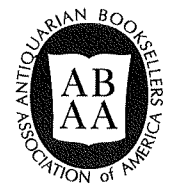




The A B A A NEWSLETTER



VOLUME TWELVE, NUMBER 1

ANTIQUARIAN BOOKSELLERS' ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

FALL 2000

INSIDE: *The Impact of the Internet on the Specialist.* By Gordon Hollis. . . . PAGE 5

Presidents Meet in Edinburgh

by Tom Congalton

One of the duties of the President of the ABA is to represent the organization at the ILAB Presidents' Meeting held once a year. Every other year the Presidents meet in conjunction with the biennial ILAB Congress and Book Fair, this year held in Edinburgh, Scotland, and sponsored by the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association (ABA), the national association in the United Kingdom.

For several reasons, I fulfilled this role with some trepidation. My relations with non-American dealers have almost always been cordial, but much of my rare book business involves books of primarily American interest, and I haven't deemed it necessary to attend or exhibit at overseas book fairs. The single exception was an ILAB fair in Cologne in 1992, and on that occasion previous commitments prevented me from attending in person.

I was also concerned by the views, commonly and reasonably held by many American dealers, that past and present administrators of ILAB have governed with a Eurocentric view of the antiquarian market and that American views and meaningful participation in ILAB business have been only barely, and not particularly gladly, tolerated. The ABAA's relationship with ILAB has on occasion been strained, with perhaps the most visible irritant for us being that the ABAA, despite constituting about one-quarter of the ILAB membership and providing



Photograph courtesy of Bob Fleck

Presidents of booksellers' associations from around the world met at the 35th International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB) Congress held in Edinburgh this September.

Life is Short, But the Day is Long

by Kevin MacDonnell

The following article on deadbeats, con artists, and time-wasters is an expanded and updated version of one published three years ago that was originally intended for booksellers new to the trade. Older dogs reading this article should keep this in mind, but they still may find a few new tricks.

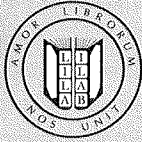
Any pinheaded Pollyanna can write rapturously about the joys of bookselling, but it takes a hard-assed card-carrying curmudgeon to cast a harsh light on the less joyous aspects of our business. If we are not careful, these unpleasant

parts of our business can keep us slogging and schlepping in endless circles. And then we die. If you dare read further, remember the words of the German *Freude Meister* Friedrich Nietzsche: "Joyous distrust is a sign of health. Everything absolute belongs to pathology." Fred probably had in mind things like God and the meaning of life, but in this article I'll be applying my joyous distrust to those folks who make our days longer and our lives shorter.

Besides the annual cleaning of the bathroom, ridding a computer system of a virus, or packing up unsold stock

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ILAB Book Fairs

2001

January 25-28

Stuttgart, Germany (VDA)

February 23-25

San Francisco, CA (ABAA)
Concourse Exhibition Center

March 23-25

Cologne, Germany (VDA)

April 19-22

New York, NY (ABAA)
Park Avenue Armory

April 26-28

Amsterdam, The Netherlands (NVvA)
RAI Congress Centre

May 17-20

Paris, France (SLAM)
La Maison de la Mutualité

June 7-10

London, England (ABA)
Olympia Exhibition Centre

October 12-14

Florence, Italy (ALAI)

November 8-11

Boston, MA (ABAA)
Hynes Convention Center

2002

June 6-9

London, England (ABA)
Olympia Exhibition Centre

September 12-14

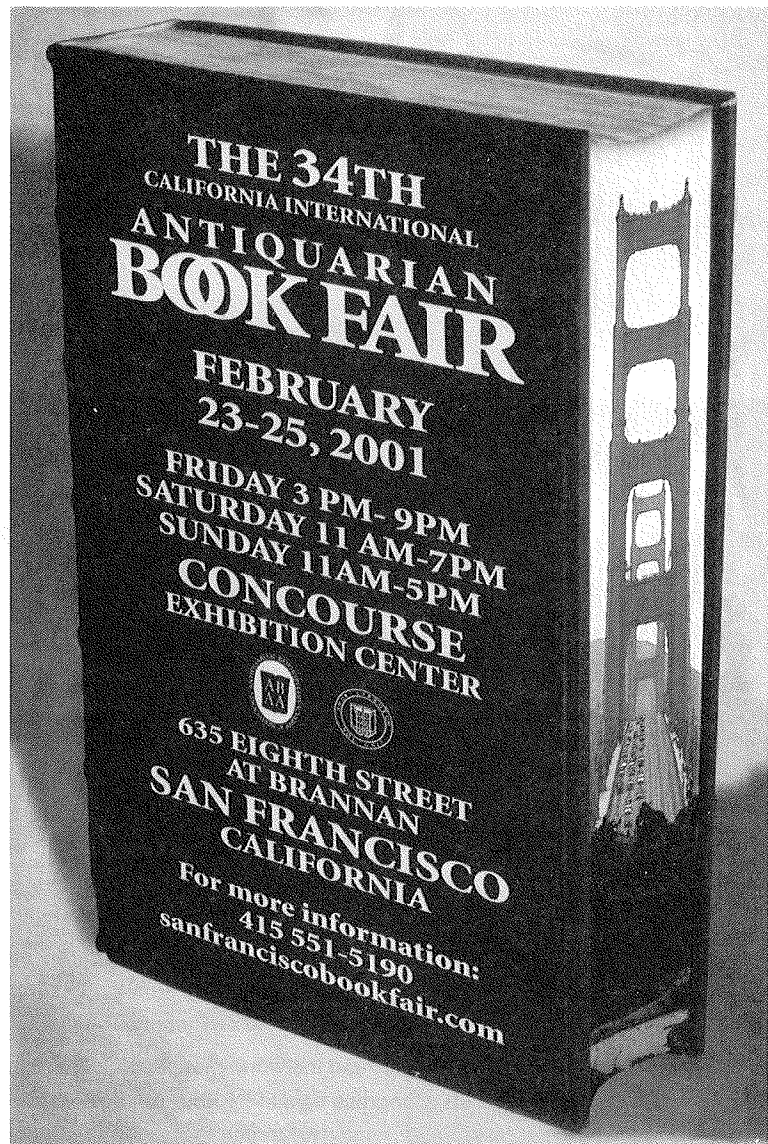
Copenhagen, Denmark (ILAB)
19th International Book Fair

2003

June 5-8

London, England (ABA)
Olympia Exhibition Centre

For a calendar including non-ILAB book fairs, visit www.abaa.org/bookfairs



Please join us at the 2001 California International Antiquarian Book Fair in San Francisco

The Book Fair showcases the inventory of more than 260 antiquarian book dealers from around the world—and a whole lot more. Bookbinders, calligraphers, printers, and conservators will be demonstrating their arts. Watch calligraphers create valentines, learn to make a quick slipcase, find out why and how you should consult a paper conservator, see how eighteenth-century books were given quick cover decors, watch a printer at work, learn the secrets of early inks, and meet with representatives from Bay Area book arts groups to discover how you can get involved. On Discovery Day, Sunday, February 25, from 12:00 to 3:00PM, bring up to three books for free, “unofficial,” and enlightening appraisals by participating dealers.

For more information, visit sanfranciscobookfair.com on the Internet, or contact Winslow & Associates, phone: 415-551-5190; fax: 415-551-5195; email: info@winslowevents.com.

The 34th California International Antiquarian Book Fair is sponsored by the ABAA and the Northern California Chapter

ILAB and the Internet: A Five-Year Saga

by Bob Fleck

A miraculous event occurred at the 35th International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (ILAB) Congress in Edinburgh this October. All but one of the countries represented at the Presidents' Meeting voted to authorize ILAB to sign a contract with Rockingstone, a Dutch Internet company. With this overwhelming vote, ILAB not only gained a Web site but also a centralized search engine for antiquarian books. Even more importantly, ILAB's ruling Committee recognized that there is a mandate from its national organizations to provide a different form of leadership. The Internet, with its lightning speed, has forced us all to realize that the old ways of running the League must be modified if ILAB is to survive.

To better understand the significance of this change you need to know something about the history of the League. ILAB was formed in 1947 in an attempt to bring international cooperation and goodwill to a war-torn bookselling community. Its charter made it clear that ILAB was a federation of countries and that the central Committee was not to intrude on the workings of the individual associations. There was distrust between nations, and no one wanted a strong central committee empowered to take bold steps in the name of ILAB.

I first became involved with ILAB's Committee of seven (now eight) in 1994 when I proposed a League Web site using Mike Harris, who was then the ABAA Web master. It took many meetings to convince Committee members to spend \$360 a year for that first Web site, which contained only the most basic information about ILAB and included links to each member-country site. In those days, European countries had not yet discovered the Internet. I remember flying to Stuttgart in 1995 with Mike Harris so that we could make a detailed presentation to the ILAB Committee and the German association. Mike had confirmed with the German hotel that it had full Internet access. When we arrived,

we discovered that the hotel staff had been confused by Mike's request and had responded "of course" when they should have said "of course not." Luckily, Mike had a full backup demo on his laptop, so we could present our concept even without being connected. The show was great; but only a few present understood what we were talking about, and even fewer saw any good use for searching large online databases. Moreover, our audience couldn't forget about local phone service costing money for every minute connected!

It became obvious that a small Web site with links to national affiliates was all ILAB could do in 1994. At least the ILAB Committee allowed the formation of an Internet committee, the first time in League history that *any* committee had been formed for any reason. As time went by, however, more and more dealers discovered that they could sell books on the Web, and national associations started to put searchable dealer directories online. The ABAA demonstrated via its Web site that the new technology could be used in many helpful ways, not only to sell books but also to educate the public. The ABAA attempted to get as much technology as possible with as little outlay of cash as possible. We got very good returns on the cash we spent with Mike Harris, and we refused to spend the large amount of cash necessary to build our own search engine, although we talked about it constantly. In 1997, the ABAA signed an agreement with the Advanced Book Exchange (ABE) allowing the association to use the ABE search engine for free in exchange for promotional considerations. In addition, each ABAA member received a special discount when signing up with ABE. What a great deal for the ABAA! I thought that this business arrangement would be a great concept to "sell" to ILAB. Why pay for great, expensive technology when you can get it for free? (ILAB was even poorer than the ABAA—remember, your ILAB dues are only \$10 a year.)

In the months leading up to the ILAB Congress in Vienna in 1998, it became obvious that there was a real difference of opinion between the French member of the ILAB Internet Committee, Alain Marchiset, and myself and Georg Beran of Switzerland, the third member of the committee. Georg and I thought that it was absolutely essential to have a centralized database of books and to have that database at the ILAB site. Alain Marchiset was dead opposed to this concept, stating that the French would never agree and that each national association should have its own database searchable by a meta-search engine similar to that at www.bookfinder.com. We told him that the technology just wasn't good enough. Anyone who uses bookfinder.com can tell you of the flaws in the system.

About the same time, the ABAA was re-evaluating its site. The search engine provided by ABE was good, but not as good as that of another online book database, Bibliocity. Mike Harris made a proposal to the ABAA that was costly but seemed to handle the problems we foresaw in the future. The question was, could Mike Harris accomplish the massive amount of work his proposal promised in the time frame he promised? While debate over this question was going on, I had to move the ILAB Internet Committee to a conclusion that could be presented in Vienna. An all-morning meeting with Alain Marchiset resulted in a series of motions that were given to the ILAB Committee, including one calling for a meta-search engine combined with a centralized search engine at the ILAB site, if possible. Mike Harris had promised such a solution, so it made sense to think that if he accomplished his work for the ABAA, the League could use it as well. All the motions that we presented in Vienna were passed by the Presidents.

Meanwhile, Mike's plan went under the keen eye of the ABAA Internet Committee. Mike eventually withdrew as ABAA

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The 35th ILAB Congress in Edinburgh

by Tom Congalton

This past September 15–19, Great Britain’s Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association (ABA) hosted the 35th ILAB Congress and 18th International Book Fair in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Several preliminary events took place as the participants in the Congress gathered in the Scottish capitol. The ILAB Committee met on Friday, September 15, followed by a dinner and reception for Committee members and the National Presidents at a private home. I did not attend this event because, having arrived in the city a day or two earlier, I was being hauled unceremoniously about the countryside to various castles by my wife Heidi and daughter Jessica.

On Saturday, the National Presidents’ Meeting took place at the Royal College of Physicians on Queen Street, a location that served as the nexus for several of the week’s events. I’ve treated this meeting elsewhere in the *Newsletter*.

Saturday evening after the Presidents’ Meeting, Congress participants gathered at the George Inter-Continental Hotel, headquarters for the Congress, and were motor-coached up to Edinburgh Castle, an impressive edifice that has overlooked the city for most of the past millennium. There we were bagpipied into the Great Hall for a State Reception with Scotland’s First Minister, Donald Dewar. Dewar favored us with a brief but witty address on book collecting; although he downplayed his (apparently distinguished) standing as a book collector, he confessed his inability to resist the blandishments of booksellers’ catalogues. It was with shock and dismay that we learned that barely more than a week after the Congress ended, the relatively youthful Dewar had passed away after suffering a stroke.

The program for the Congress informed us that the required attire for the State Reception would be “lounging suits,” and although I am pleased to report that I did not precipitate an international incident by wearing my pajamas, it might well be adjudged a close

thing. By the same token, male participants were encouraged by Congress organizers to hire traditional Scottish dress for this and other events, but I personally thought it poor recompense for the organizers’ splendid hospitality to unduly subject them to the sight of my tartan-clad chubby white bookseller legs. This did not, however, prevent others from attiring themselves thusly.

After the reception we were bused to the Royal Museum of Scotland, an impressive modern structure across the street from Grey Friars Cemetery, for the Welcoming Dinner and Ceilidh (a virtuoso bagpipe performance). Afterwards, we received group lessons in Scottish folk dancing, an event that precipitated merriment in participants and spectators alike.

On Sunday morning the General Assembly of the Congress was held in the Queen Mother’s Conference Centre at the Royal College of Physicians. We were there to ratify the votes cast at the meetings of the ILAB Committee and the National Presidents, and most particularly to inaugurate the League’s new officers: President Kay Craddock of Australia, Vice-President Bob Fleck of the U.S., General Secretary Keith Fletcher of Great Britain, Treasurer Poul Jan Poulson of Denmark, and Committee Members Walter Aliche of Liechtenstein, Frédéric Castaing of France, Arnoud Gerits of the Netherlands, and Michael Steinbach of Germany. After this was done, the congregation retired for a buffet lunch in the building’s Great Hall, misleadingly named the New Library. Perhaps by Edinburgh standards this was a “new” library, but to a callow American modern first-edition dealer, it was hoary with age.

That afternoon we were left to relax, but at 7:00PM were again loaded onto buses for a Gala Dinner at Hopetoun House, about a half-hour outside the city. Hopetoun House is an impressive stone structure, reportedly the largest semi-private residence in Scotland with about 240 rooms, and is home to the Marquis

of Linlithgow. There we were permitted to tour substantial areas of the house, with champagne in hand, admiring the Gainsborough and Henry Raeburn portraits of long-deceased family members. After a time we were piped into dinner, something that was becoming so frequent that I feared I might begin slaver-ing in the future anytime that I might encounter pipe music.

While various courses were served, we were treated to an exhibition of Scottish folk dancing, slightly more accomplished than the efforts of the booksellers the night before. Perhaps the high point of the dinner was a highly amusing and histrionic recitation of Robert Burns’ “Address to a Haggis,” after which we were served a portion of the legendary delicacy with “neeps and tatties” (turnips and potatoes) accompanied by a wee dram of Scotch. Although many seemed to dread this encounter, it was with some surprise that most seemed to find it palatable, and several even applied for a second helping. Heidi, Jessica, and I found ourselves at a table of almost exclusively French speakers, but a game effort was made by all to be collegial: the French dealers tested their imperfect English while I racked my brain for the pathetic remnants of my high school French classes. (These remnants, of course, consisted mostly of vulgarities and insults, the only things that seemed important in high school; but again international incidents were avoided, because our French colleagues were either extraordinarily tolerant or sufficiently dismissive of my efforts not to take offense.) One French dealer seemed particularly to relish the opportunity to engage the haggis, for he exclaimed with delight upon learning we were to be served the dish: “Haggis—*formidable!*”

After the dinner, we entered the front court of Hopetoun House and into a misty drizzle expecting to board the buses back to town, but first we witnessed a performance by a massed group

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The Impact of the Internet on the Specialist: A Survivor's Tale

by Gordon Hollis

This year I had to undergo chemotherapy and major cancer surgery, and then spend months at home recuperating. This episode, which extended over the first nine months of the year, caused me to look back on my life and also allowed me the leisure time to write about it—if remaining home due to post-operative side effects can be considered leisure time. Because my career as a bookseller has always been of great importance to me, not only as a way to make a living but also as a source of emotional satisfaction, I decided to write about how one watershed event affected it: the emergence of bookselling on the Internet. Interestingly enough, I had been analyzing the impact of the Internet for the last few years anyway, because it had, in about 1995, decimated almost overnight the very heart of my business.

For those who don't know me, I have been a dealer in out-of-print and rare books for the last twenty-three years. I originally entered this business believing it to be a serious, if counter-cultural, endeavor that I felt had the possibility of making me a good living. It also promised to be much more interesting than my then-current careers as a spectacularly unpublished poet and a forever-adjunct English professor at a state college in Colorado.

The out-of-print (O.P.) side of my book business was quite specialized. For fifteen years before I decided to abandon it, I carried books mainly in the history of theatre, dance, and costume/fashion, in the price range of \$50–\$500. Generally, I carried nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century books and manuscripts, and my buyers were librarians, authors, and historians. I did carry other merchandise, but my bread and butter was the modern out-of-print book used for research purposes. Although I have a small but visible store on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, where I have been since 1986, I did



Photograph courtesy of Gordon Hollis

ABAA member Gordon Hollis of Golden Legend Inc., Los Angeles, CA.

very little business through my walk-in trade. Instead, mine was a successful catalogue business that issued, between 1986 and 1996, about 150 lists and catalogues describing about 100 to 150 books each. I became well known among my circle of collectors and librarians as having books in many languages and on many theatre-related subjects, including dance notation, dance movements and dance crazes, the history of gymnastics, set design, theatrical architecture and its technical elements, fashion history, national dress, the role of dress and manners in courtship, and many others.

From a financial point of view, my O.P. business was as successful as I wanted it to be. My specialized inventory provided a profit margin that was generally greater than two to one; sometimes it was as great as ten or twenty to one. Customers, furthermore, routinely bought many books, rather than just one or two, from a list. This, as I said, was my bread and butter. It was not my goal to get rich from this line of merchandise, but I did very strongly believe that

it was a central and essential element for stability and growth, the basic and rich soil from which everything else would spring.

I created this kind of business because I wanted to have stability, so that I would not have to worry about cash flow from one month to the next. I knew what instability was like in the rare book business: I had previously experienced a disastrous partnership with an investor for four years, during which Golden Legend Inc. sold only the finest and most luxurious finely bound sets; livres d'artistes, including original books by Miro, Matisse, and Picasso; and modern first editions, mostly signed and inscribed. During this period, no matter how much capital my partner poured in and how much time I spent, the business continued to lose money. I blamed the losses on an inability to find a readily available and profitable type of merchandise. I came to deeply distrust the heart-stopping prices of collectors' books and the inevitable lack of steady

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sales when one has a small, select, and very expensive inventory.

After I split up with my partner, I went “downscale” and started to handle inexpensive and readily available books in performing arts history. I have also always carried, to a lesser degree, the antiquarian book, especially on dance. I was particularly fascinated with older books, although for years I couldn’t afford most of these. I still grow amazed when I hold a 300-year-old book. I’m not interested in the text but in the qualities of the object as an antique—the smell of the paper, the shape of the typefaces, the texture of the binding, the presence of marginal notes, and, in particular, the type of illustration: woodcut, engraving, or etching. In my travels, I occasionally found an early book in my subject. While it was impossible for me to imagine myself regularly handling antiquarian books, I still bought a few, if I could buy them cheaply.

Along with the modern O.P. and the occasional antiquarian book, I sometimes handled the deluxe book in my field. These “luxury” editions were often specially numbered and signed. The theoretical theatre designer Gordon Craig published a number of beautiful books in the teens and twenties. The *Ballets Russes* and the dancers Vaslav Nijinsky and Isadora Duncan were the subjects of several dozen of these deluxe editions, which ranged in price from less than \$1,000 to \$5,000 and up. Although I handled these books, I chose not to invest heavily in either deluxe or antiquarian books, even in later years when I could afford them.

Part of my unwillingness to plunge into a higher-end antiquarian and deluxe inventory was that it seemed an inherently dangerous investment: the more an item cost, the less a margin for profit remained. I believed that the more expensive the item, the more competition for it existed, and the less room there would be for profit. If, for example, I were to buy a book with a Leon

Bakst watercolor for \$5,000 at a public auction, bidding against knowledgeable competition, I would not expect the item to be worth \$10,000 or \$15,000 to a knowledgeable collector. Because many private collectors and institutions are very well aware of public auctions, profit margins for books known as rare in my field seem to be inversely proportional to the keystone ratio of two to one that businesses like mine rely on. In other words, good business holds that you will succeed if you buy something for \$5 and sell it for \$10. You will fail, however, if you buy it for \$5 and sell it for \$6 or \$7.

If I distrusted the mathematics of the \$1,000 rare book, I liked what happened with the \$100 out-of-print specialized book in theatre, dance, and costume. Many librarians and collectors, it seemed to me, could always buy a \$100 book. When a group of baroque dance reconstructionists from Cambridge, Massachusetts, contacted me in need of a copy of Caroso’s *Il Ballarino* from 1581 (one of the first books to teach court dancing), I quickly learned that the last thing they wanted was a rare original edition worth between \$10,000 and \$20,000. They simply needed the text and not the antique object: a paperback would do; a dog-eared, marked-up reprint edition would do; a facsimile would do. Also, many librarians believed that since their acquisitions mission was to develop undergraduate holdings rather than to build an antiquarian book collection, a facsimile would serve their students quite as well as a rare original. Most undergraduate librarians were not on familiar territory with early and rare editions in the first place, and they were very unlikely to risk their job security by spending their entire acquisitions budget on a multi-thousand-dollar rare book. They would, however, and repeatedly did, buy from me \$1,000 worth of \$100 books.

Along the way, I came to believe that scholarship was sometimes better than capital (especially when you don’t have capital). I found that I could market an O.P. book in almost any language, no

matter how obscure, if I could place it in the context of theatrical history. I quickly saw that I could dramatically increase sales if I took the time to describe a book in its own time. As a result, my days became increasingly devoted to researching the background of a book. I would avidly work on a new acquisition attempting to understand it, digging at it the way a fox pokes at a rock in an attempt to dislodge the creature beneath. Back in graduate school at the University of Chicago, where research skills are valued above all others, or perhaps through my bookselling experience itself, I learned a basic concept: every old book presents a series of questions about itself and its time. Just because I didn’t know the answers didn’t mean they didn’t exist. So I set about finding answers to all the questions that a book raised.

Let me give an example: About ten years ago, at the New York book fair, I found among a multitude of early Italian play libretti one with interesting illustrative woodcuts: *Il pellegrino. Comedia nova di m. Girolamo Parabosco* (Venice, 1552). The price of \$300 was well within my comfort limit, so I bought it, speculating that since I had a very good customer for books illustrating the history of stage design, I might be able to sell this one. I thought the little woodcuts in *Il pellegrino* seemed influenced not by the usual medieval scenes from late-fifteenth-century stagings of Terence but by the then-modern theories of staging as defined in Sebastian Serlio’s *Architettura*, which was just becoming popular in the mid-sixteenth century. Digging through every reference book on renaissance Italian theatre that I owned, I verified that I was correct in my thinking. There were no examples I could find of plays from the period showing the new Serlian ideas of stage design. *Il pellegrino* must, then, reflect a very early depiction of modern stage design, making the book quite important in the study of theatrical scenery as it developed over the years.

I sat wondering what I should sell this book for. Although I had paid \$300 for it, the price seemingly had

little to do with what I saw in the book. There may be hundreds of Italian plays from that period extant, but this particular play was special. It was also seemingly rare in that it was not held in any of the European or American libraries that reported their holdings. Therefore, I decided it was worth what an important theatrical book from the period was worth: \$3,500. I sold it immediately to my customer, who was thrilled to have it.

Somewhere along the way, it became clear to me that I wasn't selling the kind of books that most people would consider rare. The books I sold were so specialized they were valued only by a small group of collectors and librarians. My kind of book was just about opposite from the general rare book, such as a first edition of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is not rare at all, although it is expensive. The value of this kind of book is created by a general popularity among collectors, which causes the rising prices. No matter how many copies come to auction or are listed in dealers' catalogues, there are never enough for the market.

For the specialist, the right kind of book would never appear at a major auction, and its value is not often set by competition, but by common sense and the budgetary limitations of those who are interested in purchasing it. Certainly, with *Il pellegrino* I was well within my rights to sell it for \$3,500, because that price is not very high for an important and rare sixteenth-century book on theatre. With modern books, however, I could not overstep the common-sense notions of values operating in the out-of-print market at the time. I couldn't expect, for example, to sell a scarce biography of a German dancer of the 1930s for \$3,000, but I could certainly sell it at a large profit, regardless if I paid \$50 or \$15 or 50¢, since it was scarce and I didn't have much competition from other booksellers. This was the way I grew my business: by buying books in my field for \$50 or \$15 or 50¢, by finding out through research what role they played in the history of theatre, and then by raising their prices by as

much as common sense and the budgetary limitations of my customers would allow.

Soon I was traveling all over the country, then to Europe, and even to Japan in search of inexpensive but important specialized books in the history of theatre. Although the issuance of my lists did not provide huge profits, I never once had a losing month. My sales grew steadily. My reputation grew, also, as I came to know more and more collectors and librarians around the world. Extraordinary profits came when extraordinary opportunities presented themselves. Once I bought a collection of 5,000 mostly ordinary theatre books for a dollar a book, none published before 1860, that was left to a university who decided that it duplicated their holdings. From these thousands of books, I culled a group of almost 700 items on ancient Greek and Roman theatre—an unheard-of number of books on this subject. I sold those 700 books for \$40,000. Another time, I bought from a Northern California dealer, for a small sum, an illustrated book on the dancer Nijinsky that was so rare that I had never heard of it. After a lucky investigation, I came to learn that it was one of only four copies remaining; all others had been destroyed when the publishing house had been bombed at the beginning of World War One. I sold this book at Sotheby's for \$32,500. Since I knew that these opportunities were as rare as the books involved, I refused to grow overly concerned about them. I simply kept to my core business of the homely, \$100 out-of-print book on special aspects of theatrical history. My yearly sales grew steadily up through \$200,000, then \$300,000, then \$400,000 and beyond. This is not so very much money, but I took home at least \$100,000 a year for myself, which was adequate, and I was able to amass a war chest of several hundred thousand dollars. I could never decide how to put these savings to work, since I had a business formula that worked without further capital investment. The books that were profitable for me didn't cost very much, and the books that cost a great deal were rarely prof-

itable. As a result, I did not invest in books when I didn't have potential customers, for the books would only gather dust on the shelves, and I would not invest in books that had all of their potential profit squeezed out of them by other dealers or auction houses.

Jump to the mid 1990s: books everywhere. The out-of-print book world was suddenly awash with books. First a trickle, then a river of books flowed out of the Internet. First Amazon, then Interloc, then Advanced Book Exchange, then Barnes and Noble, then a half-dozen others. Due to the inexpensive fees and user-friendly technology of these databases, small booksellers from all over the world started to offer their holdings online: first from the U.S., then from Australia and from Europe, and now from Russia and Japan. Within a year or two, booksellers, then astute librarians, and finally collectors and scholars were going daily to these databases in order to search for titles that in the past they had found only through the few booksellers they knew.

This development had an immense impact on the prices of O.P. books when search engines like MXBookfinder (later bookfinder.com) and others organized data from online book databases, making it possible for users to instantly compare editions and prices. Most importantly, collectors could now see how many copies were available. These developments completely changed the O.P. book world. Within a year or two, books I used to import from Germany and the Netherlands were now offered by the very dealers I had traveled so far to see. The impact on my specialty was devastating. Soon *everything* was listed, and everything included all those dusty books and pamphlets on tap dancing in Ireland, courtship manners in Burma, pioneer dances in California, WPA set decorations, Mardi Gras, and the circus in the nineteenth century that I had taken the trouble to locate and research. Books that almost never appeared in any catalogues except mine before the advent of

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these databases now started to appear with frequency, in multiple copies, and for prices that were a fraction of mine.

I thought long and hard about what I was witnessing. I concluded that computerization was going to completely transform the out-of-print book business. First I came to realize that many books in my specialty (perhaps in all specialties) had not been rare in the first place; they had simply been unavailable except through an inefficient distribution system of specialty bookshops and catalogues. I also came to realize that the very value of many O.P. books was going to change because of their greatly increased availability. The fact that I prepared an elaborate description did not make the book worth \$200 if four other copies were available at around \$50. When a book's value is based on a scarcity that has ceased to exist, then that value has to come down; it may even evaporate, if too many copies appear.

This computerized revolution in bookselling also served to remind me that the availability of books referred to the availability of the *text* of books and not the physical objects themselves. What would happen, I started to wonder, if, along with the millions and millions of books online, a perfectly readable electronic book came to be developed, a book that everybody liked? (I am just supposing such a thing could be done.) What would then happen to the O.P. market? To follow this line of thinking was to reach a plateau where there appeared the possibility of an entire new world, one where, after 550 years, the common, everyday book would change its basic form and become, for want of a better word, electronic. The very concept, not only of the book but also of the library, could now be imagined in a different form. This has already happened to the library's card catalogue. Given all the possibilities for change, I concluded that my security as a bookseller was threatened. What was the point of con-

tinuing with scarce O.P. books as the center of my business if I would no longer be able to charge for my time and expertise? I simply decided one day that I was no longer going to handle out-of-print material. Period. *Il fin!* There was simply no point in it.

The immensity of this decision didn't fully hit me until quite a while later. My life, for the better part of twenty years, was intimately involved with the research and marketing of those scholarly books I could afford and of which I could be proud. I had sold specialized books on theatre, dance, and costume to libraries from New Delhi to Stockholm to Nova Scotia to Tokyo, and I took great pride in my work. This aspect of my work was now almost certainly finished.

Given that I was going to stick to my decision, I was not at all sure, at the time, of what I was going to do next. There was, of course, a basic question: how I was going to make money? As important, there was also the question of how I *wanted* to make money. I had always looked at my career as a creative way of life. I loved the travel. In the small and intimate bookselling community, I had made friends throughout the U. S., Europe, and even Japan. The yearly rituals of international book fairs and auctions, the numerous catalogues and trips to research libraries, the excitement of opening a shipping carton as if it were a birthday present, all of these played an important part in my emotional life. Like many others in the book business, I had thoughts of leaving it entirely. Aside from the question of what kind of new career a man of fifty-plus years could turn to with the expectation of making a good living, I wasn't quite ready to give up. Even in the most discouraging times, when my lists failed to bring much revenue, I always felt that my expertise had not been challenged by Internet developments. It was simply this "line" of merchandise that had become common, not my expertise as a bookseller. All my years of research in the history of theatre and dance; of making contacts among collectors, historians, and librarians; and—most

importantly—of developing an eye for the important book still had to matter. I didn't quite know where I was going, but I knew there had to be a destination within the book world. I got through the next year or two as best I could. True to my decision, I stopped buying out-of-print books, no matter how attractive they had been in the past. At a book fair in 1997, I remember looking at a scarce book on ice dancing marked \$50 that I had sold in the past for over \$300. Now, I simply walked past it. Those days were over, irrevocably.

What kind of book still requires an expert? This is the question I continually asked myself. Over the next two years, I came to some conclusions. One of these was that deluxe modern books in costume/fashion, theatre, and dance would support life, so to speak. I had always handled some of these: numbered copies of designs by Leon Bakst, who had created the Ballets Russes costumes; books on the set designs of Miro and Picasso that contained original and sometimes signed engravings; limited editions by George Barbier, the art-deco fashion designer; portfolios on Isadora Duncan by Segonzac and a number of other artists, including Rodin. The market for these kinds of books had, if anything, increased. Due to the encroaching databases, these books and portfolios had become more available; however, they seemed somewhat Internet impervious. These books sell in the price range of \$750 to \$5,000, which is a price expensive enough to make the typical collector shy away from buying them from complete strangers. Many customers would hesitate or, in fact, would never buy a deluxe book from an unknown entity online because there are too many unknowns. In fact, the more expensive the object, the less likely a person is willing to buy it from a stranger. So, there was still need for a dealer in this line of merchandise. I found these books quite easy to sell, if priced correctly and in the correct condition. True, they never came cheaply, but it really doesn't matter, because they sold very quickly and I always made something.

The problems for the dealer who handles this kind of books are obvious and discernable at any book fair: competition, price comparison, price cutting, and the inevitable loss of profit. These deluxe books are also handled by dealers in decorative arts and by a number of dealers in illustrated books. At the recent Los Angeles book fair, one of my best customers informed me that she had developed a crush on another dealer there who also handled deluxe dance and costume books. His prices were, she felt, much cheaper than mine. Of course they were! He was so cheap that I bought heavily from him and considered him an important supplier! Easy come, easy come to everybody.

An even bigger problem than competition was that I was not very interested in this kind of merchandise. While deluxe books are beautiful, they are not very challenging. Books are collected in one of two distinct ways: as texts or as symbolic objects. For the historian and scholar, books are always, and only, collected as texts. Even the paper and binding are texts in themselves, the study of which will explain something about the book in its own time. For the connoisseur, on the other hand, books are collected in the same way that one collects paintings or antique chairs or religious relics. The connoisseur searches for the perfect example of the beautiful; in my field that would be books by Craig, Karsavina, Pavlova, Nijinsky, Barbier, Lepape, and Iribe. These artists sell quickly, while books about minor artists sell almost not at all. Therefore, if I wanted to make money, I would have to sell the same books over and over again.

Most of all, I missed the research that was required with out-of-print books. Perhaps I also missed the educational role I played in helping others develop collections. In other words, I defined my role as a bookseller, as an historian whose job it was to explain why the book was worth buying, why the author was worth reading, and why the subject matter was worth studying. There seemed to be only one way to continue to be this kind of bookseller, and that was to move into early printed books.

There was a certain common-sense logic to working more with them: if twentieth-century books were going to inundate the Internet data bases, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books were not, because they were, in fact, rare—and they were going to remain rare no matter how many booksellers came online. Secondly, I realized that rare book libraries around the world would continue to collect the early printed book as the backbone of their collections, and libraries would continue to rely on experienced dealers as their principal suppliers.

I decided to try a little experiment. When I was in Paris in 1997, I saw at an auction preview a fascinating set of early eighteenth-century Dutch engravings of theatrical scenes on the *Commedia Dell'Arte*. I knew this item might be special, but I didn't know how rare or how important. I really couldn't find out, either, because my reference library was 5,000 miles away, and the auction catalogue didn't provide much of a description. I had to either bid or not bid. Because it was an item for which I had no customers, and about which I knew little, there was a big risk involved. On the other hand, buying it now represented a small step forward in my venture into the early printed book field. So, I bid and won the item at about \$4,000.

On returning to Los Angeles, I began plowing through all my reference works (and buying back via the Internet a half-dozen titles I had sold over the years). Within several weeks, I found all I needed to know to authoritatively identify these engravings and to provide thorough background documentation. I even found, in a reference book on the Italian comedy, a complete set of reproductions that guaranteed the completeness of mine. After nailing down the book, I created a full description of which I was proud. With no potential customers, I simply put it in my next catalogue for \$7,500, added some new institutions to my mailing list, and waited. I didn't have to wait long. It immediately sold to Trinity College Library, Dublin, Ireland, one of

Europe's oldest and most distinguished rare book libraries—a library with whom I had never dealt before. With this encouraging sign, I decided to devote much more of my resources to antiquarian books.

Jump to the present. I have learned to live with my decisions. If I don't get fired up by modern limited editions, I've come to appreciate the steady cash flow that they provide. I've also come to realize that new collectors usually enter the field via the modern book. If I wish to cultivate new collectors, then I should speak their language. At book fairs, I now make a display that is quite sumptuous, using both modern and early printed books, and I tend to make a little sales pitch to younger collectors about the importance of older material. Perhaps they will one day realize that early printed books are fabulously interesting, although not quite so accessible as books from our own time.

My business is certainly a different kind of business than before. I used to spend \$10,000 a month on inventory; now, at a recent Christies sale, I spent \$20,000 in the space of two hours on a handful of sixteenth-century Medici festival books. Amazingly, I soon sold my fête books at excellent profits. On the other hand, I am still holding, without any present possibility of selling, a dozen early books on theatrical fireworks, all of which were expensive, and one of which cost me \$4,500! As my inventory continues to grow, and expensive books accumulate on my shelves, I sometimes remember my axiom against putting money into a top-heavy inventory that, when unsold, petrifies on the shelves.

I am happy to report that my theory concerning the price-to-profit ratio of top-end material is not completely correct. I had always thought that the more expensive the book, the less the profit margin. Not true. As long as I don't buy in the very visible areas where it was obvious that everybody was going to compete, perhaps in the Shakespearean arena, I generally have good luck in

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Hollis

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finding specialized material that I can sell at good profits. For example, I sold one of my Medici fête books for \$16,000 to another dealer, even though I purchased it for \$8,000.

Most importantly, if specialized out-of-print books sometimes require a bit of digging, then early printed books can bring an avalanche of mysteries to explore. The decision to move into antiquarian books has brought to me everything that I had lost when I abandoned the O.P. market, plus research challenges that do not exist with modern books. Finally, and paradoxically, the very Internet that destroyed my out-of-print business has now brought me an entire new way to research my books, due to the huge number of new reference tools that have come online; RLIN and OCLC are only the most obvious. I used to complain that I couldn't get out of the store often enough to do the kind of research necessary for some of my books. Now, via the computer, I have access to a huge range of databases and links related to performing arts history. Recently, in the research of an eighteenth-century dance book, I came across a series of

links not only to eighteenth-century dance studies, but also to dress, manners, sexuality, and related subjects.

Have I succeeded? If love of my work is a measure of success, then I certainly have. An amusing story will illustrate how I've adjusted to the massive changes that have affected my business. Not long ago I bought an early Henrik Ibsen play, *Hæermændene paa Helgeland* [The Vikings at Helgeland] (Christiania: Jensen, 1858). Since I did not know of a good bibliography of Ibsen, I couldn't be sure of the publishing history. Somehow, I got the idea of accessing the online catalogue at the University of Oslo to see what editions they had. After fiddling around with my telnet link, I actually got in their system; but, not surprisingly, I couldn't get very far with my limited knowledge of Norwegian. Frustrated, I was about to give up, but I noticed the little email dialogue box at the bottom of the library home page. So, I posed my question about the Ibsen edition to whomever might read it. Within two days, in perfect English, the reference librarian answered my questions: indeed, I had the first edition; my title was printed in April, 1858, as a supplement to the newspaper, *Illustreret Nyhedsblad*; and this edition was rare, even in Scandinavia. Furthermore, she provided a list of bibliographies and

invited me to visit her beautiful library if I ever were in Norway.

The future? For a cancer survivor, it is all-important to look to the future with both tenacity and excitement. I mention my cancer, as I did at the beginning of this article, because it, as much as the Internet, has changed my life. The Internet almost drove me from the rare book world, and cancer almost killed me. Had my cancer occurred during the time of my greatest discouragement about my future in the book business, it undoubtedly would have killed me.

I will end this article with a chilling but ultimately hopeful little anecdote. Early this year, after my seemingly treatable cancer had spread into my pelvis and I was a candidate for chemotherapy, the oncologist at Norris Cancer Hospital at USC looked at my CAT scan report and turned to me: "The cancer has been in there long enough to spread to your lymph nodes, but it hasn't. You must have excellent resistance." I instantly knew the source of this resistance. I have a great deal to do in this world. After a five-year battle with the Internet to keep my career, I certainly was up for a little fistfight with cancer. I was at the moment of greatest energy and strength in my profession. My immune system had gotten mad, had put on brass knuckles, and was kicking ass. ■

Presidents' Meeting

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nearly one-third of ILAB funds, has only once witnessed one of its members elected as ILAB President. That one time is now forty years in the past.

Additionally, few American representatives have been seen fit by ILAB to serve as officers on the ILAB Committee, the body that conducts the day-to-day business of the organization. While grievances of relatively recent vintage exist as well, the powers-that-be in the League did see ABAA past-President Rob Rulon-Miller fit to serve as General Secretary of the Committee and to allow another ABAA past-President, Bob

Fleck, to lend his considerable expertise to ILAB's fledgling Internet efforts.

Recently, ABAA officers and the Board of Governors have given considerable attention to ILAB matters. For perhaps the first time, the potential exists for the League to function as something more than just an international expression of collegiality: the League can establish an Internet presence that might actually have a meaningful and positive impact on all of us in the trade.

Thus it was that many of us were disappointed when Rulon-Miller wasn't nominated to head the Committee in this year's elections, something we had more than some reason to believe might occur.

As a consequence of this unhappy result, and as a prelude to the Presidents'

Meeting, several concerned members of the ABAA began an effort to galvanize support from the National Presidents (who actually vote on the Committee's officers) to nominate another American, Bob Fleck, as Vice-President of the Committee. Among those leading the effort were Rulon-Miller and our immediate past-President, Priscilla Juvelis.

As ABAA President, it fell to me to nominate Bob as well as to introduce several resolutions to the Committee and the Presidents, both of which served to indicate our seriousness about participating further and more fully in the decisions and day-to-day administration of ILAB. This was a relatively time-consuming process, but truth be told, I felt that my only real personal contribution

was an implied threat to the other presidents: if they didn't hew to our positions, I held a mandate from the ABAA to persist until I had exhausted their supplies of fax paper. This effort apparently caused some consternation in the Committee and elsewhere, and at least one past member wrote to all involved decrying this unseemly attempt to influence the election process.

Aware of having been the public face of this effort, I was not all that optimistic that I would be greeted with open arms when the Presidents' Meeting convened in the library of the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh. However, I need not have worried. At least outwardly, all the pleasantries were observed. ILAB Presidents-of-Honor John Lawson and Anthony Rota were particularly collegial and helpful, as they proved to be throughout the Congress.

The process of the meeting itself might uncharitably be described as somewhat tedious, despite the considerable and mostly successful efforts of outgoing ILAB President Alain Nicolas to keep the meeting moving along briskly. The necessary but time-consuming ILAB requirement to provide all comments and remarks in both French and English apparently taxed the abilities of some present to be coaxed from the beckoning arms of Morpheus. Perhaps my greatest achievement at the meeting was in remaining at least nominally awake for its entire duration, something that couldn't be said for all of the participants, particularly after we had repaired for lunch a few blocks away at the boyhood home of Robert Louis Stevenson, now a private residence but provided to us through the good offices of ABA President Elizabeth Strong.

At the Presidents' Meeting the National Presidents ratify decisions reached by the ILAB Committee, a process that seems, in practice, akin to leading a herd of horses to water and trusting that they will drink. However, I was heartened to see that several of the Presidents, rather than trusting blindly the views of the Committee, seemed particularly prepared, well-informed, and engaged by the issues in question, partic-



Photograph courtesy of Bob Fleck

ABAA President Tom Congalton (center front), ILAB Committee Members Walter Alicke (left) and Michael Steinbach (right) at the Presidents' Meeting in Edinburgh.

ularly those related to the Internet. I was especially interested in the well-reasoned and articulate remarks of Presidents Emmanuel Lhermitte of France and Eric Speeckaert of Belgium.

While most of the meeting was taken up with matters related to the Internet, which Bob Fleck deals with elsewhere in these pages, I am happy to report that other ABAA initiatives met with almost uniform success, including the election of Bob Fleck as Vice-President of ILAB.

In truth, Bob's nomination was met with much less resistance than we had feared, as his tireless efforts on behalf of ILAB, particularly in the sphere of Internet development, and his frank and congenial demeanor served to put the ILAB Committee and Presidents on notice that he was less motivated by personal recognition than by an earnest desire to participate within the ILAB framework. I was very pleased to be able to repeat my nomination of him for Vice-President at the meeting, and I will take it on faith that the complimentary things I said about him made it safely into the simultaneous French translation.

One bit of business was mildly distressing: a carefully worded rebuke by

the outgoing President directed to outgoing General Secretary Rob Rulon-Miller for not attending the meeting. I had been warned in advance that this might occur; I spent the short duration of the statement discreetly scratching myself, gazing off into space, and playing with the little flag that had been thoughtfully placed on a wooden base before each national president. Any necessity of replying to this statement on my part was negated when another statement was immediately read into the record thanking Rob for his efforts on behalf of the League, particularly for his work on the ILAB *Newsletter* and his initiative to reorganize the ILAB By-Laws.

Four ILAB member organizations, because of their large number of members, have two votes each at the Presidents' Meeting: Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. This year, I was given the proxy of Brazilian President Jordão, who was unable to attend the meeting. Thus, when the time came to vote on the various issues and those with two votes were asked to raise both hands, I was in the slightly ridicu-

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Presidents' Meeting

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lous position of having not only to raise two hands, but to also balance a Brazilian flag in whatever manner I thought it might best be noticed. I think the meeting's appointed vote scrutineers were a little confused by these maneuvers, but luckily none of the votes were so close that they required a recount.

Another ABAA proposal, to schedule more working meetings for National Presidents, was also approved, our intention being to engage the Presidents in the business of ILAB without having to rely so heavily on the filter

of the ILAB Committee for information and guidance.

Two other ABAA proposals, one looking to study and revise the ILAB By-Laws and another requesting ILAB to produce a five-year budget, were tabled for future consideration at my request as a gesture of confidence in the new Committee, whose members seemed to signal their willingness to explore these suggestions without being mandated to do so.

I was impressed by the seriousness of purpose that I think was reflected by all of those involved in the ILAB Presidents' Meeting, and it was heartening for me to see that ILAB might indeed yet serve a purpose beyond promoting international collegiality and the occa-

sional book fair (not that either of these are inconsiderable goals). I think that the chronic tendency of some American dealers to dismiss ILAB as a potentially positive force on our trade must be discarded, and in the future, despite periodic setbacks and what some might feel are occasional slights from our European colleagues, we would do well to remain as engaged and active as possible in determining the future direction of the League.

I hope that we will continue these efforts, and I look forward to the next Presidents' Meeting, hosted by our New England Chapter (a project ably headed by Michael Ginsberg) in the days leading up to next year's Boston Book Fair. ■

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in a driving rainstorm after a book fair, what are the most unpleasant chores that we face as booksellers? Three things come to mind: dealing with deadbeats, confounding con artists, and tripping up time-wasters. These might not be what came to *your* mind, but they are what came to *my* mind; and I'm writing this article, so that's what this article is about. Deadbeats, con artists, and time-wasters cost us all money, but more important, they cost us time. As I've gotten older, I've become more and more aware that I have less and less time to spare. Every sunset draws me closer to the dawn of a new day that puts me a little closer to death. And any time stolen or wasted is time I never get back. There's me and there's death, and there's this stuff in-between called time, and I resent people who try to take away any of that stuff. These happy thoughts inspired the title of this article, which expresses the philosophy guiding my actions when I am obliged to deal with those who would steal my time. If I've learned anything, it is this: a little time and effort invested up-front saves a huge amount of time and trouble down the road.

Deadbeats

Collecting debts is a bad job that's not made any more agreeable by the responses we get when pursuing unpaid bills: lies about the check being in the mail, overtly hostile jabs as if it's all our fault for sending the book in the first place, or worst of all, pathetic excuses rooted in the messy personal lives of customers whose intimate secrets we'd usually rather not know.

Booksellers are a Lucky Lot

Yet, when it comes to debt collection, we are far more fortunate than those in most other occupations. If you have doubts, just ask any doctor, lawyer, or building supply wholesaler how much time they spend trying to collect overdue bills and how often they must write off bad debts. Booksellers come closer to collecting 100 percent of their debts than do the vast majority of business owners, and for good reason: Their major client base (libraries, booksellers, collectors, and readers) is highly motivated to pay its bills. Libraries may grind slowly and exceedingly finely, but like all public institutions they ultimately do pay their bills. The vast majority of booksellers themselves tend to pay their bills, if only because they are in this line of work, and because they enjoy what they are doing and want to keep doing it. Collectors

tend to pay, because most of them know that people who are "slow pay" are not the first to be quoted the best books—and, if your customers don't know this, let them know. Even the very worst collectors tend to pay, because, like drug addicts, they don't want to be cut off from their supply cold turkey. General readers tend to pay because people who are readers tend to be thoughtful and moral, as are 99 percent of the population. This is fortunate because many book businesses operate on relatively small profit margins or with small staffs, meaning that any time devoted to debt collection is time lost that could have been spent cataloguing, buying, or selling books. Or cleaning that bathroom. These "hidden" costs of dealing with debt collection are critical to businesses that don't have the staff, the time, or the profit margin to spare.

Screening and Profiling

For that reason, it's best to avoid the "slow-pay/no-pay" crowd by screening buyers before they get a chance to stiff you. The good news is that you can screen and assess your customers, predict which ones are most likely to be "slow pay" or "no pay," and practice effective ways of dealing with customers who fall behind in paying their bills. But first, a disclaimer: Booksellers vary widely in the way they approach this

problem because booksellers vary widely in the nature and scope of their operations. A bookseller with a large used-book store on a busy street is likely to have a large percentage of walk-in sales to strangers for small amounts. A specialist rare book dealer operating from a rural home may sell mostly by catalogue or by private quote to well-known customers for large amounts. And, Internet sales have become a major factor for most booksellers, large and small, and these require a whole new set of skills for controlling losses. Our individual circumstances vary, and for this reason it should be obvious that not everything I present here will apply to every situation.

My views on this subject are naturally shaped by my own experience. I was a bookstore manager for a nationwide chain when a teenager; in the 1970s I was a university rare book librarian; in the 1980s I was the literature manager for the Jenkins Company; and for the last thirteen years I've operated a rare-book business as a sole proprietor. I have a computerized customer database of more than 7,000 people, of whom less than half are regularly sent catalogues; most of the others have interests that might result in me quoting them something now and then. I also maintain a database of more than 800 deadbeats, and I screen all new customers against that database. I screen my customers by sending them a mailing-list form. If they do not fill in the form, they don't become a customer. I ask for a home phone number, a business phone number, email address, specific collecting interests, and both mailing and street addresses. On first orders, I require several book trade references. I actually call references before shipping anything, since one in five people who supply references give fictitious ones, or else their references have only bad things to say about them! If a customer has no trade references, I require payment in advance. If a customer pays in advance with a money order instead of with a check, I make a note of this. For credit purposes, a check that clears counts for something—especially a check bearing

the full address and phone number of the account holder, a high check number, and a date code indicating a long-established account; a money order is meaningless. Three of the worst deadbeats I ever dealt with all paid for their first purchases with money orders. If a new customer tells me his or her phone number is unlisted (UL), I ask for it anyway. Only about 1 percent of my customers have ULs, but 50 percent of those who have tried to stiff me have ULs. Clearly, people with ULs are not bad all people, but it is a risk factor: someone with an UL is more likely to be a deadbeat than someone without. If a customer provides an anonymous email address from Yahoo!, hotmail.com, go.com, mailcity.com, msn.com, usa.net, junio.com, or some other generic online email service, I ask for the email address at their ISP. Why? Because generic email addresses are the cyber version of an UL. To determine whether an email is from an online email account, visit the domain by substituting "www" in place of the sender's name and the "at" sign ("www.cyberdude.com" for "deadbeat@cyberdude.com") and look for any offers of free email service. If I don't learn about a customer's employment through casual conversation, I use a nationwide reverse phone directory (*SelectPhone* CD) to get the name of the business or employer for the phone number the customer has supplied. Why? Here's a breakdown of the twenty-eight customers who have required me to go to extra trouble to collect their unpaid bills: attorneys, 7; college students, 4; professors, 4; dentists, 4; Texas Baptist preachers, 3; booksellers, 2; doctors, 2; nurse, 1; and movie producer, 1.

In thirteen years, these twenty-eight people have let their bills go unpaid, each requiring three dunnings, and this is what they do for a living. I make no moral judgments about these professions (I was once a college student, and some of my best friends are attorneys), but with new customers I use caution in direct proportion to how many risk factors I see in their profile. It is also probably worth noting that a disproportionate number of my best customers are owners

of privately held businesses and that no self-employed business owner has ever required a third dunning.

Another part of the screening profile includes the age of my customer. Of those who have required extra dunning, one was over 60, two were between 50 and 60, two were between 40 and 50, and twenty-three were under 40. Those who require dunning tend to be ten years younger, on average, than those in my general customer base. And they tend to be unmarried, unlike those in my general customer base.

I have never been able to determine any geographic trends among American deadbeats, other than the fact that all three of my deadbeat preachers were Texans and Baptists. Southerners, Yankees, and Californians all seem about the same when it comes to paying—or not paying—their bills. While their geographical location itself is not a risk factor, the distance customers live from the bookseller to whom they owe money does matter. I've encountered more than a few deadbeats who were able to maintain good relations with booksellers in their own locale, but whose reputations declined the farther afield I inquired about them. When asking for references, I'm more interested in hearing about a bookseller across the country than about a buddy across town.

Proximity may also come into play, as well as language and common cultural attributes, when it comes to screening overseas orders. While it is my nearly uniform practice to require prepayment on overseas orders, I'd suggest making it a habit to ship overseas orders by insured mail only (parcel post). Many overseas customers request shipment by uninsured mail (AO, airmail printed matte, or sea-bag), and that virtually guarantees that a package will be reported as undelivered when shipping to some countries. Insured mail to Western Europe, Canada, England, Japan, and Australia is rarely lost in transit. But insured mail to Mexico, South America, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and Indonesia is high risk, with loss rates

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two and three times higher than for other parts of the world.

Even sex is a risk factor. Of those 28 problem customers, 6 were female. Females comprise a little less than 5 percent of my general customer base, but 21 percent of my deadbeats. Again, I make no judgments about this (my spouse is female and so is my Mom), but in assessing risk, it is a factor, just as being young and male is a risk factor when applying for automobile insurance.

I have also noticed that those buying gifts, although a small percentage of my total offline buyers, require dunning more often than collectors buying for themselves. This pattern even applies to some of my regular customers who pay for the books they buy for themselves on time. While buying books as gifts is not common when selling from a catalogue or by private quote, buying books as gifts has become extremely popular on the Internet. Although reports vary, my experience has been similar to what I've heard from most other booksellers: about 25 to 30 percent of online "buyers" never send a check, or else they provide an invalid credit card number. Remember that gift-givers lack the motivations that tend to keep collectors and drug addicts in line. Most such online sales represent the first, last, and only book you may sell to that person, and under those circumstances some people just don't care what some lowly bookseller thinks of them.

Finally, I have also noticed that when good customers begin to take longer and longer to pay their bills, the trend rarely reverses itself. Slow-pays almost always evolve into no-pays, a fact worth remembering.

While the actual numbers I cite from my own experience are small, they are statistically significant. They are not a mere sampling, but instead they comprise the entire population of deadbeats from a pool of more than 7,000 customers. And while it is beyond the scope of this article to explore all of the

social, economic, and psychological reasons that might account for these numbers, I do know this: If a 28-year-old unmarried female Argentine attorney with no trade references, an unlisted phone number, an email address at hotmail, only a post office box for a mailing address, and only vague collecting interests expresses a wish to buy a gift for a friend, then orders a book and pays for it with a money order, I'm going to exercise more caution than I would with a 65-year-old married male business owner in Austin who has trade references, a published phone number, an ISP email address, home and business street addresses, specific collecting interests, and an established bank account.

Dialing for Dollars

Let's assume you have done everything right (you have screened the customer, exercised due caution, etc.), but somehow a customer has ended up with your book, and you have not ended up with their money. How do you collect? I've heard from booksellers who relate stories of how they've cursed and yelled and threatened a customer to collect an overdue bill, but those stories usually don't have happy endings.

My own approach in collecting an overdue invoice is based in part on advice from a friend who worked at a collection agency. The most effective method is to increase the pressure steadily and politely in a carefully prescribed sequence, letting the customer know the next step in the sequence each step of the way. One benefit of doing it this way, especially if you are dealing with a hard-core deadbeat, is that you train the deadbeat to expect that you will do exactly what you say you are going to do. First, send a statement and invite the deadbeat to call. Then send a second statement, followed up with a phone call to the customer's home or business. In that phone call, speaking in a deliberate, calm, and pleasant voice, express concern and ask why the payment has been delayed. Never ask, "Why aren't you going to pay for this book?" That kind of question, especially when combined

with threats, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Listen carefully to the customer's answers and, if appropriate, ask for partial payments; failing an agreement on partial payments, request the return of the book, "So that we can remain friendly, and you can continue to do business with me and other booksellers." Say this even if you know you're never selling this person another book as long as you live. Remember that your goal is to collect the payment, not vent your spleen. The third statement should be the final statement, marked thusly, and sent with a letter stating how many days will pass before the bill is turned over to a collection agency or attorney. Follow it up with a call just days after the deadbeat gets that final statement, again speaking in the same calm but firm voice as before and again offering to accept the return of the book, and remind the customer that the book trade is a relatively small community, that dealers talk to each other frequently, that people who don't pay their bills quickly get reputations, and that you intend to contact other booksellers to see if this unpaid bill is part of a pattern of behavior. Do not raise your voice or make any direct threats. Deadbeats are used to dealing with angry people and idle threats. Deadbeats are not used to people who stay calm and who have done each thing they said they were going to do, every step of the way. To a deadbeat used to ignoring angry, threatening merchants, a calm, deliberate person can be hard to ignore.

In my experience, only two deadbeats have ever required action beyond this third dunning. One was a West Virginia lawyer who had stiffed several booksellers in a very similar way. First, he'd buy a book or two and pay on time; then he would order a more expensive book for which he would not pay. Although he'd done all of his business by mail and the local postal inspector had made it clear that the lawyer had committed mail fraud (his behavior with each bookseller established the legally required "pattern of behavior"), the regional postal inspector was not prosecuting cases involving less than \$50,000. I then

brought the case to the attention of the local district attorney in this deadbeat's West Virginia hometown. It took a few months more, but when threatened with local prosecution that would lead to the loss of his license to practice law, he paid his debts to each bookseller, and in one case he returned the book in question. Even at the thirteenth hour, with his back against the wall and his livelihood threatened, this deadbeat tried to clear his account with one bookseller by supplying a bogus credit card number.

The other case involved an \$85 purchase by a university professor. The deadbeat professor moved, and it was not worth pursuit. After consulting with my attorney, I published his name and the facts in my next catalogue, carefully worded to avoid libel. He had stiffed at least one other bookseller that I knew about, and if he was like most deadbeats, he likely didn't stop at two. For a lousy \$85 he ruined his reputation with 3,000 dealers, collectors, and libraries; it was the least I could do. And, any potential deadbeats who read my catalogue got a glimpse of what might be in store for them. About five years later I got a phone call from this deadbeat professor. He'd gone to work in the English Department at a large Texas university, and in a casual conversation he had with his department chair, my name had come up. Later, at some library function, he met the university provost, and my name came up again. Suddenly, he'd gotten religion and wanted to do right by me, or so he said. I told him to send a check for \$85 (interest free!). He said he would send a check that day, and even mentioned that he still had the book and liked it very much and did not want to return it. But he never did send payment. I called his office after a couple of weeks and left a polite message, but got no response. I guess his urge to be a deadbeat was overwhelming. Clearly, he had enough money and motivation to spur any rational person to action. The university fired him about a month later. I'm going to plead the Fifth on what may have led to his firing and just make the general observation that some deadbeats will take incredible risks, even

when the amount of money involved is trivial. For many deadbeats, the monetary amount is not as important as the psychological forces at play. And for many booksellers, the money is not as important as the time spent dealing with deadbeats and their pathologies.

Con Artists

Booksellers have always had to guard against forgers, people offering stolen books, and the like, but with the rise of the Internet, a once minor school of con artistry has become a major movement. The Internet has made it easier than ever to steal descriptions and images. Booksellers have always cribbed notes from each others' descriptions without crossing the line of copyright infringement. But the Internet now makes it possible for anybody to steal entire descriptions and images with just a few clicks of a button. The reason this problem has mushroomed is not simply because it is easy, but because the theft of such descriptions and images supplies a missing element (or the *appearance* of it) in the Internet economy: expertise.

The Theft of Expertise

While the Internet has the ability to bring buyers and sellers together directly; it does not yet supply the expertise and added value that is provided by the middleman (the bookseller). Any imbecile who finds a book in a chicken shed in rural Arkansas can now, using an online book database or online auction venue like eBay, sell the book directly to a collector in Los Angeles. But if the seller doesn't have the expertise to examine (collate) and describe (catalogue) the book, then he or she is forced to rely on the buyer's expertise. Or, the seller can simply steal a description off the Internet and appear to have a level of knowledge and expertise that he or she does not possess. By stealing an image or obtaining a scan by email, the con artist can mislead potential buyers, who will think they are buying or bidding on a pristine copy rather than on an item with petri dish covers

that will contaminate their entire library. In the case of online auctions, the seller may not even own the book being offered for sale and may in fact be offering the property of others without their permission, thereby causing harm to the future salability of that property. If a potential buyer recognizes the source of the description or image, he or she may be misled into thinking that the owner of the stolen description or image (an ethical and honest bookseller) has some connection or partnership with the seller (an unethical and ignorant thief). Or the buyer may presume that the use of the description or image signifies that the book was once sold or examined by the bookseller from whom the description or image was stolen. In every case where a description or image is used without permission, copyright infringement is being committed against the owner of the description or image, and fraud is being committed against any potential buyer.

Those who post descriptions and images to their websites and to online databases can protect the images with electronic watermarks, but they cannot protect their descriptions on book databases. While those who steal descriptions are not intelligent, they *are* clever; in the case of those who sell via online auctions like eBay, con artists know that in order to sell successfully they must include an image of what they are selling. To get such images, they simply pose as a potential buyer, contact booksellers via email, and ask for scans. To avoid having my time wasted by such con artists, I no longer send scans via email to anyone. I offer instead to send a scan by snail mail; it's hard to imagine a serious buyer declining an offer of a scan that would arrive in three or four days. I also routinely search the eBay buyer and seller fields for the email addresses from which such requests originate to see if such requests are coming from eBay sellers. In nearly every instance this turns out to be the case, and I use the VERO system at eBay (vero@ebay.com) to have auctions ended when I find one of my

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descriptions has been stolen. I also search eBay by a few keywords typical of words and phrases found in my own descriptions, and then use the VERO system to end any infringing auctions. I also contact ISPs for the email addresses of those who infringe on my descriptions and send a form letter composed by my attorney advising the firms of the infringement and threatening legal action if the email account is not closed immediately. None of this is terribly time consuming (both my VERO and ISP infringement notices are stored as form letters in my email system), and the time spent has proven effective. Over the past year, the number of infringing auctions and requests for scans have dropped from two or three per day, to just two or three per month. During that same time, the percentage of people who ask for scans and actually take me up on my offer for snail mail images has increased from one out of ten to half of all requests, and most of those have resulted in sales.

Every now and then, somebody who has stolen one of my descriptions will actually turn themselves in—though not deliberately. Typically, I'll get a call or an email from somebody asking me to explain some issue point or bibliographical reference. If the request comes by email, I ask them to give me a call at their convenience. These calls start out just like calls from real customers asking about a book they want to buy, but during the course of the conversation it becomes clear that the caller has used my description to sell a copy of the same book—or what they thought was the same book. These con artists have called me because their customer has asked them some question (usually because *their* book does not match *my* description) and they don't have the expertise to provide even a semblance of a plausible explanation. I always advise them to have their customer give me a call.

Assorted Time-Wasters

Free Appraisals

We booksellers have always had to deal with people who want to waste our time for their own benefit. The most familiar example is the person who wants a free appraisal—so he or she can then offer the book for sale to somebody else, or put it up for auction. Sometimes these time-wasters make themselves quite clear, and even expect us to steer them to someone to whom they can sell the book. Others pose as people who are “thinking of selling” the book for which they want the free appraisal. In general, I ask them to bring the book to the phone (this eliminates quite a few right away). I then ask a series of yes or no questions about the book without answering any questions they may ask—but the questions they ask sometimes reveal their real purpose in calling. Once I know what they have, I either tell them I'm not interested or that I must examine the book in order to make a fair offer. The wheat and the chaff usually separate quickly at this point. Those seeking free appraisals will persistently continue asking questions about the book even though I've told them I'm not interested. And it's amazing how many people want me to think that they trust me implicitly to make them a fair offer (sight unseen!), but don't trust me enough to send the book to me by insured mail to close the sale.

Free Consultations

Still other time-wasters seek free appraisals by posing as owners of a book, when in fact the book in question is one they are thinking of buying from another bookseller or online auction—they just want some expert advice before they spend their money (with somebody else). They expect the kind of consultation booksellers usually reserve for their better customers and colleagues. One local character (who never bought anything from me and also never failed to snatch a fistful of my free catalogues at every local book show) got away with this for more than a month before I caught on. He was calling or emailing

me almost weekly to ask if I had a copy of one book or another by a particular author. When I'd say no, he'd then ask what such a book would bring if I were to have one for sale. His calls were annoying, and I gave evasive answers to discourage them, but he persisted. On his fifth or sixth call I recognized the book he was describing as one I'd seen on eBay a day or two earlier and realized he was calling me every time he saw something by that author appear on eBay. Using his email address, I checked his bidding record on eBay and confirmed my hunch. The next time he called I politely let him know I did not have the time to advise him on his eBay bidding, and the calls stopped.

Free eBay Appraisals

Another favorite way to obtain a free appraisal is to offer an item on eBay at an absurdly high reserve. I'd noticed items from time to time being offered with insanely high reserves and had just assumed these were from sellers with inflated notions of value. But while standing in a booth at an antiques flea market, I listened as two vendors openly discussed their use of eBay to obtain free appraisals for things they knew nothing about. By listing the item with a low opening bid but an extremely high reserve, they could gather a lot of bids on an item and thus get an idea of what it might be worth. Since the object was not likely to reach the reserve, they had no commission to pay, just the listing fee. And if they decided to sell the item to the high bidder, they could contact him or her and do so, avoiding a commission. This is something to keep in mind when you are bidding on eBay, and the auction ends without reaching reserve.

Cyber-Hawking

In days of yore, it was difficult to know if people were hawking their books to various dealers, but with email, a quick check of the header will sometimes (not always) reveal if the suspect email has been sent to a dozen, or fifty, or a hundred other dealers. Emails of this kind, when sent from generic online email

accounts, are almost always a bulk mailing, or otherwise they are not what they seem. Think about it: if somebody wants to sell you a book or needs your advice, why would they hide their true identity? There are legitimate privacy concerns on the Internet; they do not apply in these cases.

Catalogue Collectors

In the old days, I could expect an avalanche of postcards after every one of my *AB Weekly* ads, many asking for catalogues or quotes, but most simply scrawled with the demand, "Please add me to your mailing-list" or "Send me your catalogues." Typically, they had noted vague interests—if they had any interests stated at all—and when they did claim specific interests they often could not spell them correctly: Jay Frank Doby, Earnest Hemingway, John Stinebeck. I still have some of those postcards on my "bulletin board of shame." I would send a sample catalogue or quote to those whose requests looked legitimate, and I entered every name into my computer for future tracking. It was expensive and time-consuming. I rarely get postcards now, but email has taken their place. And screening catalogue requests by email is a breeze compared to the old days of sorting through illiterate, handwritten postcards and articulate requests neatly typed on embossed letterheads. I now ask people to supply specific interests and tease information out of them before investing much time or trouble. I send out only a tenth as many sample catalogues and quotes as I once did, and with virtually 100 percent favorable results.

Orders That are Not Orders

The cost of selling books on the Internet is just a fraction of the cost of selling books by catalogue, by quote, at book fairs, or through an open shop. But unlike those other venues, an Internet order is not always an order. In four years of selling via the Net, my experience has been that roughly 30 percent of all orders that come via email without a credit card number do not result in a sale. People often use the order buttons

at the various book databases to ask questions, and many others apparently change their minds faster than they can push buttons. I've heard complaints from many booksellers who say they put a book on hold, only to find a week or two later that the person placing the order was not serious. The solution is simple. When I get such an order, I reply by letting the person know the total due and asking them to reply immediately and confirm their order, "so that I can place the book on hold." I find out right away if an order is serious. No confirmation, no hold: no time wasted. This also reduces the problem that arises when a second order arrives for a book on hold. Because the Internet caters to the American fondness for instant gratification, by the time you realize the first order is not serious a few days later, the second order has sometimes already found another copy. I also do not delete a book from my database until payment is received. A book search service in New England once placed a firm order for a \$200 book, and when the payment had not arrived ten days later, I sent an email reminder. They replied that they were waiting for me to "get the book off the Web" before they contacted their customer to quote the book. I declined, and two weeks later got an order for the book from a fellow who turned out to be—guess who—"their customer." He's now "my customer," which seems only fair, seeing as how he bought *my* book (and saved \$350). I guess when you operate a search service with no capital investment in inventory and have everything drop-shipped, you need a 175 percent profit margin.

Orders placed with credit cards are not always orders either. The Internet has made credit card scams easier than ever. Stolen card numbers are now commonplace, and claims for non-delivery of merchandise are a growing problem and are nearly always decided in favor of the cardholder. One place on the Net that gives excellent advice on protecting yourself from credit card fraud is www.scambusters.org. Any bookseller who takes plastic and ignores this website does so at their peril.

Make Your Life Easy

Keep A Database of Deadbeats, Con Artists, and Time-Wasters

The single most important part of my screening process is my deadbeat file. The principle behind this database is that, although learning from your own mistakes is good, learning from the mistakes of others is cheaper and saves time. Put another way, I like to know who is doing what unto whom before they get around to doing something unto me. All new customers are checked against my deadbeat file. This is a steadily growing database of more than 800 individuals and businesses who fall into one of the following unsavory categories: they do not pay their bills, they are con artists, they have been convicted of fraud or theft, they are mentally unbalanced, or else they are a time-waster. My actual computer codes are DB, CON, EXCON, THIEF, NUTS, WASTE. Whenever a bookseller mentions a deadbeat in conversation, or I read about book thieves or con artists who have been arrested or convicted, I enter their names, the details, and my sources of information in my database. Good sources of information on deadbeats include other booksellers during duller moments at book fairs; publications that report on thefts, scams, arrests, and convictions (*Maine Antique Digest* comes to mind); organizations that report the expulsion of members (Universal Autograph Collectors Club is one); and eBay's feedback system. I add one or two deadbeats a week these days (I used to add just two or three a month), and almost as often, I hear from somebody in this elite group requesting a catalogue or ordering a book. While I cannot legally publish or circulate my deadbeat database, I do respond candidly when fellow dealers call me because my name has been given as a reference; if all dealers did the same, we'd all be better off. It is my hope that someday soon a password-protected version of the "open accounts" file that the ABAA has had for years will be

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accessible to members at the ABAA Web site. The time it takes me to maintain my own deadbeat database is minimal, and saves me not only both catalogue printing and postage costs, but prevents untold headaches later. And a deadbeat file is forever. Deadbeats never seem to go away. A deadbeat I first encountered in 1968 contacted me earlier this year asking for catalogues. Another deadbeat who plagued the Jenkins Company in the early 1980s, and spent the late 1980s and early 1990s in Federal prison, has contacted me several times since getting out of prison, asking to be added to my mailing list, and he recently approached one of my better customers with exactly the same con that landed him in prison.

Screen Customers on the Internet

The Internet has opened up new channels for commerce as well as new ways to carry out scams. The good news is that it has made screening customers easier than ever. The online telephone directories are an excellent source of information. ATT (anywho.com), GTE (bigbook.com), Yahoo! (people.yahoo.com), theultimates.com, switchboard.com, and whowhere.com are all huge databases where phone numbers can be cross-checked, addresses verified, etc. However, I have not yet found an online site that allows cross-checking addresses for neighbors as easily as does the *SelectPhone* phone directory on CD (sold by Info USA, 800-992-3766). Neighbors are an astonishingly helpful source of information when tracking down a deadbeat, since not all neighbors adore each other. *SelectPhone* allows you to click a "neighbor" button and generate a list of everybody up and down the same street as your deadbeat. Using house numbers you can quickly tell who lives on either side or across the street from your deadbeat, and you can give any of them a friendly call. A neighbor once told me the name and phone number of a 20-something deadbeat's mother;

when I called the young deadbeat, I told him how ashamed his mother would be. After ignoring months of dunning, his check arrived in a few days.

Email addresses open new doors to screening new customers. By entering an email address in the buyer or seller fields on the eBay search page, you can quickly learn something about the buying habits of a customer (for the last thirty days anyway), but this source must be used with caution. I buy both cheap and expensive books on eBay, but my wife buys antique pattern glass and cheap Victorian trade cards; in any given month my eBay purchases might not accurately reflect my level of buying. Some people use more than one user-ID on eBay, which might obscure their complete buying or selling records. And more sophisticated collectors in some fields might rarely see anything on eBay that they would want. But most of the time both buying and selling patterns are very clear. The eBay feedback system must also be used with caution. It's easier to amass positive feedback as a buyer than as a seller, and most eBay users are reluctant to leave negative feedback for fear of getting negative feedback in reprisal. As an experiment, I compared the feedback records of two dozen people on my deadbeat list against the feedback records of some of my better customers. A pattern quickly emerged, and I now apply the following rule-of-thumb: if somebody in eBay has one negative feedback in their first one hundred feedbacks, they deserve extreme caution. If they have more than two hundred feedbacks, with one percent or greater negative feedbacks, avoid them; likewise if they have tagged their feedbacks as "private," which blocks viewing their feedbacks altogether. But don't take a perfect feedback record too seriously either; I should mention that I found several deadbeats (including a book thief and a man convicted of mail fraud) with flawless feedback records. I first became convinced of how informative an eBay feedback check could be when I got a call from a fellow who was a

self-described "major Jack London collector." He wanted me to send him three books totaling \$1,000, and he wanted a discount, and he wanted them sent on approval without prepayment. Although he gave me three familiar references, none were dealers who would normally handle much Jack London, which was surprising because he lived quite close to a dealer who has sold quite a bit of London material. His first reference was lukewarm, reporting that he'd bought a couple of cheap books; his second reference said he'd never bought anything; and his third reference said he was a great guy, bordering on sainthood, if I was to believe what I was hearing. I asked for a check with his order, and declined to give him a discount. His check arrived, cleared, and the books were sent. All three books came back, along with a pompous note nitpicking their condition. Now curious, I checked his email address on eBay and learned that he'd bought twenty-five items that month, nearly all items in the \$3 to \$8 range; and whenever a decent Jack London book had appeared on eBay, he'd bid just ten cents on the dollar. He had failed in his feeble attempts to buy even common titles in so-so condition in the \$50 to \$75 range; all of his purchases were for trinkets and shabby copies of magazines. And, out of slightly more than 100 feedbacks, he had already garnered two negative feedbacks, both describing him as immature, childish, and a nasty piece of work. I wish I'd known this *before* sending him the books.

A third Net resource that can be useful in screening customers is the major search engines. The best for this purpose, in my experience, has been www.google.com. Simply type in the name of the person in question, and you may be surprised what you learn. My first use of google for screening purposes involved a medical doctor from Kentucky who emailed me asking that I send him scans of the spine and front cover of a *Huck Finn* I had listed for sale. I assumed his request was legitimate, but I checked eBay anyway, in

case he was just another eBay con artist. Sure enough, there he was on eBay as a seller, not a buyer, and a seller of cheap books and grossly misdescribed antiques. I told him I'd be happy to send a snail mail scan, but he never responded. A few days later, while searching for something else through google, I typed in his name out of idle curiosity, just to see what would happen. In less than a second, there was his name on a list of doctors in Kentucky who had been stripped of their licenses to practice medicine. It had been five years, and he'd not been able to get his license back. It's next to impossible to strip a doctor in Texas of his license to practice (child molesting,

drug dealing, and malpractice are not always enough); I can't imagine what a doctor must have to do to have his license taken away in Kentucky, but I knew I didn't want him as a customer. More recently I used google to track down a good customer who suddenly lost his job as CEO at a large bank. He did not send me a change of address, and his old office would provide no information. This didn't bode well, but google found an article about him being hired as CEO for a major financial firm, and we got back in touch. So, use google as you wish, and be prepared for a few surprises.

As I have cautioned, we all operate businesses under a variety of circum-

stances, and what works for one of us may not work for all of us. These experiences are my own. Take from them as much or as little as you can use in your own situation. To be certain, deadbeats, con artists, and time-wasters have found ways to exploit booksellers by using the Internet, and they can work their scams faster and more efficiently than ever before. But it works both ways. With the Internet, some common sense, and a little joyous distrust, booksellers are better equipped than ever before to fend off those who would steal their time, both online and off. ■

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Web master, thus eliminating any hope that a meta-search engine could be easily implemented for either the ABAA or ILAB. This was not happy news to my French colleague. The ABAA, however, had been pursuing other less-costly options to the Mike Harris approach. Bibliocity offered to provide a free search engine to the ABAA in exchange for having dealers sign up with the firm. This was the plan that the ABAA decided to adopt, and a good one it was. The ABAA once again had managed to avoid the large cost of developing its own search engine. The new ABAA plan also partially solved my ILAB dilemma, for I could propose that ILAB adopt the inexpensive Bibliocity solution, if I played my cards right. About this same time Arnoud Gerits, the son of the former ILAB President Anton Gerits from the Netherlands, became head of the ILAB Internet Committee. This was a very important step, for Arnoud had been elected to the ILAB Committee of eight and had better lines of communication with our European colleagues than I had. More importantly, he was European himself, spoke a number of languages, and was a great businessman who saw the Internet as a sales tool for his own business.

When Alain Marchiset heard that the ILAB Internet Committee was going to propose a single, centralized database and search engine using Bibliocity's technology, he was incensed. Where was the concept of a meta-search engine? He firmly believed that the ILAB Committee could not make such a decision, since it was against the principles of the League. The League, according to Marchiset, was a confederation of individual countries with no centralized power. We pointed out that each country's integrity would be preserved on the ILAB site and that a direct link to the French association site—and hence the French search engine—would also be preserved, as it would be to all other national sites. It was not enough. Alain Marchiset asked what had happened to the vote taken in Vienna that the Internet Committee would try to incorporate a meta-search engine into the ILAB site. I told him that Mike Harris and his expensive plan was no longer an option. I told him that the League must have a centralized database and search engine now and a meta-search engine when the technology had improved. This was not good enough for him, and he promised to organize other national associations against this concept.

Florence in 1999 was the next meeting of the National Presidents. Only the Presidents could authorize the ILAB

Committee to spend money on a new Web site. I attended the meeting, filling in for ABAA President Priscilla Juvelis and also acting in my role as an ILAB Internet Committee member. Arnoud Gerits, Georg Beran, and I prepared for the meeting by lobbying the various associations for support for our plan.

Then the world as we knew it fell apart. Bibliocity was bought by Alibris just before the meeting. Alibris is known as the company that hides names of dealers from buyers and demands a 20 percent discount from dealers; at the time, it seemed to be trying to gobble up the antiquarian book world whole. The ABAA Internet Committee pulled off a great feat, keeping the free Bibliocity search engine at the ABAA site under a contract that favorably protected the ABAA. Paul Pritchard of Bibliocity and Dick Weatherford of Alibris flew to Florence at the last minute in an attempt to convince the ILAB Committee to use their services. The change in Bibliocity's ownership, when combined with the strong misgivings held by the French and other associations about a centralized database and search engine meant that ILAB Internet Committee would have to back peddle if it was to preserve momentum. We knew the Presidents were going to demand to see

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progress, so we proposed a motion asking for \$15,000 to hire a Web master and develop an improved site with dealer searchability. The motion passed unanimously. We also proposed a motion permitting the ILAB Internet Committee to find a search engine for the site and run it on a trial basis until the League's 2000 meeting in Edinburgh, when a final vote would be taken. This motion created heated discussion among the Presidents. The fear that the ILAB Internet Committee would place an Alibris-type search engine on the site, combined with the French concerns about any centralized search engine, made for a close vote. But the ayes carried the day, and the committee forged ahead.

The ILAB Internet committee hired Rockingstone, a Dutch firm, to be Web master, and the trial site with searchable dealers was running by the spring of 2000. The search engine was added during the summer with constant improvements being made over the summer months. I asked Arnoud Gerits if the ILAB Internet Committee could convene at Rockingstone headquarters so that we could meet and evaluate key personnel. Georg Beran, Arnoud Gerits, and I visited the company in June 2000. I was amazed by my visit. Jelle Samshuijzen, the President of Rockingstone, heads a company of fifteen people who speak five different languages. He had been a bookseller for fifteen years before founding his company and had served as the Web master for the Dutch association (NVVA) for four years. Rockingstone not only provided Web master services, but also offered bookseller software packages and Web site development. Samshuijzen told us of his vision of online virtual book fairs with panoramic tours and showed an example of such a tour he had done for his hometown. His presentation, combined with a reputation for answering questions quickly, convinced me that Arnoud Gerits had found the right per-

son for ILAB, and one who I could fully support.

The thought then occurred to me that if I had been so excited by Samshuijzen's presentation, what would the ABAA think about it. The ABAA, though well protected by its contract with Alibris, knew that a new partner must be found to provide a search engine; maybe Rockingstone could be that partner. The ABAA Planning Committee was meeting in August in Amherst, Massachusetts. Since many of the members of the Planning Committee were also on the ABAA Internet committee, wouldn't it be an ideal time for Rockingstone to give a presentation? Ken Lopez concurred, and Jelle Samshuijzen agreed, on short notice, to fly to the U.S. and give his presentation. I also knew that the ABAA use of Rockingstone would be a real stamp of approval to using the firm for the ILAB search engine.

The Rockingstone presentation was made and thoroughly appreciated. Two competing proposals were also presented by other firms, but the ABAA Internet Committee decided to use Rockingstone. Members of the ABAA Executive Committee handed me a unanimous vote to take to Edinburgh: they voted to recommend Rockingstone to the ABAA board meeting in Boston whether or not ILAB accepted the firm. How positive can you get!

We have now gone full course and are back in the present: Edinburgh 2000.

I arrived a few days early because I wanted to spend time with Kay Craddock, the soon-to-be-elected President of ILAB. As I was the soon-to-be-elected Vice-President of ILAB, it was essential that we had a good plan of action, for many matters but especially for the Internet. The English (ABA), French (SLAM), and Italian (ALAI) associations all had Internet proposals on the agenda, and none of them included Rockingstone. Just before they left for Edinburgh, the Scandinavian association presidents were urged by their joint Web site advisor to vote against Rockingstone. I decided to shop for books at McNaughtan's, the Edin-

burgh shop owned by Elizabeth Strong, the delightful President of the ABA. I had been there for about an hour buying books and waiting for Elizabeth to arrive when suddenly she burst in the door in a real panic. Somehow it had not been communicated to the Congress organizer that Rockingstone was going to do a full presentation, with live Internet access, to both the ILAB Committee Meeting on Friday and the Presidents' Meeting on Saturday. The organizers had provided beautiful rooms for each meeting, but neither of these had Internet access. Elizabeth Strong was able to get a room within the building for Saturday, but she could not do anything about Friday's meeting. It seemed as if a Mike Harris scenario was developing all over again. Arnoud Gerits had arrived by then, so we made a quick executive decision. We challenged staff members of the Hotel George (the ILAB Congress hotel) to see if they could get us not only a room but also Internet access and equipment by the next day. Within one hour they had done the impossible, and we had our room for this very important presentation.

The presentation by Rockingstone opened up the eyes of the ILAB Committee members. They voted unanimously to recommend Rockingstone to the Presidents and asked me to write that motion for ILAB President Alain Nicolas to deliver. As is usual with these Congresses, intense lobbying occurs during the cocktail hours and dinners; I believe a new height of lobbying was established that Friday night. Our ILAB treasurer, Poul Jan Poulsen, put his neck on the line by lobbying the Scandinavians, Alain Nicolas worked on educating the French, and I worked wherever I could. Tom Congalton, our great ABAA President, never shook so many hands in his life, I bet.

The National Presidents met the next day. These meetings are very formal and a little daunting to a first-time participant. Everything is translated into French as you speak, so presenters must learn to speak in short phrases and wait for the translator to translate them. It is a slow process. A number of motions were

discussed and put to vote before we arrived at the Internet segment. We all walked down the hall to the room Elizabeth Strong had found on short notice and were given the full presentation by Rockingstone. Arnoud Gerits and I helped answer the many questions that were raised. When the French questioned if people could go to their SLAM site and search for books, they were immediately shown just how easy this was accomplished (Baudelaire had many hits!). The actual discussion and vote was postponed until after lunch. I sat next to Arnoud Gerits at the beginning of the afternoon session, and he whispered to me that it was looking good. Lunch had provided both of us with one more chance to lobby. The discussion lasted for almost an hour. Tom Congalton reminded all present that the ABAA had just placed great faith in Rockingstone by committing to the firm. The vote was 21 in favor to 2 against (England's two votes). A long saga had ended and a new one had begun. ■



Photograph courtesy of Heidi Congalton

ABAA President Tom Congalton, ILAB President Kay Craddock, and Immediate Past ILAB President Alain Nicolas at the 34th ILAB Congress in Edinburgh.

Congress

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of bagpipers and drummers. The atmosphere lent drama to the spectacle, and many expressed the opinion that the unexpected piping was one of the high points of the Congress. Me? I was looking for food.

Monday, September 18, was taken up with symposia on a variety of topics, which were held in several conference rooms at the Royal College of Physicians. After opening remarks by President-Elect Kay Craddock and Andrew Hunter, of Bernard Quaritch, and a keynote address by Nicholas Poole-Wilson, a panel discussion ensued on the subject, "The Relationship between Auctioneers and Antiquarian Booksellers," which was introduced and moderated by Hunter. Participants included ABAA member John Hellebrand of Palinurus Rare Books and Timur Yuksel of Switzerland. Perhaps the most lively, and occasionally testy, exchanges were between bookseller and former head of Sotheby's London

Book Department, Roy David, and Felix de Marez Oyens, International Head of Christie's Book Department, whose spirited defense of the auction houses was perhaps slightly undermined by the news that he himself was leaving Christie's to join the prestigious Paris bookselling firm of Pierre Beres.

Afterwards the congregants split up for several smaller symposia on subjects as diverse as "Collecting Sir Walter Scott for Scotland," by Iain Brown, and "16th-Century Vellum Bindings," by Nicholas Pickwood. All of the presentations I attended were interesting and well done, perhaps hampered only by their brevity. Probably the best attended was a reminiscence by Anthony Rota, by turns wistful and humorous, of his "Reflections on Fifty Years in the Book Trade."

After the daylong symposium, we attended a cocktail reception barely a block away at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, where, in addition to the paintings and sculptures of Scottish notables, we viewed an exhibition of Stanley Spencer's paintings of workmen on the Clyde. After cocktails we repaired to yet

another museum, the National Gallery of Scotland, for a buffet supper and a walk through its impressive collections.

Tuesday, September 19, provided a choice of two tours, one to Glasgow and particularly the Charles Rennie Mackintosh-designed Glasgow School of Art, the other to the Border Country, there to visit Sir Walter Scott's home at Abbotsford. By all accounts both tours were more than satisfactory, although I confess we took the day off as a respite from the relentless Scottish hospitality.

Tuesday evening saw the Congress Farewell Dinner at the Assembly Rooms on George Street, a venue that would also serve as the site of the upcoming book fair. The dinner was held in a lovely mirrored ballroom that had in the nineteenth century, among many other notable events, played host to lectures by Charles Dickens. It was in this room, at another dinner party, that Sir Walter Scott revealed that he was the author of the previously anonymous *Waverly Novels*.

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Congress

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After dinner we were entertained by an excellent choral group singing Scottish ballads, speeches by ILAB officers, and a general round of picture taking. I had been told during the dinner that each of the perhaps twenty National Presidents present would be called upon to make grateful remarks to the host and host country, but this tedious and almost certainly repetitive exercise was wisely avoided in favor of some generic remarks by ILAB Treasurer Poul Jan Poulson. Anyone wanting the text of my clever but never-delivered speech can have it after I fish the cocktail napkin that it was written on out of the pocket of my suit, when it comes back from the cleaners.

After a free day on Wednesday, when several of the city's libraries were open for our inspection, a final cocktail party was held on the former Royal Yacht *Britannia*. While this was an impressive venue for drinks, I confess that I was growing just a little weary of making small talk with booksellers, by turns grimly or cheerily clutching wineglasses or champagne flutes.

Many of the week's peripheral events were not of an official nature: ad hoc gatherings in the bar or lobby of the George Hotel, British dealers (it was rumored) marauding through local pubs

until the wee hours, or various groups holding court in local wine bars. It was perhaps at these venues, as much as at the events on the official program, that many Congress participants familiarized themselves with new friends and acquaintances.

One of these events occurred Wednesday night, when London dealer Simon Finch hosted a charity benefit at a local pub—with Simon sitting in with the band he had imported from London. They were joined by several other booksellers, including David Brass and Adrian Harrington, who called upon their impressive repertoires, meticulously honed decades ago in the garages of London. Our unjaundiced assessment is that the loss that the entertainment industry has sustained by their vocational choices has been the antiquarian book trade's gain.

From what I could gather from idle chatter, the rate of attendance at this Congress was considered something of a disappointment by the organizers, with participants numbering a little above 130. General opinion seemed to suggest that this was because Edinburgh was not considered by many to be a particularly advantageous place to hold a book fair. Preliminary material circulated by the ABA indicated that perhaps 200 dealers would exhibit at the fair; in the end barely 40 did so. This did not, however, in any way distract from the festive

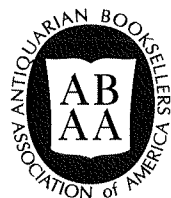
nature of the Congress, and virtually everyone I spoke to had a splendid time. Elizabeth Strong, ABA President and proprietor of Edinburgh's McNaughtan's Bookshop, was everywhere in evidence as hostess, smoothing the week's proceedings, as was Peter Miller of Ken Spelman Books.

My travel plans prevented me from attending the 18th International Book Fair later in the week, although I did manage to attend a small PBFA fair held prior to the ILAB event.

While I have exhibited at a couple of the previous ILAB fairs, I had never taken the opportunity to participate in the congresses. Dealers exhibiting in the ILAB Fair must sign up and pay for, but are not necessarily required to participate in, the ILAB congresses. Conversations I've had in the past might lead one to believe that some of these exhibiting dealers find the notion of the Congress an expensive nuisance, and I'm not at all sure that before I attended this Congress, I wasn't of the same opinion. However, after my first Congress, I think in future I will avail myself of every opportunity possible to attend. It seems that each sponsoring nation, as a matter of national pride, goes through Herculean efforts to provide a lavish and entertaining Congress. Why shouldn't I or, for that matter, you benefit from those efforts? ■

A contribution to the ABAA Benevolent Fund or to the Elisabeth Woodburn Memorial Fund is a meaningful way to honor the memory of a departed colleague. A contribution can also be a thoughtful celebration of an important event in the life of an antiquarian bookseller—a birthday, an anniversary, or a retirement.

The Antiquarian Booksellers' Benevolent Fund is a non-profit charity fund established by the ABAA in 1952 to benefit any antiquarian bookseller in time of personal need. The Elisabeth Woodburn Memorial Fund offers financial assistance for education and scholarly research relevant to the antiquarian book trade.



Direct your contributions and inquiries to:

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Rendell Chair Established at RBS

A gift from ABAA member Kenneth Rendell and Shirley Rendell has established a chair in manuscript studies at Rare Book School (RBS), the Charlottesville-based institute for the study of the history of books and printing, rare books, and related subjects.

Albert Derolez has been appointed to hold the chair, to be known as the Kenneth and Shirley Rendell Chair of Manuscript Studies. Derolez is a professor at the Free Universities of Brussels and has recently been re-elected President of the Comité International de Paléographie Latine. He is also the author of *Codicologie des manuscrits en écriture humanistique sur par-chemin* (1984) and other important works on medieval manuscripts.

Derolez has been teaching courses in codicology and paleography at RBS since 1987, and he will again offer courses in both subjects in the RBS 2001 summer session, to be held at the University of Virginia (UVa) in July and August 2001.

Further information about these courses will be available this winter on the RBS Web site: <http://www.virginia.edu/old-books>. RBS was founded at Columbia University in 1983; it moved to UVa in 1992.

Fred Schreiber, ABAA member and an expert in Renaissance European books and manuscripts, took a Latin paleography course from Derolez at Columbia in 1988. "What a splendid appointment!" he said on hearing about the Rendell chair. "Albert Derolez is not only a wonderful instructor at RBS, but also a most distinguished, internationally respected paleographer and codicologist."

Bernard M. Rosenthal, another ABAA member and a well-known San Francisco Bay area antiquarian dealer, has known Derolez for many years. "The Rendells have acted wisely when they selected RBS as the recipient of their generous endowment," he says. "It provides the ideal atmosphere in which Albert Derolez' scholarship and passion for teaching can flourish."

Kenneth and Shirley Rendell are husband-and-wife principals in the firm of

Kenneth W. Rendell Gallery, one of the world's leading dealers in historical letters and documents. The Gallery has a showroom on Madison Avenue in New York City; the firm's headquarters are located near Wellesley, MA.

"We're happy to be able to support the school," says Kenneth Rendell. "There's nothing else out there like RBS, either in size or quality."

"We are delighted to have this chair," says Terry Belanger, director of RBS and University Professor and Honorary Curator of Special Collections at UVa. "Ken Rendell began giving book and manuscript materials to us nearly twenty years ago, and this is simply the latest in a long string of generous donations to the Book Arts Press, RBS's parent organization."

The close relationship between the Book Arts Press, Rare Book School, and the Rendells goes back nearly twenty-five years. Between 1972 and 1992, Belanger directed a master's program in rare books at Columbia University. Among the graduates of this program were Steven Ayers, Rosalie Fawcett, Jennifer Latin Julier, William Marden, and David Warrington, all of whom went on to work for the Rendell firm.

In 1996, the Rendells gave the Book Arts Press twenty-five large boxes of manuscript material, ranging from a fourteenth-century contract between an Italian town and the mercenaries it proposed to hire for its defense, to a batch of Christmas cards from Eleanor Roosevelt.

The range of the material was very wide: seventeenth-century documents in which the men sign their names and the women sign with an "X"; requests for autographs stretching back to the eighteenth century; examples of nineteenth-century letter-copying and reproducing devices; twentieth-century responses refusing requests for autographs ("I am desired...to express in reply His royal Highness' regret that he is unable to have the gratification of complying with your request: owing to the large number of applications of a similar nature which he is in the habit of receiving, he has

found it necessary to lay down a rule by which he is precluded from granting his autograph unless he has the pleasure of being acquainted with the person applying for it").

"We developed a whole new range of teaching materials from this gift," says Belanger. "We now have a set of files with headings like Bills of Lading, Crossed Letters, Envelopes, Franks, Handwriting by the Blind, Ice Coupons, Identity Cards, Jigsaw Letters, Musical Quotations, Muster Rolls, Perforations, Pneumatic Mail, Route Cards, Recommendations, Telegrams, Visas, and the like." Belanger adds, "The files help answer such questions as, When did the desk stapler become common? What was life like before postage stamps? When did letter-writers begin using envelopes? They get used a lot, both in RBS courses and in my undergraduate classes at UVa." ■



The ABAA Newsletter

welcomes contributions from all of its readers, including non-ABAA members. Please send your letters, articles, announcements, reviews, and pictures to:

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New Members

The ABAA *Newsletter* welcomes the following new members accepted at the Board of Governors' Meeting in October.

John J. Hood, 1401 Massachusetts, Lawrence, KS 666044; phone: 785-594-4070.

Donald G. Magee, The Newport Bookstore, 116 Bellevue Avenue, Newport, RI 02840; phone: 401-847-3400.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Mary Hill, Carpe Diem Fine Books, Monterey, CA. ■

Membership Updates

Robert F. Batchelder has a new address and phone: PO Box 1779, West Chester, PA 19380-1779.

Cahills Rare Books has a new address, phone, and email address: 31 Golden Rain, Aliso Viejo, CA 92656; phone: 949-305-2361; email: cahillsbooks@home.com.

Judy M. Cohen has a new area code: phone: 845-883-9720; fax: 845-883-9142.

Dower House has a new email address: Dowerhse@yahoo.com.

Bennett Gilbert has new email and Web site addresses: info@gilbooks.com; Web stie: www.gilbooks.com.

Rick Grunder has a new address, phone, and fax: 2922 Eager Road, LaFayette, NY 13084; phone and fax: 315-677-0035.

Glenn Books has a new address and phone number: 360 Kaw Lane East, Lake Quivera, KS 66217; phone: 913-268-0767.

Jack and Joyce Hanrahan have a new email address: hanrahan@maine.rr.com.

Imperial Fine Books has a new email address and Web site: imperialfine-

book@aol.com; Web site: www.imperialfinebooks.com.

Klemm Books now is only at the California address, phone, and fax, and has a new email address: klemmbooks@charter.net.

Jeremy Norman & Co. has new addresses, phone, and fax: PO Box 2566, San Anselmo, CA 94979-2566 (mail); 343 San Anselmo Avenue, San Anselmo, CA 94960 (ship); phone: 415-456-6507; fax 415-456-6511.

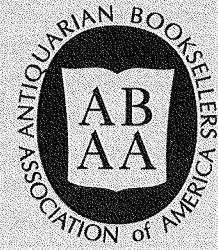
Albert J. Phiebig has an email address correction: Mphie@aol.com.

Barbara Ratner-gantshar has a new address and phones: 30 South Adelaide Avenue, Highland Park, NJ 08904; home: 732-247-8808; work: 732-906-2564.

David Redden has new phone and fax numbers: phone: 212-606-7386; fax: 212-606-7042.

Howard Schickler has a new address: 100 Water St., Studio 402, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

Barry Scott has a new address, phone, and fax: PO Box 1529, Kingston, RI 02881; phone and fax: 401-783-6403. ■



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**The deadline for submissions
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