June 2003

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Recommended Citation

Leonhardt, Thomas W. (2003) "Lost in Austin -- Antiquarian Booksellers," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 15: Iss. 3, Article 35.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4134>

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Lost in Austin — Antiquarian Booksellers

by **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (St. Edward's University, Scarborough-Phillips Library) <leonhard@libr.stedwards.edu>

"The most important single aspect of the dealer-customer relationship is the gradual development of friendship and rapport. The buying of books is a unique type of transaction, unlike the purchase of almost any other commodity." **Robert A. Wilson**, *Modern Book Collecting*, p. 65 (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980).

Wilson is speaking specifically of the relationship between a private collector and his supplier but his advice applies equally to librarians charged with building fine library collections that have depth as well as breadth. Those librarians who feel that close relationships between librarians and vendors would do well to reconsider, especially when it comes to buying out-of-print scholarly books, many of which might be considered rare simply because scholarly books are issued in such short runs. Parenthetically, it seems that all else being equal, librarians are better off selecting vendors whom they trust and with whom they can develop a mutually beneficial business relationship.

When selecting a book jobber for a library, many factors should be considered beyond discount. That is why it is important to understand the hidden costs in library work. I prefer the jobber who becomes an extension of the acquisitions department. That means that there must be a comfortable working relationship between the company's sales representative and with those behind the scenes people at both ends of the operation, those in the library and

those at the company's offices. It is important that an atmosphere of trust and collegiality exists for the sake of both parties.

This trust and collegiality is even more important when using an antiquarian bookseller to find those books that are needed to add depth to one's collection or just to find out-of-print titles on a general desiderata list. These can be two separate functions but a good antiquarian bookseller can help you meet both needs and a very good one becomes an extension of your staff in no uncertain terms. For the work done, that is, identifying and supplying a title that the library needs, the bookseller is paid. If performance is not satisfactory (you need to determine before the fact what this means and come to an understanding with the private contractor, the antiquarian), then the relationship is severed.

The first library job I had was as a page in the **Rare Books and Special Collections Department (RBSC)** of the Doe Library at the **University of California, Berkeley**. Under the studied tutelage of **Mrs. Leslie Clarke**, the scope of my duties grew over a period of three and a half years so that when I left, brand new M.L.S. in hand, in 1973, I had learned more than I knew at the time. Two things I learned, among the many, were the value of an antiquarian book seller and the value of a good antiquarian catalogue. It is often the things we learn unconsciously that we absorb most thoroughly and keep with us long after the experience. Let me offer a couple of examples.

Mrs. Clarke (for that is what we called her) had a variety of visitors. I don't know what the budget was for the **RBSC** but I think it was relatively healthy. We had a standing order for all **Black Sparrow Press** publications and not the trade release but the limited, signed editions, this in support of a wonderful collection of West Coast poetry. **Mrs. Clarke** even had a poetry consultant to help with selection, the late **Robert Duncan**, complete with cape and black armband signifying his distaste for the war in Viet Nam. I was formerly introduced to him once but I thought that I had known him for a long time thanks to his notebooks that had been donated to the **RBSC** and that lay in gray Hollinger boxes in the vault, a dark, cool, closed stacks area of the Doe. The notebooks were so open and personal that I soon closed the one box and never opened another.

Another of **Mrs. Clarke's** visitors was **Bernard "Bernie" Rosenthal**, an antiquarian from San Francisco and a scholar in his own right and in the tradition of his book selling family. Sometimes before and sometimes after meeting with **Mrs. Clarke**, **Mr. Rosenthal** would hunt through our card catalogue with its extra tracings for printer, date, place, and illustrator. After double-checking our entries, he would then produce an illuminated manuscript page, for example, as something that would add depth to the collection.

That practice seemed odd to me at first, maybe a conflict of interest for a book seller to tell us that we needed something that he had for sale. I don't think it was that way at all, now that I think about it. It was more of a service. Here is something that you collect and you have nothing from this period or this place or this language on hand. He was looking after her library's interest and his own at the same time and in a scholarly, collegial, and highly civilized manner. They were professionals who knew how to conduct good business and themselves. I miss that atmosphere but I cling to the memories and sometimes wonder where I would be had I followed my dream of becoming a rare books librarian.

I also learned the value of scholarly antiquarian catalogues and that at least some of them were compiled by librarians, for example those from **Warren Howell Books** in San Francisco. But most booksellers must do their own cataloging and have their own reference collections to help them identify what it is they have to sell and how to present it to librarians and book collectors so that they will learn what they don't already own and understand why they should buy it. I don't remember if we cataloged, in turn, the catalogues from **Howell's**, but we did keep and catalog those from **Maggs** and from **Quaritch** and a handful of others.

Let me give you an example of a modern antiquarian with an M.L.S. from **UCLA**, **Jeff Weber** (a third generation librarian and son of **David Weber**, director emeritus from **Stanford**). The catalogue is **A Bookseller's Cabinet: Mostly Bibliography**, **Jeff Weber • Rare Books** (Catalogue 19: Bibliography and Scholarship) 1992. "[Item] 33 **BLADES, William**. The Enemies of Books. With a preface by **Richard Garnett**. Illustrated by **Louis Gunnis** and **H. E. Butler**. London: **Elliot Stock**, 1891. Tall 8vo. Xxvi, 117 pp. Frontispiece, 26 illustrations. Red cloth, t.e.g. Very good, bright copy. **FIRST EDITION**. **Blades** first discusses the major destroyers of books: fire, water, heat, dust and neglect, the bookworm and other vermin; and then devotes a chapter each to bookbinders, and collectors as destroyers of books; and concludes with an anecdote of a book-sale in Derbyshire."

Another librarian bookseller is **Michael Hackenberg** who also worked with **Mrs. Clarke** when I did and who was a library school classmate who stayed on after his M.L.S. to earn his Ph.D. If ever there was a scholar who loved books, it was **Michael**, the only person I know who complained about not being able to work on a holiday. He was deep into several boxes of French Revolution pamphlets and didn't want to break his rhythm for something as silly as Labor Day or whatever holiday it was. **Michael** taught at the **University of Chicago** until it decided that it didn't need a library school (Schools of Information Science had not yet hatched). He decided that he didn't need one either and became a scholarly bookseller. The tenure he

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Best Sellers from page 90

Jones. Cambridge Univ Press 2002 \$110.00 Cloth 0521662400.

Davis, Stephen H., 1939-. *Theory of Solidification*. Cambridge Univ Press 2001 \$75.00 Cloth 0521650801.

Conant, Jennet. *Tuxedo Park: A Wall Street Tycoon and the Secret Palace of Science that Changed the Course of World War II*. Simon & Schuster 2002 \$26.00 Cloth 0684872870.

Simon, Bart, 1966-. *Undead Science: Science Studies and the Afterlife of Cold Fusion*. Rutgers Univ Press 2002 \$60.00 Cloth 0813531535.

Chown, Marcus. *Universe Next Door: The Making of Tomorrow's Science*. Oxford Univ Press 2002 \$26.00 Cloth 0195143825.

Batten, Frank, 1927-. *Weather Channel: The Improbable Rise of a Media Phenomenon*. Harvard Business School 2002 \$29.95 Cloth 1578515599.

Wildlife Responses to Climate Change: North American Case Studies; Ed. by Stephen H. Schneider. Island Press 2002 \$27.50 Paper 1559639253. 🐾

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has been awarded is from his loyal customers and his hard work. His catalogues are mostly online as PDF files but worth receiving and reading, too. I actually had a catalogue (online) waiting for me when I began work at St. Edward's University. If Michael can find out where I am, he can also find most of that desiderata list that you keep looking for on the Web without really knowing what you might be buying.

With most of our library catalogs online now, the **Barney Rosenthal** approach can be replicated from the comfort of the bookstore's back room or wherever the computer is located, so if you find a bookseller whom you like and trust (it will take time), the bookseller can become part of your collection development program and help you acquire those titles you missed the first time around or that weren't reviewed but became important, if not seminal, works through readership.

The booksellers who I have mentioned, are members of the **Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America**. I urge you to visit the **ABAA Website** (abaa.org), see who belongs, what their specialties are, and lots of other things such as condition (of books) and conditions (of sale) and the **ABAA Code of Ethics**. We need these independent booksellers who depend on us for their livelihood. And we depend on them to continue to make available to our libraries, the books of the past that we need for our future.

Inside Pandora's Box

Thoughts Coming Out of the ALCTS Out-of-Print Discussion Group at ALA-MidWinter: "Not Dead Yet! Out-of-Stock, Out-of-Print and Remainders"

by **Bob Rooney** (Taylor & Francis) and **Brian Elliott** (Senior VP, Sales and Marketing, Alibris; Phone: 510-594-4530) <briane@alibris.com>

Column Editor: **Jack G. Montgomery** (Western Kentucky University Libraries)

Changes in the status of availability of new books, remainders and used books are all the result of a series of decisions taken by the market — the combination of authors, publishers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers and customers. As the book market continues to evolve, new technologies are developed and used book businesses grow, the number of alternatives available to all parties grows more interesting — and at times complex. We explored this from a couple of different angles:

- **Definitions:** What do the different core status designations (in print, out of stock, out of stock indefinitely and out of print) mean?
- **Decisions:** How do decisions to make changes in designation get made?

- **Technologies:** What are the impact of new technologies and business models on those designations?
- **Choices:** How are different libraries handling these changes?

Definitions and Decisions

We'll start with some core definitions, and also explore how publishers reach those points. I'll skip some of the interesting and at times problematic ones (Not Yet Published; Publisher Out of Business) in favor of focusing on a limited, frequent set.

In Print, and Remainders...

In Print means that the book is in print from the publisher, and may or may not be in stock with one or more distributor or wholesaler. Titles may achieve

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