

## Book Reviews

*Newsletter on Serial Pricing Issues*. Ed. by Marcia Tuttle. Electronic mail address to subscribe, submit, or request back issues: TUTTLE@UNC.bitnet. U.S. mail address: Serials Department, Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599. No.1— . February 25, 1989— . Subscription price: free. *Note:* Access cost may be involved at the subscriber's end depending on type of network access and charging mechanisms for connect time (ISSN: 1046-3410).

My enthusiasm for early electronic networked serials does not stem from their meeting the same standards as print-on-paper publications, standards that have evolved over 500 years. (Standards have yet to evolve for e-publications.) Nor is the proper question, would libraries acquire an e-journal if they had to pay in hard currency? (We might not for a number of reasons, such as not knowing quite what to do with such publications.) One has to be excited by electronic serials because they are small steps at tapping the potential of an awesome medium. One has to be thankful for them and their editors, for they have, almost without our realizing it, inveigled us into the basic techniques of navigating e-world, and we have had fun learning how.

The *Newsletter on Serial Pricing Issues* (NSPI) falls somewhere in the middle-range of formality of the electronic serials currently distributed on the "Net." That is, it is not a discussion list, where postings are received from list members and redistributed; it is not a journal with an editor who receives, edits, possibly submits for peer review, and distributes long scholarly or discursive articles. The NSPI has a theme: serial prices; it has a mission: to deliver late-breaking news and opinions quickly to subscribers; it has a philosophy: to be impartial.

This philosophy of impartiality means that when the editor sees or is offered material that is in scope, responsibly written, and interesting to subscribers, that material (letters, news items, extracts from published materials) is included. Originator and philosophical stances do not determine inclusion.

The *Newsletter* originally began under sponsorship of the ALA/RTSD (later ALCTS) Publisher/Vendor-Library Relations Committee, which created a subcommittee on serials pricing issues, one of whose mandates was to act as a clearinghouse, gathering and disseminating pricing information. Marcia Tuttle, subcommittee chair, envisioned the electronic NSPI, and the other subcommittee members became the first editorial board. After the subcommittee was disbanded two years later (May 1991), Tuttle continued the *Newsletter* as her own, and established a new editorial board. All along, the *Newsletter* has borne the stamp of the editor. The board's influence has been largely transparent.

Originally the *Newsletter* was slated to appear first electronically, with a paper counterpart following every two months. By October of 1989, less than a year after start-up, ALA recognized the need for some cost recovery and announced a fee for retrospective paper copies, effective January 1990. In issue #15, January 27, 1990, an editorial announced that paper would no longer be produced. This was a perfectly sensible decision, given the commitment to publish quickly and inexpensively as the highest priority. Such a sequence may eventually prove to be the model for a number of journals that begin in parallel formats and quickly find the costs of dual (paper and electronic) output too high to sustain and drop the paper ver-

sion or charge for it. In electronic publishing it is, after all, possible to move the paper production efforts and costs onto the subscribers rather than onto the editors and publishers.

At this writing, Tuttle has produced fifty-one *NSPI* issues in under three years, or 1 2/3 issues per month. Their appearance has been regularly irregular. Presumably when there is enough material or there is late-breaking news, an issue is keyed and distributed to those on the subscription list. This is the model that all electronic lists and conferences, as well as some e-journals, follow. While the *Newsletter* has not changed a great deal since its start-up, technical issues have been resolved; the software has improved, and editor and subscribers have become much more e-proficient. No longer is it necessary to run pieces in the *Newsletter* describing how to download or access it—a critical mass of academic readers is fluent in e-reading.

With issue #2, a table of contents appeared, along with a column, "From the Editor." The column usually informs readers about some characteristic of *NSPI* rather than stating an opinion or point of view on issues. Editorial neutrality presumably encourages diverse types of contributors (such as publishers). Also with issue #5, Chuck Hamaker of LSU began writing the column, "Hamaker's Haymakers," which has been the most consistent feature of the *Newsletter* in providing references to useful reading matter, in interpreting events, and in speaking for the intelligent, conscientious consumer. Hamaker's voice is sometimes strident; often highly opinionated; frequently controversial; and always articulate, provocative, and service-oriented. The column provides a welcome counterpoint to the noncommittal editorial tone.

With issue #11, the *Newsletter* officially received an ISSN, making it a "grown-up" effort. With issue #34, October 1991, an official letters-to-the-editor column, "From the Mailbox," appeared. In n.s. #13, November 1991, a formal linkage between the *Newsletter* and the bulletin board SERIALST was announced, with

potentially more spillover in topics, more room for discussion of *NSPI* news items (a useful service to be sure), and SERIALST's becoming "moderated." While any one of these changes is not striking of itself, collectively they illustrate growing sophistication and responsiveness to the technology and wishes of the readership.

The *Newsletter* is quickly produced, avidly read, widely distributed, and full of information on the latest round of price increases from the biggest publishers, projections from subscription agents, reports from significant conferences and workshops, letters written by serial librarians protesting egregious publisher practices, responses from publishers, and announcements of good sessions at library meetings. It is easy to subscribe to, a good read, a quick read, worth the small amount of disk space it takes to save it, and worth reviewing every few months just to remember the details.

The *Newsletter* is as good as it can be given current constraints. It could be improved in some ways, but most of them would take financial commitment in the form of systematically pursuing contributions, increasing the number of contributions, and doing a great deal of editing and editorial work, some research, and some more writing. A little less editorial neutrality would enliven the editor's column. I do not know precisely what *NSPI*'s distribution method is, but it would be useful to have a widely accessible archive file to access via file transfer protocol and to search via standard software. At the moment, one can receive back issues on application to the editor, or if one has been clever and prescient, one has saved all the files electronically on one's computer hard disk, or even on diskettes. Readers like me have been foolish and printed the copies, leaving them lying around like so many conventional paper newsletters, and have lost half the benefit of subscribing to electronic journals in the first place, the benefit of "intelligent" documents.

In addition to distributing a great deal of information and helping to hook librarians onto e-mail, *NSPI* has been a

pioneer in the new genre of electronic serials. By now, as directories of e-serials quickly show, librarians have more electronic communication forums than any other profession. The lesson to be learned is that electronic serials, even when physically unprepossessing and produced on shoestring budgets, can be highly visible and powerful.

Almost anyone with an idea, commitment, and spare time, at an institution with network connections and a half-friendly computer center, can start an e-list or newsletter or even a journal, and possibly should. The networks so far are subsidized. It is an excellent time to experiment, to find out what the community needs and wants, to learn what the community supports over time and in what form. Eventually, all these publications will be more sophisticated, more commonplace, less of a novelty. While they will undoubtedly be "better," it will be hard to match the early days' excitement we still feel as we log on to our e-mail and LISTSERV, or the Mailer Daemon bring us the next issue of our current favorites, of which NSPI is most certainly one.—Ann Okerson, *Association of Research Libraries, Washington, D.C.*

**DePew, John N.** *A Library, Media and Preservation Handbook*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clío, 1991. 441 p. (ISBN 0-87436-543-0). LC 91-16501.

The national concern for preserving the intellectual content of great research collections impinges increasingly on the jobs, time, and attention of librarians who are not preservation specialists. For these professionals, as well as for those in smaller institutions, this is a useful and interesting book.

It is generally successful in terms of its stated aims of bringing together a portion of the vast literature of the past two decades on the conservation and preservation of library materials and of making it available to those who have little knowledge of preservation. It is, then, designed as an introduction "to the basic environmental controls, materials, processes and techniques . . . required to house and preserve library materials."

The organization and range of topics treated make it clear that DePew understands preservation in the broadest possible sense, that preventive measures from climate control to disaster preparedness are as important as salvage activities, and that nonprint media merit the same consideration as paper. The handbook is divided into nine sections covering paper and papermaking; the environment; care and handling of library materials; binding and in-house repair; acid paper and brittle books; photographic, audio, and magnetic media; surveys of buildings and collections; disaster preparedness and recovery; and preservation services, suppliers, and educational opportunities. Ten appendices supply further details, specifications, sample forms and surveys, and techniques. Because the language of preservation is complex and technical, a short glossary is provided, and a more complete glossary is planned as a companion volume. The reference bibliography at the end of each section is a useful tool.

The handbook falls short, however, of being a definitive, all-purpose summary of the state of preservation knowledge. For example, because of limitations on space, DePew deliberately excludes discussion of the administration and organization of preservation activities, referring readers to the *Association of Research Libraries' Preservation Organization and Staffing*, SPEC Kit 160 (Washington, D.C., 1990) and works by noted librarians in the field.

In addition, other omissions and a troubling lack of balance among the issues considered and the level of detail in their treatment detract from the book's value. The author's criteria for treating certain topics at length, while only summarizing others, are not articulated. The book begins, for instance, with a very, perhaps unnecessarily, detailed section (forty pages) on paper and papermaking. Highly interesting for the nonspecialist, it leads one to expect a similar level of attention to the treatment of paper. Several aspects of this treatment are discussed, with more attention given to deacidification (fifteen pages), a tech-