longer at the bindery, funds previously spent on binding are now spent on magazine boxes, and issues get to the stacks more quickly. However, he notes that the biggest difference is that staff who previously spent time on claiming and other issues now concentrate on online serials access. He adds that if the library had more staff, they might spend more time on check-in, but print serials are used little and patrons prefer online, so the library will concentrate on that.

Yue and Kurt reflect on University of Nevada Reno’s changes nine years after ceasing serials check-in. They note that action may seem extreme, but it did work out despite problems. However, they emphasize that their approach may not work for everyone, and that libraries considering ceasing serials check-in should consider “Size and physical organization of the print serial collection, serial storage facilities, library service models, and institutional cultures.” In an effort to assess the impact of the change on staff work and patron access, Yue and Kurt surveyed library staff. The results revealed that most staff felt that it did not negatively affect their work, but some felt that it negatively affected access.

While ceasing serials check-in changes patron service, it also causes the need for change in serials processing work flow, including claiming. The University of Nevada Reno Libraries chose to reallocate staff to online serials management and cease most print serials check-in and claiming. However, Carr continued on page 64.

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Further, we shared the understanding that libraries were the long-term custodians of that inestimable heritage, that library book collections were the warehouses of knowledge. All were devoted to traditional characterizations of the place of the library as the “caretaker of the vessels of culture and knowledge,” the library as the “heart of the university,” which seem to have become the laughing stock or the objects of mockery of many librarians deceived by the shabby doctrines of modernism. But not so

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For the Argonauts — all were convinced they served a critical and honorable role in assisting in the collecting and distribution of the wealth of the culture.

All were prepared to face and deal with the risks and hazards of brokering knowledge and serving the central facilities of culture.

Does such a group of individuals possessed of those cultural understandings and commitments exist out there someplace today? We can hope there is. And if such should prove to be the case, what might the probabilities be that such individuals would choose to voluntarily coalesce in the way the Argonauts did?