Library-Book Trade Relations

HELEN WELCH TUTTLE

The great, beneficial, and overdue trend of the past decade in relations between the library and the book trade has been in the direction of increased communication, more awareness of interdependence, and greater cooperation. Between the librarian and the bookseller the movement toward togetherness has been made in larger part by the librarian, not because he is more accommodating, more outgoing, or more eager to work harmoniously than the bookseller. Rather, the librarian, given increased purchasing power and constantly pressured to provide his patrons with speedier access to the publications, has had to turn to his source of supply for help, and has had to put faster service above larger discounts, to think less of saving pennies and more of stretching staff time. If he formerly thought of the profit-dependent bookseller as an adversary, he has now made the pleasing discovery that the seller is more partner than opponent, a knowledgeable and helpful fellow, and altogether a good man to have on one’s team.

In relation to publishers, librarians have generally felt that they could not influence production decisions, that the publisher felt little interest in the library’s predominantly single-copy ordering, that if the publisher thought of libraries at all, he knew that the librarian was a captive customer and that he could well be left until last when orders were being filled. The publisher seemed unaware or uninterested in the fact that, particularly in smaller communities across the country, the library might be the only local place where potential buyers could see the publisher’s product on display.

Even here there has been some change. A talk given in May 1969 at the annual meeting of the American Book Publishers Council by Dan Lacy, long respected as an articulate representative of publishing, is reported by Publishers’ Weekly as follows:

Helen Welch Tuttle is Assistant University Librarian for Preparations, Princeton University Library.
Publishers haven't always seen the value of library business, Mr. Lacy observed. Before World War II, the head of an important publishing house rose at a meeting of the National Association of Book Publishers and recommended that members raise a fund to enable the American Medical Association to investigate "contagion" carried by the circulation of public library books; he hoped that this would induce people to buy books rather than borrow them.

Today the indispensability of the library market is appreciated, Mr. Lacy continued; it makes up a major part of the market for general publishing, including 80%-85% of the sale of children's books. It is the main market for facsimile reprints, for reference books and encyclopedias, for university press and other scholarly books. The growth of book title output from about 11,000 to 30,000 a year in 13 years is related to the growth in library demand. Librarians, educators and publishers are working together more closely.¹

Nowhere is the increased fraternization of the library and the trade more apparent than in the increasing organized togetherness of the last decade or so, evidenced by guest speakers of the one group appearing at the meetings of the other, the same phenomenon in the journals of the two groups, cooperative efforts to solve problems of mutual interest, and the creation of a number of joint standing committees.

It is not surprising that of American Library Association units the Rare Books Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, with its concern for the supply of old and rare books, should have been one of the first to arrange meetings with the book trade. During the past decade the Section has offered preconference institutes before most of the ALA annual conferences. The institutes have generally been held on the sites of eminent rare book collections located in or near the conference city, and most recently have been co-sponsored by the Bibliographic Society of America (BSA). Themes such as "Book Illustration," "Rare Books in Natural History," "Americana," and "Antiquarian Book Trade in the Twentieth Century" have brought together speakers from both the profession and the trade, and have explored mutual concerns. The 1966 New York Conference listed a program meeting of the Section and the BSA on the topic "Men and Books—The Interdependencies of Collectors, Rare Book Librarians, and Book Sellers." The programs have generally been entertaining and of good quality, and as usual the non-scheduled and informal chatter among bookdealers and librarians has offered nonappraisable values to all participating.

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Since 1959, when the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America (ABAA) was incorporated, the library has had an authoritative body to turn to for problem negotiations in the antiquarian portion of its acquisition business, and thus mutual energies have been used to form more positive associations. Sol Malkin, informer to and chronicler extraordinary of the antiquarian book trade (acquisition personnel neglect to scan his AB Bookman's Weekly at their peril), has brought together pertinent information about the ABAA in his article, “Organization and Structure of the American Antiquarian Book Trade.”

The Rare Book Section's approach to togetherness is an informal but positive one. At the opposite extreme is the functioning of the ALA Bookdealer-Library Relations Committee, which is attached to the Acquisitions Section of the Resources and Technical Services Division. This group has served as a grievance committee for librarians and has sought to develop acceptable standards of conduct for both parties to the commercial acquisition process. Carl Jackson, an early chairman during a period of considerable trouble, characterized the Committee in 1962 as follows: “The Bookdealer-Library Relations Committee, an outgrowth of the former Fair Trade Practices Committee, concerns itself with all problems stemming from the practices and procedures of libraries and booksellers in the purchasing and supplying of books. It aims to study specific problems, offer constructive advice, and especially to establish standards of performance in order to promote better bookdealer-library relationships.”

The earlier Fair Trade Practices Committee attempted a stronger role in dealer-library disputes. The impracticality of such an attempt was soon recognized, and the proceedings of the Acquisitions Section Executive Committee at the 1960 Montreal Conference includes the statement: “The Executive Committee decided that arbitration or mediation by the Fair Trade Practices Committee must be abandoned and all the committee can do in cases of differences between librarians and booksellers is refer to the standards as stated in the Code on Fair Trade Practices.”

The Code referred to appeared in the literature first in 1957 as “Buying and Selling Books and Manuscripts: Some Canons of Good Practice,” when the committee was under John Fall's chairmanship. It covered such topics as approvals, auction buying, copying, discounts, evaluations, returns, and sale of duplicates, and it invited suggestions for revision. An effort was made to avoid any implication that dealers were being criticized, the introduction explaining that “A
code of fair practices for book dealers and librarians is not needed in order to convince members of either group that it is reprehensible to steal or lie. There are many points, however, on which a dealer or librarian may honestly be uncertain as to the proper procedure, and a code might be a useful guide for those who want to do the right thing.”

Out of some of the complaints grew the Committee’s efforts to develop performance standards for book jobbers, later enlarged to produce a manual to include comments on bookdealer-library relations from the points of view of various types of publishers, booksellers, and libraries, and eventually emerging as a cooperative study made with the National League of Cities exploring book buying procedures, particularly those which involve the library working under contract with a jobber through a purchasing agent. The result was a report, “Purchasing Library Materials in Public and School Libraries; A Study of Purchasing Procedures and the Relationships between Libraries, Purchasing Agents and Dealers,” by Evelyn Hensel and Peter D. Veillette. Although not aimed toward the large research library, the report proposes projects which all acquisition librarians should approve and support, for example, the suggestion that “A standard format for order forms should be developed and adopted by all libraries.” Enlarging on this recommendation, the report explains: “Wholesalers have said that standardization of order forms would reduce their costs and enable them to give better service and higher discounts. Although it may not be possible to produce a single form that would satisfy everyone it should at least be possible to standardize the information needed by the dealer and the position of the various items of information.”

It is unfortunate that so much of the Bookdealer-Library Relations Committee activity has had to be concerned with negative approaches to this important relationship. A more recently formed joint committee, the American Book Publishers Council/Resources and Technical Services Division (ALA) Joint Committee, set up in 1966, has concerned itself with such topics of mutual interest as reprinting, universal numbering systems, library materials price indexes, the scope of Books in Print, and book production delays. Its preconference institute last June on “New Dimensions in Acquisitions” brought in contributions from all aspects of the book trade, and participants could not fail to note the useful freshness of approach in Dan Melcher’s insistence that a library could obtain 48-hour service from book jobbers,
Art Brody's recalling his attempt to solve LC's cataloging backlog problem, and Ted Waller's efforts to arouse both librarians and the trade to cooperate in trying to avoid the disastrous cuts in federal aid to libraries.

With the development of federal aid to libraries has come a complementary recognition that libraries, publishers, and booksellers should cooperate to promote measures which provide reading materials to the public and, equal in importance, to see that good programs are not interrupted or crippled by the withdrawal of support.

While ALA president in 1966, Robert Vosper, who came out of an academic library acquisitions background, made an attempt to complement ALA's working relationship with the publishing industry. He established a joint committee of ALA, the American Booksellers Association, and the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America. In an interview that year Vosper expressed his pleasure with the new link as follows:

I think one of the very pleasing things I have been able to do is set up a committee in the ALA establishing formal relationships with the American Booksellers Association and the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America. Libraries and the book trade have not always had cordial relations. Now I think we are in a position to work together in a common goal and a common concern to get books to readers and we ought to be able to think of more imaginative ways to accomplish this than we have in the past. Patrons of libraries of all kinds should be advised that books in great demand, out on circulation, are readily available, especially paperbacks, at reasonable prices in bookstores.

This effort toward cooperation is still in the embryo state and has not given evidence of the direction its activities will take.

Librarians and the producers of books have met and reached amicable disagreement in the matter of a standard book numbering system. When such a facility was proposed for all new U.S. imprints, librarians held open meetings with representatives of the publishing industry and the Library of Congress, and the topic was explored. Later an Interdivisional Committee on a Universal Numbering System for Publications was established by the Resources and Technical Services Division and the Information Science and Automation Division. The Committee's name indicates the librarians' concern that the system adopted cover all publications and on a world-wide basis. The Committee was able to bring about discussion between the publishers
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and the Library of Congress designed to explore a system which would include numbering not only for books but for other library materials as well, but no change was made in the system developed for books only. This attempt is still unsuccessful.10

Standard Book Numbers are being assigned in increasing numbers to new books published in this country under the direction of the Standard Book Numbering (SBN) Agency, a collaborative effort of the American Book Publishers Council, the American Educational Publishers Institute, the United States of America Standards Institute's Committee Z39, the Library of Congress, and R. R. Bowker Company. The SBN is built into the British system, which was adopted in 1967.11 It now appears on LC catalog cards and in Publishers' Weekly and Library Journal new book listings. Eventually LC will accept orders for catalog cards listed by SBN, and publishers and jobbers will fill book orders thus transmitted. Librarians are exploring its uses.

Following its practice of moving into vacuums, ALA has for more than thirty years interested itself in the reprint field. Its earliest purpose was to persuade publishers to bring back into print titles which were needed by libraries. Its latest concern has been to regulate library lending to publishers of volumes to be reprinted.12

In 1966, Sam P. Williams, editor of the Reprint Expediting Service Bulletin, provided a history of the years of effort by librarians in the reprint field.13 Williams starts with the 1938 Carnegie Corporation grant of $10,000 to ALA to explore reprinting possibilities and the formation of the ALA Out-of-Print Book Committee. He ends with the successful and ongoing Reprinting Committee of the ALA Acquisitions Section and the part presently played by the Reprint Expediting Service Bulletin. Somewhere in between he was able to report, "The original Carnegie grant was husbanded over the next twelve years of the Committee's existence and expended finally in the preparation of a definitive report on the out-of-print book situation in 1951 prepared by G. William Bergquist."14 Dear dead days beyond recall, when ten thousand dollars was ten thousand dollars instead of a couple of meetings of the advisory committee for the study of . . . !

Today's lively reprinting industry makes cooperation useful for both the trade and the library. Librarians are able to suggest titles for reprinting, provide some indication of potential sales, offer a ready market for many titles to provide a partial underwriting of the costs of production, and often supply the copy from which the reprint is made. In return, the reprinters bring back into print some of the titles which the library needs.
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Reprinters are moving toward a formal organization to promote their interests, a facility which they lack unless they are publishers of original manuscripts as well. Heretofore, the movement has been too new to be organized and perhaps too competitive, as reprinters search the same resource of earlier publications now in the public domain to find potential money-makers.

Librarians and the book trade have another organizational link, the United States of America Standards Institute (USASI). Through it they develop standards which affect both areas. Standards Committee Z39 on Library Work, Documentation, and Related Publishing Practices is sponsored by the Council of National Library Associations. Its chairman is librarian Jerrold Orne and its vice-chairman Anne Richter of the Bowker Company. Its growing list of concerns includes standards relating to periodical title abbreviations, machine-input records, bibliographic references, transliteration, both library and publishing statistics, indexing, abstracts, filing, bookbinding, standard book numbering, and book publishers advertising. Informal efforts toward developing useful standards continue, and can eventually feed into the USASI apparatus for formal standards. Standardization as an effective and efficient tool is gaining wider acceptance. The process of developing standards and gaining acceptance for them is a slow but worthwhile one. For example, in 1966, the Special Libraries Association (SLA) Board of Directors and the American Book Publishers Council (ABPC) approved a statement of recommended practices for the advertising and promotion of books, listing the bibliographic elements which were minimum inclusions and those which were desirable. In 1968, a first meeting of a new USASI committee, Subcommittee 19 on Book Publishers Advertising was held, and the first order of business was a review of the SLA/ABPC statement. In March 1969, a second draft version, “USA Standard for Advertising of Books,” was circulated. Once it is approved in final form as a U.S. standard, it will begin the long road to international acceptance.

The relationship of the library and the book trade should be recognized as a partnership. Back in 1917, Edward F. Stevens, then president of the New York Library Association, gave an address with the title, “An Honorable and Lasting Peace.” Stevens’ thesis was that librarians, publishers and booksellers are antagonistic. In the climate of the then ongoing war to make the world safe for democracy, he ad-
vocated "a cessation of those longstanding hostilities among those people who have to do with books, the family feud which is becoming more acute and alarming, while the family of nations is establishing the peace universal." He deplored the librarian’s tendency to think of publishers as forming "a class under suspicion as undeserving of the confidence of librarians, because their purposes with books were less exalted than our own, and their methods tainted with the commercialism of business." He pointed out that "the extent to which the business of publishing enjoys prosperity is the extent to which libraries, which depend on publishing, will prosper. Libraries cannot absorb all the product of publishing, bookselling is the only alternative outlet, and as one survives so must the other in the economy of the great industry of books in which we jointly labor." He saw peace as firmly established on a "recognition of a certain identity of interests among publishers, booksellers, and librarians."

Building a useful partnership between the library and the trade should start in library schools. The training of the Lilly Fellows at Indiana University, LeRoy Merritt's assignment of his students to do critical surveys of booksellers' catalogs, formal courses and informal seminars in publishing, talks to library school groups by those in the trade—both lectureships and informal visits—these are inadequate to introduce new librarians to the importance of the book trade to the building of library resources. The future should bring a trend toward much more of this valuable and productive exposure.

Strong links between the trade and libraries have been forged by persons leaving one field to join the other. Those with book trade experience who decide to become librarians bring a background of knowledge which is a decided plus value, particularly if it has been obtained in the European book trade with its background of formalized training. Some librarians have left libraries to enter the shop. European firms which do a great deal of business with American libraries sometimes send their promising young employees to the United States to work for a year or so in American libraries. Such transfers between the two professions emphasize their like aspects and increase their knowledge of each other.

That the librarian does not understand the bookdealer's business is an old complaint. The librarian is buying and the dealer is selling, so the librarian tends to assume the arrogance or the patronizing kindness of the one who decides the outcome of the encounter. The librarian, a salaried individual in an enterprise which is unfettered by
the necessity of showing a financial profit, fails to understand the
margins within which the bookseller must operate if his business is
to survive. When the dealer gives a service, it must appear in his
overhead charges. When the librarian performs a service, he is simply
carrying out the function for which he was hired. This difference in
approach is perhaps the greatest hazard in the library-bookdealer
relationship. The librarian should realize that if booksellers were pri-
marily interested in profit, they would not be trafficking in books; they
would reserve them for leisure hours and put their working hours into
replacing hilltop meadows and wooded valleys with dismal streets of
look-alike houses wrapped in twenty-year mortgages.

A sampling of library literature shows that those in the trade have
long been urging librarians to try for a better understanding of the
problems of the bookseller, and then to work in closer harmony with
the bookseller to the advantage of library service. Exhortations along
these lines still appear in modest amounts in the literature. Jake Zeilt-
lin, dean of the West Coast antiquarian dealers, emphasized in a talk
to librarians, as he has before, that there is not enough communication
between libraries and booksellers. Thomas F. O’Connell reported
his successful attempt to bring the dealer to the librarian, when he
asked Benjamin Muse, owner of a bookstore on Cape Cod, to come to
York University Library in Toronto to talk to the staff. Muse stressed
commonality between the library and the store, pointing out that good
books do not automatically come into a bookstore; that, as in a li-
brary, books must be selected and sought after for stock. Thus, in a
scholarly bookstore the owner’s livelihood depends upon his ability
to find the quality book to sell. John Parker, librarian, states the matter
colorfully as he projects the librarian into the trade formerly domi-
nated by the private collector: “We bring narrow budgets and the
trappings of bureaucracy into a trade where ample means and a close
personal relationship between the merchant and his client are an
ancient and warm tradition. . . . Members of our profession have too
long looked upon booksellers as ‘the trade’ and themselves as its
victims.”

The growing number of formal links between the trade and the
library described above suggest that there is more activity and promise
in this area than there has been. A bookseller writing two years ago
thought so; Dominick Coppola in the Spring 1967 *Library Resources
and Technical Services* thought it worthwhile to encourage such inter-
action. He ended his report on the bookseller and acquisitions with
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the exhortation: "May I emphasize that it is up to the librarians now more than ever before to learn as much as possible about the book trade, to keep abreast of developments, and to use to the fullest extent the facilities which it has to offer. It falls to the well-informed and dynamic librarians to challenge the imagination of booksellers and to encourage them to enter new fields and devise better and different ways in which they can be of service to the library community."

While the librarian may legitimately be concerned with prompt delivery of invoices so that they may be processed with shipments of books, answers to claims for nondelivery of orders, and excessive delays in producing the titles ordered, yet a preoccupation with these details to the exclusion of other values to be got from the bookseller is a pity. The old nonproductive librarian-dealer attitude is illustrated by a symposium published in the British journal, Assistant Librarian, in 1963. Entitled "Books Are Different" and exploring the relationship of libraries and the book trade, the gathering of viewpoints includes "The Trade's View of Librarians" written by R. D. Sanders, Managing Director of the Book Centre who had previously served for twenty-five years as Secretary of the Publishers Association, and "The Librarian's View of the Trade," written by the librarian H. G. T. Christopher.

Sanders pointed out that in his former capacity he had had official relations with all sorts of related organizations, but his only contact with the Library Association had been one small joint committee of the two associations together with the Booksellers Association, a committee with the function of deciding whether a library qualified for the 10 percent discount offered to free libraries spending annually a specified amount for new books. He had had the impression that librarians regarded themselves as professional people who ought not be concerned with matters of trade. He suggested that all concerned with the production and distribution of books should work together toward their common goal of increasing the book-reading public, and suggested a number of topics for discussion which would benefit from joint attack and which were basic to this mutual concern. In short, Sanders was thoroughly professional in his approach to the discussion of the relationship between libraries and the book trade.

Christopher's contribution, representing the point of view of the librarian, can be characterized most succinctly in his own words: "Summing-up, what librarians require is prompt delivery; regular, quick and accurate reporting of non-supplied items; intelligent an-
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ticipation of library demands for certain items; ‘on approval’ facilities from all types of booksellers; and an efficient system of the recording of orders.”27 And what reciprocal contributions does he assign to librarians? Librarians should provide correct bibliographic descriptions for the titles they order, should simplify their invoicing demands, and should not expect booksellers to service (i.e., catalog and process) their books for them. As difficult as it is to admit, this illustrates the professional attitude of the “nonprofessional” tradesman and the non-professional attitude of the “professional” librarian. As Alexander Woollcott said of the master of the golden-hearted poodle Harpo, “The delicate balance of ownership inclines, if anything, the other way.”

Publishing, bookselling, librarianship—all can be professional in character and all can share the responsibility of providing books for the reading public. That is why most of us who are old in the library world felt a sense of shock when Bowker was purchased by Xerox. Bowker and Wilson have been library science publishers since before we can remember, and their interests have traveled hand in hand with the needs of libraries. When a library problem indicated a need for a new or changed publication, Bowker or Wilson was a partner in working out the solution. We do not know whether Bowker thought of itself as being in a profession, but it took a professional attitude toward libraries.

We do not know about Xerox. We know it has produced very useful gadgets upon which libraries have come to depend. But we also know that it is a business giant with an awesome record of growth and profit-making. We fear that it may approach the library publishing business as a business instead of as a Bowker-type profession. We wonder if the finicky details of gathering together a directory of publishing, or other such tool important to libraries, and the slender margin for profit which it offers, will seize the serious attention of such a giant. If publishing gains attention as a potentially lucrative field for investment where money can either earn high returns or be lost advantageously, acquisition librarians will be operating within a very different situation.

Special mention should be made of the relationship of the librarian and the antiquarian dealer, particularly the dealer who specializes and becomes an authority in his specialization. Surely the building of library resources in the rare book category is the most exciting and least routine of the acquisition areas. The increasing importance of
the specialist dealer in the pursuit of these resources is not a new
trend, rather a strengthening of an old one as the important materials
appear less frequently in the market.

The antiquarian bookseller searches out the scarce materials, some-
times preserving them from destruction; gathers and passes along
bibliographic lore; defines new collecting fields, pointing out the
value of neglected areas of collecting; aids the private collector to
bring together the great collections which often end in institutional
libraries; sometimes gathers a collection of his own, drawing upon his
exceptional opportunities to do so; publishes catalogs which are virtu-
ally annotated subject bibliographies; and pushes the librarian toward
greater knowledge of such materials by example, by shame, and by
precept.

Besides these direct services, the antiquarian dealer brings color
and romance, an aura of derring-do and adventure into the plodding
and safe, civil-service atmosphere of the library. Dealers in rare books
sometimes take on a quality of rarity themselves, an attribute made
up of knowledge of people, knowledge of books, and an appreciation
without illusion of both. Such dealers hold with an open hand, as we
are told we must do if we are to love usefully and creatively. While
the librarian is acquiring and sharing and keeping, the dealer is ac-
quiring and sharing and letting go and acquiring again in an endless
wave, retaining only a sense of pride in a partnership dedicated to
gathering the great resources and creating the distinguished col-
lections.

The affectionate warmth and mutual respect of the dealer–librarian
relationship, which should permeate all who have the good luck to
work with books, is epitomized and reaffirmed by a 1967 book, A
Garland for Jake Zeitlin, on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday & the
Anniversary of His 40th Year in the Book Trade, made up of fourteen
articles by a happy profusion of authors, booksellers, librarians and
collectors.28

Should the professional librarian, the impartial provider of bibli-
ographic aid to all who seek the library, pursue this gay rogue? By all
means! Pamper him, court him, all but fondle him. If you feel that
you are enjoying it too much and have a twinge of conscience, just
remember that it is part of your job, the best part!
References

19. Ibid., p. 852.
20. Ibid., p. 854.
23. O’Connell, Thomas F. “Mail Box [Comment on York University in Toronto’s Experiment in Librarian-Bookseller Relations],” AB Bookman’s Weekly, 41:2150, June 3-10, 1968.
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27. Ibid., p. 182.