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And We Weren't There

by Nat Bodian (Publishing Consultant)

A Library Vendor's Difficult Decision — and a University President's Reaction: A Reminiscence of Dr. Sammartino *

One of my activities, as head of sales at Baker & Taylor in the late 1950's, was the monitoring of library-account activity. This was important since B&T discounts to libraries were based for the most part on a library's advance indication to B&T of its buying intentions in three categories: (1) anticipated yearly volume of purchases, (2) types or categories of books normally ordered, and (3) average number of copies of each title ordered.

Because we were in many instances the sole supplier of books to many libraries, we included in our service an effort to locate difficult-to-find or out-of-print titles. This was done as a courtesy and at a modest markup.

To locate these difficult-to-find books, we would advertise the wanted titles in the *AB Bookman's Weekly* (then called *Antiquarian Bookman*) and purchase an available copy offered to us if in suitable condition and appropriately priced.

One day, Jerry Corbutt, the B&T sales department specialist responsible for locating and buying these out-of-print books, came to me with a file of recent orders from Fairleigh Dickinson University, a fast-growing educational institution started by Dr. Peter Sammartino 17 years earlier.

On each of the university library's orders, consisting of 30 or more books, only a few at most had been shipped from B&T stock of over one million books. All the others, Corbutt told me, he had to advertise in *Antiquarian Bookman* and search out one-by-one from various sources.

What became readily apparent was that the FDU library, in the process of building its collection, was using

Baker & Taylor as its out-of-print search service. Current or readily-available titles appeared among the FDU orders only occasionally.

I telephoned the librarian. As I recall, her name was Mrs. Goodman. I told her that in reviewing her library's ordering pattern, most of the titles were out of print or from difficult to obtain sources. I asked her where she was ordering her current titles.

She responded she was using two library vendors. The other vendor apparently was receiving FDU book orders first. Baker & Taylor then got orders for titles the other vendor could not supply.

I painstakingly crafted a letter to FDU explaining that since we were not an out-of-print vendor that we would no longer accept FDU book orders and were terminating her account.

Within days, I received a telephone call from FDU. An almost timid-sounding male voice at the other end introduced himself.

"This is Peter Sammartino. I understand that you don't want to sell us books anymore. Would you please tell me why?"

I instantly recognized the name. Dr. Peter Sammartino was the founder of Fairleigh Dickinson University and had been president since its founding 17 years earlier. He was a highly-regarded scholar and author of numerous books on education.

I explained to Dr. Sammartino that Baker & Taylor was in the business of selling new and in-print books, and that his university library had been using B&T as a supplier of books not generally available and mainly out of

print. We could not continue to serve his university library on that basis.

"Would you continue selling us books," he asked, "if I promise that future orders are for current and new books only?"

I assured the university president that Baker & Taylor would be happy to resume servicing his library on that basis, and Dr. Sammartino, in return promised that future orders would be on that basis only.

Subsequently, Fairleigh Dickinson sent the largest part of its new book orders to B&T. On more than one occasion, Mrs. Goodman, the librarian called me personally to advise that if any books on a pending order were not in stock that they could be cancelled.

When I left B&T in 1960, there was a healthy relationship with FDU and I suspect that that relationship exists, even today.

* Dr. Sammartino was president of Fairleigh Dickinson from its founding in 1942 until he retired in 1967. His wife, Sylvia Sammartino—a co-founder of FDU—served at his side during these years as dean of admissions.

On Sunday, March 29, as Dr. and Mrs. Sammartino were about to be feted on the 50th anniversary of the founding of Fairleigh Dickinson tragedy struck. Dr. Sammartino took a .38-caliber revolver in the bedroom of his Rutherford NJ home and shot his wife dead. He then placed the gun in his mouth and killed himself. Mrs. Sammartino, 88, had been diagnosed as having Alzheimer's disease. Dr. Sammartino, 87, had been in ill health and had hearing and kidney problems. ☞