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Papa Abel Remembers -- The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fasicle 14: Building and Computers in the Twentieth Century

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book market, print on demand, or eBooks. This library strategy is therefore based upon satisfying the most powerful library clientele by giving them what they need when they want it. As an administrator, I have sympathy for this decision; but it is based a bit upon the “I’m all right, Jack” theory of library service since it may overlook the other key group of users, students. When I was discussing this issue in my collection development class last semester, one bright student asked about how this policy will affect the procrastinating student who needs a book the week before the term paper is due. A few years ago, it would have normally been in the collection “just in case.” Now, the deadline is too close to get the book “just in time,” especially since students seldom receive the priority processing commonly reserved for faculty requests.

The next explanation was the subject of my presentation at the **2010 Charleston Conference**. Faculty may be purchasing their own books because doing so is simpler than asking the library to do so. With a wide choice of online booksellers, faculty can easily find and order materials much more easily than in the days of physical bookstores. In addition, competition in the out-of-print book market has reduced the prices for many publications to the point that buying a personal copy has become much less expensive. Anecdotally, a faculty member in one of my liaison areas told me that she never uses the library because she buys all the books she needs. After giving this talk, which was a prelude to a more formal study, I was surprised at the support for my hypothesis that some faculty are asking the library to purchase only expensive items and those that are difficult to obtain from online booksellers.

My final explanation is that faculty in the disciplines most likely to be supported by books are discouraged enough that they no longer think that complaining is worth the effort. With this year’s 20% success rate of getting a tenured position in the Humanities, with the traditionally lower salaries, with the lack of outside grant funding and the perks that this support brings, they may be happy enough to have a full-time tenured or tenure track position. Not finding the books that they need in the library may be a trivial concern as Humanities faculty look at the dismemberment of departments at universities like the **University of New York at Albany**. (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/10/04/albany>) Non-tenured faculty may be less likely to rock the boat even as they have greater need for books to complete the research needed for tenure.

While the lack of faculty complaints may make life easier for library directors, I worry that faculty silence is one more sign of the diminished importance of academic libraries. Raised voices in the academic senate, picketing the administration building, and letters to the editor for increased library funding might not lead to more money but would show that some faculty still care about the library. 🐼

Papa Abel Remembers — The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fascicle 14: Building and Computers in the Twentieth Century

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

Earlier an account of the Copenhagen presentation to Scandinavian librarians was related. The same presentation was offered in London several weeks later to a group of about 50 UK university and research library librarians organized by **Tom Slatner**, then running the London office. **Tom** had enlisted **Maurice Line**, then director of the **British Library** subsidiary responsible for collecting all the scholarly journals and books and reproducing them in support of the Library’s international interlibrary loan service, to chair the meeting. (The London office was supplying all the non-UK, English-language books to **Maurice’s** library.) But there was a surprise laying in wait — **Maurice** had invited **Julian Blackwell** to the presentation. I had no option but to lay out in considerable detail the firm’s systems, having learned of **Julian’s** presence only upon arriving at the room — that after all, was the point of the gathering. That a major competitor, who was having difficulty bringing up the systems to support a comparable offering, would have a detailed account of the firm’s systems and their capabilities was entirely beside the point — so, off I went on another six-hour presentation.

The session broke for lunch a little before noon. **Maurice** had, unknown to me, arranged that he, **Julian**, and I, were to go off to a different restaurant for lunch. I didn’t know, and don’t know today, if some sort of confrontation was expected or some other purpose was to be served. Whatever, in the course of lunch, I decided to make a proposal of a very different nature. I suggested to **Julian** that I would welcome the opportunity to sit down with him and his brother **Richard** to discuss the possibility of somehow merging our firms. I pointed out that each outfit had a great deal to offer the world of knowledge creation and distribution. But that in a genuine sense we were both wasting management time and resources in our worldwide competition. I advanced the notion that some sort of an equitable merger could not but prove a more powerful vehicle for carrying forward this cultural responsibility. I knew that the **Blackwells** were as committed to the cultural role of the distribution of knowledge and the stimulus thereof to new knowledge creation (ala **Karl Popper**) as were our band of Argonauts. He indicated that he would carry this message back. But I heard nothing further for some years when I learned that he had not sent his memo to **Richard** or the **Blackwell** board. Too bad! What might have emerged from such a joining of forces can still not be divined.

In the several weeks between these two presentations I had had much time in quiet

evenings in hotel rooms to further reflect upon the meaning of these sessions and intervening mini-repeats to other librarians and publishers in Europe. I was particularly struck by the degree and extent into which I had fallen into the information trap. I, together with the entire band of Argonauts, had entered the game as bibliophiles and scientiaphiles (the latter a neologism invented for the immediate purposes herein) but we were submerged in specific bits of information. It was true that we still dealt with books, the “violls” (to use **Milton’s** apt phrase) of knowledge, but their essence had been subsumed within the continuing focus on programs and systems dealing with their control as objects rather than violls of hard-won knowledge. The only knowledge to be found in this welter data and technical information was the over-arching design of the system and its components — and more importantly the understanding of what the entire construct was meant to do. I, for example, no longer studied publishers’ catalogs or subject bibliographies, and together with the office managers I no longer selected books to fulfill a variety of users’ needs. Almost all the Argonauts were now setting up networks to couple the firm’s systems to library needs. I hardly knew what was being published, so I might add to the library that I had long planned to occupy my advanced years. A massive unforeseen consequence indeed.

Whatever, I returned to Portland to take up the tasks of getting a new building up and planning its layout. To this end, meetings with the managers of each of the individual operating sections were conducted to solicit their sense of the amounts of space and other facilities each would require to not only carry on their functions effectively but to provide for future growth. When these individual plans were in hand, collective meetings of all the managers were mounted to plan the co-ordination, and resulting physical relations were held to optimize the flow of books, cataloging, processing, and related functions. It took about six months to gather and integrate this information. Thereupon a rough layout, reflecting dimensions as well as operating relationships, was created. This layout was then taken to an architect from whom final construction drawings were duly received.

In the meantime, **Keith Barker** had been looking for a site of sufficient acreage to accommodate this building somewhat larger than two football fields placed side-by-side, plus another future building of the same size to accommodate growth, landscaped parking segments, and well-landscaped grounds. The

continued on page 63

Papa Abel Remembers from page 62

aim was to present a handsome campus to passersby and pleasant grounds for the staff in good weather. He located such a site of about twenty-five acres in a semi-rural setting with good transportation access. And with that, the firm was on its way to a fine solution to its long-standing space problems, and the staff was able to communicate readily with one another, thereby greatly improving the efficiency of the Portland office. And what a marked improvement over the old, outworn garages, manufacturing plants, and storefronts which had been the firm's habitat from its founding this was proved to be.

Keith was then faced with the problem of financing such a substantial acreage and building cost. Financing is a never-ending preoccupation of every growing firm. But it is a particularly difficult matter in the case of a bookseller. Few bankers or investors have any interest in so marginal a trade as the book-trade and particularly the scholarly book-trade. Hardly surprising when investments in manufacturers, contractors, car and appliance dealers, etc. dealing in genuine hard goods are widely available — nothing so questionable as scholarly books the customers for which are widely and thinly scattered



across the face of the globe. Scholarly books are an arcane and difficult-to-dispose-of form of collateral. Whatever, Keith succeeded in lining up the financing for this project.

While this undertaking of a building to solve our efficiency problems and attendant financing problems consumed much management time, the work of offices scattered across North America and with a beach-head in Europe continued on apace. Sales continued to grow, procedures were routinely being refined, and various amalgams of the array of services the firm had developed were constructed in response to the unique needs of particular libraries.

All of this growth naturally led to a number of people joining the operating staff. This growth in numbers of staff led to an amorphous problem. When the staff was small and the range of services offered limited, new staff members rather naturally and quickly came to understand not simply the procedures associated with the jobs to be accomplished but the spirit of the firm, the dedication to the idea of the scholarly library, and their place in the operation of Gutenberg's knowledge generation and dissemination engine — of getting knowledge from those who knew to those with a need to know. Something had to be done in a more formal manner about getting the new staff up-to-speed on these basic principles underlying the specific tasks performed by the firm. So the managers were all asked to articulate

these precepts to their staff members. Some of us involved with larger numbers undertook to gather staff for more formal sessions articulating this sense of the grounding and purpose of the firm. This initiative seemed to be of help in generating and maintaining a common sense of the *raison d'être* of the firm and the jobs it was expected to perform.

In order to meet the increasing need for Approval Plan forms, the computer staff had converted the printing of these forms from an array of Flexowriters (something on the order of 25 machines occupying a medium-sized room, as I recall) to the computer printers. Catalog card databases and production had always been fully-executed on the computer. So, the computer was finally fully-integrated as a stand-alone device in the work-flow of the firm. Gary Olson and the computer staff had, in effect, pioneered the integration of the computer into the heart of the library acquisitions and cataloging functions. The firm could now provide an integrated body of the principle functions on the book side of the scholarly library.

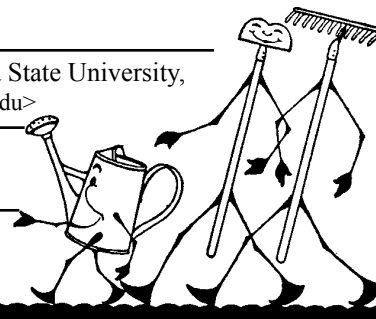
Whatever the passing elation of reaching that mile-stone, the firm remained embedded in a rapidly evolving environment. This changing environment demanded continued attention to maintaining the reputation for responding positively to the changing needs of the scholarly library, as well as operating its systems and procedures in the most efficient way possible. 🌱

Biz of Acq — Collecting in the Cloud

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Out With the Network (Drive), In With the Net

Using technologies to streamline services is old news at most libraries. Tools such as online video tutorials, elaborate subject pages, and online forms have been quickly adopted at the reference and circulation desks to both guide our users and solicit their input about our services. At the same time, our collections are an ever-richer mix of online journal packages, eBooks of various stripes, databases, and streaming media. And yet, some of our library selection tools and procedures missed the tech wave.

When we took on collections coordination duties, we inherited a system that had seen the University libraries through major changes, from a predominantly print-based to a largely digital collection, not to mention wild budget vacillations. Our predecessors were extremely

thorough and detailed, housing all manner of title lists, budget scenarios, and e-collections statistics on a shared network drive, that, like many such systems, had morphed into an untidy labyrinth of files and folders.

Moreover, collections decisions that required group input largely took place on email. Email is, without a doubt, one of the great communication devices of our time, but does anyone enjoy seeing her/his inbox light up with colleague number 14's indication that they too agree with the purchasing decision at hand? There had to be a better way!

Cloud Computing, as defined by **Wikipedia**, is "location independent computing, whereby shared servers provide resources, software, and data to computers and other devices on demand, as with the electricity grid. Or more simply, remote computing." Services like **Google** apps can help prevent the

chaos of a shared network drive overflowing with multiple versions of the same documents, while also making your collection's docs easier to search and organize. Similarly, tools like **SurveyMonkey** and **Jing** can round out your collections processes through simplifying your communication with colleagues about your shared collections decisions. Following are a few of the tools we've found most useful:

Google Docs and Sites

Have you ever tried unsuccessfully to locate a particular document on a shared drive, stumbling through Byzantine corridors of folders, eventually resorting to the dreaded **Windows** search function? Have you ever opened up an important document only to be prevented from making changes because someone else has it open, or worse, find that someone else has already made changes? What if you could

continued on page 64