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Lost in Austin-The Last of the Mohicans

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try to navigate the shrinking revenue available from their primary, traditional marketplace — research libraries. It is the third option, “find a way around libraries into the scholarly marketplace,” that **Rick** believes librarians should find most concerning. The role of the library as broker or buyer is one that users recognize and value.¹ When this role is no longer accepted as necessary or valuable, what happens, keeping in mind that other important roles a library plays are often unrecognized and under-utilized?

Steve: Thanks for the citation, professor, now I had to go read it. Just kidding, it’s a very interesting article, and as usual **Rick** makes you stop and consider a topic from a variety of perspectives. I’ll not retract my statement that it wouldn’t bother me as a librarian to see faculty purchase resources directly from publishers, but perhaps I better recognize **Rick’s** point that it could be a dangerous and slippery slope for libraries to begin to lose their role as content purchaser/information broker for the campus. I can’t fathom this happening soon anyway; can you imagine the logistical headaches for publishers if they attempted to sell their content directly to thousands of faculty and students across the world? Any increased revenue the publishers earned with this model would be paid out to all the new customer representatives they’d have to hire, that’s all I can say!

Robin: And, my understanding of the crux of **Rick’s** position is not that he is trying to gal-

vanize the profession to derail this possibility. Rather, he is drawing a connection between this development and the consequences for academic libraries’ relationships to scholarship and scholars. Now, this is just my interpretation, and not **Rick’s** words, but it harks back to themes often repeated in our column: change, how we respond to it, and the evolution of academic libraries and bookselling. If we were to imagine the reality of what **Rick** describes — wherein, the library is not the broker and buyer of scholarly materials — what kinds of services and value is it delivering? It’s probably a necessary, but potentially exciting, question.

Steve: I’d remind you that librarians do far more than acquire resources. I don’t know if exciting is the term I’d use if libraries lose their role as the centralized content broker for academia. It could mean a lot of librarians will be revising their position descriptions in the future, but I guess that’s a form of exciting times. Maybe we can pursue this topic next time, cause the fat lady is singing. Arrververderci, **Robin**.

Robin: I agree, let’s explore this in a bit more depth. Until next time, and please don’t forget that list of strengths and weaknesses. 🍷

Endnote

1. **Anderson, Rick.** *EDUCAUSE Review* 45 (4) (July/August 2010): 10-11, <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Review/EDUCAUSEReviewMagazineVolume45/Ist-WereaScholarlyPublisher/209335> (accessed October 4, 2010).

Lost in Austin — The Last of the Mohicans?



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Forty-five years ago, as I write this, I had a little more than a hundred days before being separated from the **United States Army**. I wasn’t yet a true short-timer but I was close. I have, as of late September 2010, 276 days until retirement (9 months, 3 days and counting) and am even further from being a true short-timer than I was in Fulda, Germany back in 1965, but I can feel a tug from the future as a detached concern about my current responsibilities creeps into my psyche.

There are a few things left for me to do before I bring the librarian phase of my life to a close. In June 2011, I will have been a librarian for 38 years and by my reckoning, that is long enough. The time is right, and there is no turning back.

This is not my final column for *Against the Grain*, but I do want to spend some time now (and perhaps later, too) looking back at my career in libraries and use this opportunity to bid a fond *adieu* to those friends and col-

leagues who have enriched my life and my career. How many will read these words is anybody’s guess and not a concern because I am really writing this for myself as a psalm to librarianship as it once was, as it became, and as it is beginning to be.

When I speak of librarianship and those intellectually curious, bookish (in the best sense of the word) people who inhabit its world, I include not only those who actually work in libraries but those who work with librarians — those in publishing, book selling, serials, and all of those other areas (not all new, by the way) that populate the exhibit halls during library association conferences. The changes over 38 years have affected them as much if not more than they have affected libraries.

My professional career began at **Stanford** in 1973, but I had been working in the **UC Berkeley** Rare Books & Special Collections and the **Bancroft Library** since 1969, work

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that led me to **Berkeley's Library School** where I earned my Master of Library Science. I left **Stanford** in the fall of 1976 for **Boise State University** where I was head of acquisitions and full of ambition and high thoughts about presenting and publishing. I wrote a couple of pieces for *The Idaho Librarian*, but I wanted to be part of the larger stage occupied by prominent names in the profession, many or most of them active in and known to me through the Resources & Technical Services Division (RTSD) of ALA.

Approval plans were still all the rage and **Peter Spyers-Duran**, then at **California State University Long Beach**, had issued a call for papers for the **Fourth International Conference on Approval Plans and Collections [sic] Development: Shaping Library Collections for the 1980s** to be held at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 29-31, 1979. Registration was \$59 for ACRL members, \$89 for non-ACRL members.

The big name speakers were invited, of course, and included **William Axford (University of Oregon)**, **Glyn T. Evans (SUNY)**, **William McGrath (University of Lowell)**, **Paul Mosher (Stanford University)**, **Robert Vosper (UCLA)**, **Kathleen McCullough** and **Edwin Posey (Purdue University)**, **Dora Bibrarz (University of New Mexico)**, and **Richard Chapin (Michigan State University)**.

Judging the contributed papers, my belated thanks to one and all, were **Norman Dudley (UCLA)**, **Hendrik Edelman (Rutgers University)**, **Thomas Mann (California State University Long Beach)**, and **Joseph Nitecki (University of Wisconsin Oshkosh)**.

My paper, titled "An Approval Plan: How It Failed, How It Could Succeed," was among those chosen for the conference. I am certain that **Noreen Aldredge**, **Dimity Burkner**, and **John Kaiser** also presented.

The following booksellers supported the conference (there was a swell bash at the **Milwaukee Natural History Museum** among other informal gatherings during the conference):

- Ambassador Book Service, Inc.**
- The Baker and Taylor Company**
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- Blackwell North American, Inc.**
- Casalini Libri**
- Coutts Library Services, Inc.**
- Martinus Nijhoff Booksellers**
- Midwest Library Service**
- Otto Hararassowitz**

Amazingly, most of these booksellers are still in business. There were many others, though, operating then who are no longer with us and those that are are not as flush as they were then and have changed their operations and, for some (all?), their business models in order to survive.

Why all these names? Well, how many of those librarians who participated do you remember? How many have retired or died? When I retire in June, will I be the last of the Mohicans? I resurrect these names to pay tribute to them and have their names in print one more time at least.

This era of large monograph budgets was actually entering a decline, although we didn't know it at the time. The average book price, just a couple of years earlier, was higher than the average periodical price. Check *The Bowker Annual* for the early 1970s if you don't believe me. You could look it up. It is true. But periodicals were beginning their steep and relentless climb and with it, a gradual decline in monographs purchased and a drop in the scope of many approval plans, plans that, I suspect, became more like gathering plans with ever narrower profiles. But is anyone interested? I wrote the first ARL SPEC Kit (under the guidance of **Maxine Sitts**) on Approval Plans in ARL Libraries in 1981,

and it was revised at least once and maybe twice, but a third time? Why bother? Those days are gone and will never return.

Those really were the good old days, especially if one was an acquisitions librarian as I was. I have always loved buying books and always will but once I retire, I will no longer be able to order on such a large scale as I did then. I don't actually order on that scale now, but I can still spend a lot of money on books for the library if I've a mind to.

Scale is relative. I will have access to three better-than-average second-hand and antiquarian book stores when I retire. There is **Smith Family Books** in Eugene, Oregon (just down the street from the **University of Oregon**) for good reading copies in every field imaginable. And still within walking distance of the university is **J. Michael's Books**, a fine antiquarian shop that also peddles a few new books (as does **Smith Family**). There are other walk-in second-hand shops in Oregon, and I will have the leisure to find them and visit them as I explore parts of the state that I have neglected during the three other times I have lived in that glorious land between California and Washington. Come in the summer and leave your umbrella at home.

A hundred miles northeast in Portland, I can roam and browse the multi-level **Powell's** that sits on the edge of the Pearl District. I have been lost there and have never found an empty table where I might sit with a cup of coffee and thumb through my purchases. I might have better luck on a sunny day.

Yes, I am closing the library door (I may not even get a library card once I am retired), but I am opening the collective book store door in new ways, the ways of a person of leisure (*sans* the wealth that often goes with that title). I will never read all of the books that I already own even if I didn't add to their numbers, but I will buy more and more and more until that last chapter comes to an end. But in the meantime, I will invoke my mantra — "Why borrow a book when you can buy one?" 🌳

Acquisitions Archaeology — Was the CD-ROM DOA?

Column Editor: **Jesse Holden** (Coordinator of Technical Services, Millersville University) <jesse.holden@millersville.edu>

As I mentioned in my previous column, I am moving away from an "archaeological" project in the strict sense to a "genealogical" project in the general sense. I am starting with the idea of the "compact disc — read-only memory" (how many of you remembered what 'CD-ROM' stands for?) and following it through some past **ATGs**. My method here is casual rather than exhaustive; I will not be evaluating all occurrences of the term or presenting every example that is available. I will be picking out some issues around the CD-ROM and following certain related threads to see what, if anything, our experience with this technology might mean.

The first CD I saw (and heard) was **Bruce Hornsby and the Range's** *The Way It Is*.¹ That was in the summer of 1987. I had just bought the same music on a vinyl LP a few months earlier, and seeing the little silver disc and futuristic player was like magic. Though, looking back, perhaps that moment should not have been so awesome. True, a CD is smaller than a record, and it can

(but usually doesn't) hold more music. The sound is, clearly, better than a cassette. In 1987, the CD seemed like a real revolution: it was small, shiny silver, and, of course, technologically sophisticated (a laser...cool!) — major hallmarks of science fiction. Following on these obvious innovations are what turned out to be, sadly, the stuff of mere urban legend. These radical new discs, I heard repeatedly, could play perfectly even when scratched. They were waterproof. And, best of all, if you watched the spinning disc through the window of the player, you would see fantastic designs that were invisible when the disc was static. (I was honestly told that one particular CD, when spinning at full speed, would generate the image of a squirrel. Needless to say, I did not see a squirrel. And I looked for a long time. The joke's on me, I guess.)

Looking back, the CD was not really so much of a revolution after all. It was like a tiny record, with the exception that (besides being smaller and incorporating a laser) you could have it skip on the player in your car in addition to the player in your living room. It seems

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