

November 1999

Oregon Trails-Support Your Local Bookseller

Tom Leonhardt

Oregon Institute of Technology, leonhart@oit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leonhardt, Tom (1999) "Oregon Trails-Support Your Local Bookseller," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 5, Article 22.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3696>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Best Selling Recent Fiction
from page 58

Eakins, Patricia. *Marvelous Adventures of Pierre Baptiste: Father and Mother, First and Last*. New York Univ Press 1999 \$19.95 Cloth 0814722091

Hill, Kathleen. *Still Waters in Niger*. Northwestern Univ 1999 \$24.95 Cloth 0810150891

Leffland, Ella. *Breath and Shadows*. William Morrow 1999 \$23.50 Cloth 0688142710

Smith, Martin Cruz. *Havana Bay: A Novel*. Random House 1999 \$24.45 Cloth 0679426620

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Broke Heart Blues: A Novel*. Dutton 1999 \$24.95 Cloth 0525944516

Alberts, Laurie. *Lost Daughters*. Univ Pr/ New England 1999 \$22.95 Cloth 0874518989

Owens, Louis. *Dark River: A Novel*. Univ of Oklahoma 1999 \$23.95 Cloth 0806131152

O'nan, Stewart. *Prayer for the Dying: A Novel*. Henry Holt 1999 \$22.00 Cloth 0805061479

Dixon, Stephen. *30: Pieces of a Novel*. Henry Holt 1999 \$30.00 Cloth 0805059237

Harris, E. Lynn. *Abide with Me: A Novel*. Doubleday 1999 \$24.95 Cloth 038548657x

Auster, Paul. *Timbuktu: A Novel*. Henry Holt 1999 \$22.00 Cloth 0805054073

Barnes, Julian. *England, England*. Alfred A. Knopf 1999 \$22.50 Cloth 0375405828

Buckley, Christopher. *Little Green Men*. Random House 1999 \$24.45 Cloth 0679452931

"Popular" Level Fiction

Harris, Thomas. *Hannibal*. Delacorte 1999 \$27.95 Cloth 038529929x

Smith, Rosamond. *Starr Bright Will be with you Soon*. Dutton 1999 \$23.95 Cloth 0525944524

Perry, Anne. *Bedford Square*. Ballantine 1999 \$24.45 Cloth 0345432983

Stephenson, Neal. *Cryptonomicon*. Avon Books 1999 \$27.50 Cloth 0380973464

Belfer, Lauren. *City of Light*. Dial 1999 \$24.95 Cloth 038533401x

Barkhordar Nahai, Gina. *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith*. Harcourt Brace 1999 \$24.00 Cloth 0151003882

Rice, Anne. *Vittorio, The Vampire: New Tales of the Vampires*. Alfred A. Knopf 1999 \$19.95 Cloth 0375401601

Wolitzer, Meg. *Surrender, Dorothy: A Novel*. Scribner 1999 \$21.50 Cloth 0684848449

Cornwell, Patricia Daniels. *Black Notice*. G.P. Putnam's 1999 \$25.95 Cloth 0399145087

Lafarge, Paul. *Artist of the Missing*. Farrar, Straus 1999 \$13.00 Paper 0374525803

Durant, Isadore, 1945-. *Death Among the Fossils*. Univ of New Mexico 1999 \$21.95 Cloth 0826319505

Draper, Robert. *Hadrian's Walls*. Alfred A. Knopf 1999 \$22.50 Cloth 0375403698

King, Stephen. *Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*. Simon & Schuster 1999 \$16.45 Cloth 0684867621

Airth, Rennie. *River of Darkness*. Viking 1999 \$24.95 Cloth 0670885959

Hickam, Homer H. *Back to the Moon: A Novel*. Delacorte 1999 \$23.95 Cloth 0385334222

Clark, Mary Higgins. *We'll Meet Again*. Simon & Schuster 1999 \$24.50 Cloth 0684835975

Mount, Ferdinand. *Jem (And Sam): A*

Novel. Carroll & Graf 1999 \$25.69 Cloth 078670649x

Gaus, Paul L. *Blood of the Prodigal: An Ohio Amish Mystery*. Ohio Univ Press 1999 \$24.95 Cloth 0821412760

Darnton, John. *Experiment*. Dutton 1999 \$24.95 Cloth 0525945172

Evanovich, Janet. *High Five*. St. Martin's/ Trade 1999 \$23.95 Cloth 0312203039


Chace, Rebecca. *Capture the Flag: A Novel*. Simon & Schuster 1999 \$22.50 Cloth 0684857588

Mason, Richard. *Drowning People*. Warner 1999 \$23.50 Cloth 0446525243

Aubert, Rosemary. *Feast of Stephen: An Ellis Portal Mystery*. Bridge Works 1999 \$22.95 Cloth 1882593278

Hambly, Barbara. *Graveyard Dust*. Bantam 1999 \$23.95 Cloth 0553102591

Massey, Sujata. *Flower Master*. HarperCollins 1999 \$24.00 Cloth 0060192283



Oregon Trails —
Support Your Local
Bookseller

by Tom Leonhardt (Director of the
Library, Oregon Institute of Technology)
<leonhart@OIT.EDU

It was late June 1973 when I began work at Stanford as the Gifts and Exchange Librarian, part of the Acquisitions Department. Stanford was already automating (BALLOTS) its order and receiving processes and its main book vendor, among many, was **Richard Abel and Company**. As it turned out, having an automated ordering system was a godsend when most of the book orders had to be re-directed a couple of years later. Around that same time, I needed a special service from any book jobber who would help me out.

Once upon a time, universities, including those in the United States, published much of their own research and made those publications available to their libraries for international exchange in the interests of scholarly communication and dissemination of information. By the time I got involved in the international exchange of scholarly information, it was already declining but propped up by cold war politics, Communism, and the Soviet

Union. In exchange for what we received, we sent exchange lists of duplicates and unwanted gifts. Stanford had few free publications and only a few sources that offered us heavily discounted prices—the **Stanford Press**, the **Hoover Institution Press**, and **Annual Reviews** (Stanford professors started that publishing house). All of this together was not enough to satisfy the Soviet libraries. They wanted new U.S. imprints and lots of them. I did not have the staff and time to acquire and ship large numbers of books to the Soviet Union so I approached Stanford's major book suppliers (Richard Abel was already in the history books by then) but none of them would place our orders; drop ship the books to the Soviet Union (various libraries throughout the USSR), and bill the Stanford University Libraries Gift & Exchange Division.


Don Coombs of **Coutts** and **Fred Gullette** of **Academic Book Center** were two of the many vendor reps who called

continued on page 64

Book Pricing Update from page 62

should receive a higher discount than the individual libraries might otherwise obtain—an economies-of-scale argument. However, there are no economies of scale. If ten libraries form a buying consortium, they generally still want their books delivered separately to at least ten different locations. Each generally wants to be billed individually. Each generally has different processing and handling requirements. And, because the goal of the consortium is to reduce or eliminate duplicate copies of the same title across consortium members, the wholesaler's volume is actually less than if the ten libraries contracted for services individually. There are essentially no cost savings to the wholesaler in dealing with a consortium. Indeed, the higher discount means there is less money to cover the same costs as selling to the libraries individually.

So, what do we see here? We see a business that offers each wholesaler little opportunity to differentiate the products for which customers pay. We see a business where services that offer opportunities for differentiation (i.e., IT-based services) are in high demand in the market, are very expensive to develop, but are expected at no additional charge. We see a business that is a one-at-time business with little real opportunity to take advantage of economies-of-scale, even when consortium buying is involved. We see a business that offers unusual, yet complicated and expensive, features such as liberal returns privileges. We see a business where there is constant pressure to reduce prices through raising discounts. We see a business that, over the last decade, has lost a significant number of players, which has translated into a loss of options for the library market!

So, next time you are negotiating a contract with your book wholesaler, bear in mind the economics under which the wholesaler operates, and realize that we—the library and the wholesaler—must, together, develop working relationships that sustain the services that libraries desire. 

Oregon Trails from page 60

on Stanford in the mid-1970s. Don passed away several years ago but Fred is alive and well as the owner of **Gull's Nest Books** in Portland, Oregon. Don and Fred were founts of information about publishing and bookselling and willing to share all they knew. They were great teachers, and they represented small book jobbers who wanted as much business as they could handle. They were willing and able to provide customized services in order to get their fair share of business. When they heard my special request, both Don and Fred set up accounts with me and immediately began shipping books to libraries in the USSR and sending the invoices to me. The arrangements, based on trust, worked well, and from that experience, I learned a valuable lesson about working with book jobbers as colleagues.

When I had the opportunity to deliver the keynote address, "The Business

of Acquisitions," at the first ALA/RTSD Preconference on Acquisitions, July 4-5, 1985 (befittingly delivered in the Windy City), I

wanted to share my enthusiasm for library acquisitions and also pay tribute to friends and colleagues, both vendors and librarians who had taught me so much. I especially wanted to share my belief that the library community needed large, medium-sized, and small vendors, each with its own mission, each with its own niche. Part of my theory about this family of jobbers was that when small and medium-sized book jobbers got so big they could no longer provide customized service, one or more employees, wanting to do more, would leave and form a small company in order to be closer to customers and their needs. There was evidence then to support my thesis. I had seen it happen and had seen it work. But that was then and this is now.

So what do we make of the most recent mergers that, while not new in the library supplier world, have come as a shock and surprise to many of us? The big have become bigger. **Blackwell's** buys **Academic Book Center** and hires **Dan Halloran** (AcBC's president) to run what is essentially a new company with an old, respected British name. **Baker and Taylor** buys **YBP** (a.k.a. Yankee Book Peddler) and moves its academic accounts to YBP, hiring (retaining) **John Secor** to continue his leadership under the business name that he stands for and behind.

There are good reasons for these mergers. The one I am most familiar with seems to be going smoothly. Longtime friends and colleagues, with a few exceptions, have kept their

jobs. For those who did not, I hope that they land on their feet and find satisfying work elsewhere. They have my sympathies and those of others with whom they worked for a full score of years. Change is not always pleasant or easy.

I wonder what these events portend? Are librarians demanding so many services and such high discounts, with one-sided loyalty, that it is no longer possible to survive without the big becoming bigger? Can experienced booksellers still split off and start their own small, service-oriented companies? Or will the technology that has enabled at least some large companies to provide at least a modicum of customization also allow smaller outfits to survive if not thrive? What has technology wrought? What have we all gained from it all and at what cost? Are the most recent mergers harbingers of more and perhaps even bigger mergers, acquisitions, food chain reactions?

I don't pretend to know the answers but I am not idly asking these questions, either. I wonder what will happen to the world of acquisitions that I grew up in. It has changed but it is still recognizable. If I had fallen asleep in 1980 and just woke up, though, I would look

"... if we do not pay for true customized service, through additional charges or through loyalty, we may not be able to get those services in the future."

at my old, familiar world and say, my how you have grown, much like a seldom seen relative comments on those nieces, nephews, and grandchildren who have gone from two years old to twenty with no sightings in between. But some things have not changed. The good companies, regardless of size, still provide excellent service

that is reflected in the representatives who are sent into our libraries to work with us, get to know us and our needs, and establish a base of trust without which I would not want work, without which no decent business relationships can be forged, much less sustained.

I am not critical of recent changes. They make sense and seem, in retrospect, logical and overdue. And there are still some small and medium-sized jobbers out there trying to make a living by doing some things for customers that the larger companies cannot or do not want to do. I hope we all understand the value of such a diverse community and also understand that there are real costs associated with services, and that if we do not pay for true customized service, through additional charges or through loyalty, we may not be able to get those services in the future. Or we will have reduced our choice of vendors to one or two at the expense of competition. Costs will rise as services are unbundled. We will pay for what we get and we will be poorer in more ways than one. Support your local bookseller. 