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Papa Abel Remembers-A Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fasicle 20: Competition

Richard Abel
reabel@q.com

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publishers, but without the presses fiscal burden of cost recovery? The answer for me is that publication by a university press, by an entity with a mission that extends beyond its own institution, means something both academically and economically — it is both an *evaluative* process of editorial assessment, peer review, and faculty board approval and an *evaluating* in terms of the press's decision to invest financial and personnel resources in a particular author's work. At a time when the humanities and social sciences are being *devalued* within the academy, formal publication signals that such works have an economic and cultural value and are more than mere localized academic work product. Over the past decades, university presses have sponsored scholarly work in areas that in many cases were discouraged or actively disparaged by university departments themselves — areas such as feminist studies, Chicano Studies, and GLBT Studies and emerging areas of inquiry such as work on tourism, sports, and video games. Literary theory as a method flourished on the lists of university presses long before 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 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 publisher, they bang down our doors, and not just to satisfy tenure and promotion requirements. And scholarly authors care: they revise diligently in response to peer review and editorial feedback, and obsess over how their monographs are edited, titled, produced, publicized, and sold. Authorship is more than communication — many of the best academic blog authors are also recent university press authors — and as long as there are scholars 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

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

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

The 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 openers, 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 a partial thing. The writer was dependent from the opening of this story onward to resort to others to form a full and trustworthy account of what happened in the period 30 to 50 years ago. As good fortune would have it, a few of that Band continued on working with scholarly books and libraries. As a consequence, they were well-positioned to intimately monitor the continued use and utility of the computer and production systems that had been conceived and implemented by the Band. They were able to attest to the now continuous and world-wide employment of those systems we pioneered.

Unhappily, I was unable to turn to the memories of a considerable complement of that Band who have departed our mortal company. They must be remembered as having been contributors of merit equal to that of those who have been included in this account and whose memories contributed to the fleshing out of this history. Bent upon outcomes not often known and beset by a continuing array of risks, some foreseen, others neither foreseen nor understandable, they were key players in the game of navigating previously uncharted waters. But,

despite these gambles and incomprehensible hazards, they never shied from nor balked at the problems of greater or lesser difficulty that had to be solved as best as the Band's collective efforts could.

In dealing with the fledgling era the memories of **Fred Gullette** and **Lorene Dortch** were constantly relied upon. **Lorene** possesses a remarkably acute memory of details relating to much of the history of the Argonauts. The same may be said of **Oliver Sitea**, who was not only another repeated respondent but also a continuing volunteer of events no longer coming to my mind.

For the middle years, resort was again had to those mentioned above, as well as **Keith Barker** and **Dan Halloran**. These two, plus **Ralph Shoffner** and **Don Chvatal**, were the sources for the complexities of the last years. In this connection **Don Chvatal** deserves especial note for his critical assessment of the chronicle of the last several years.

Lastly the writer seeks the reader's indulgence in offering his thanks to that remarkable crew who served the world of books and libraries so inventively and diligently.

Note was made that such a Band as conceived, created, implemented, and oversaw the systems created by the firm to radically increase the speed and efficiency of getting books into the hands of users would be difficult to bring together again. Such a setting of this Band fails if it did not underscore the inescapable fact that all the Argonauts willfully gravitated to the venture. We shared a common mind as to the place and worth of books as representing and incorporating the total cultural capital of the West. We well understood that we were the extraordinarily fortunate heirs of a vast inheritance for which we had done nothing warranting the showering of such a gift upon us. We well appreciated that our cultural inheritance was encapsulated in books. It remains virtually an axiom that, were some universal solvent capable of selectively destroying all the books in the world invented and released, all cultures would simply collapse into barbarism in a generation or two. And we were of the related view that the sustainable additions to the culture in our generation would be incorporated in the books in which we dealt. In short, all viewed themselves as the committed, honest brokers of knowledge as a modest acknowledgement of their good fortune in receiving an inheritance of such magnitude and of their labors to pass that inheritance on, not simply complete in its entirety but marginally richer.

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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) <bpoppe@pittstate.edu>

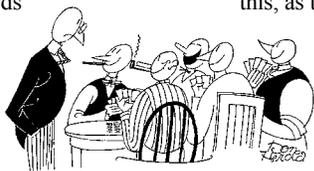
Column Editor: **Michelle Flinchbaugh** (Acquisitions Librarian, Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 1000 Hilltop Circle, Baltimore, MD 21250; Phone: 410-455-6754; Fax: 410-455-1598) <flinchba@umbc.edu>

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.^{1,2} 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 at 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.³ **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.⁴ 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.⁵

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**,⁶ 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.⁷ **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 most patrons' concerns."⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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."¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

While ceasing serials check-in changes patron service,¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ However, **Carr**

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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

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? 🐼