

University Press Committee
Minutes of Meeting of January 19, 2005
Convened at 1:30 p.m. in Room 905-09, Campus Center

Attending the meeting were chair McFarland, members Afolabi, Avakian, Goodenough, Harris, Jones, O'Connell, Stern, Silverman, Tymoczko, and Wise, director Wilcox, and editor Dougan. Copies of eleven recently published titles were on display. The minutes of the meeting of October 1, 2004, were approved. A consensus was reached that future meetings should be held on Fridays, either in the late morning or mid afternoon.

Wilcox reported that net sales for the first six months of the fiscal year amounted to \$525,000—somewhat below initial projections—but that the Press had managed to maintain its fund balance by securing numerous subsidies on a title-by-title basis, thereby reducing manufacturing costs. He cited examples among the latest books released and also discussed several cases in which authors had hired their own publicists. The committee then discussed the overall financial prospects for the Press, highlighting several points—

- (1) the Press expects to finish FY05 on budget and with no deficit;
- (2) in the long term, it is not realistic to expect the Press to operate on a break-even basis with no financial support from the University, since no other university press of its size is able to do so, and most university presses receive substantially larger subsidies;
- (3) it seems appropriate to recommend that at least a portion of the Press's subsidy should be restored by the UMass Amherst administration;
- (4) the committee believes that an investment in the Press is a cost-effective way to support the research mission and enhance the reputation of the University.

Perusing the draft report of the committee to the Faculty Senate for FY04, several members suggested that these points be made more clearly and forcefully. There was also some discussion of fund-raising strategies and efforts made to enlist support from the four other members of the Five College consortium.

Wilcox briefly discussed new arrangements with Google and amazon.com to ensure that Press books are included in search-engine results. More than 750 Press titles have now been digitized at Google's expense and added to the "Google Print" program. Several hundred titles are also enrolled in amazon's "Search inside the Book" program. Both programs are essentially marketing tools, designed to make our books more visible and accessible.

Dougan commented on two recent academic conferences where he had staffed our exhibit—the American Studies Association meeting in Atlanta in November, and the American Historical Association meeting in Seattle early January. In each case, our booth looked terrific and the books were well received. In Atlanta we cohosted a "Celebration of Authors" reception. Dougan reported that whereas a year earlier many people had asked about the Press's financial difficulties, this year it was assumed the crisis had passed.

Turning to the manuscripts on the agenda, the committee considered nine projects, presented in alphabetical order by author:

In approving Preserving and Enhancing Communities: A Guide for Citizens, Policymakers, and Planners, edited by Elisabeth Hamin et al., the committee suggested that the value of the book would be enhanced by placing the Massachusetts experience in a national context and by making sure to address issues of "smart growth." It was also suggested that redundancy could be reduced through the use of cross-references.

As a prelude to the committee's discussion of Thomas A. Horrock's Rules, Remedies, and Regimens: Almanacs and Popular Medicine in Early America, one member passed around two delightful almanacs from the early twentieth century. These thick tomes provided a vivid reminder of how almanacs once served as all-purpose medical reference works. Turning to Horrock's manuscript, the committee urged the author to take both readers' reports to heart and not to dismiss Reader B's criticisms as "minor." The committee also suggested that the subtitle become the main title—to announce the book's subject more directly and to make it more likely that scholars using search engines would be led to the book. The project was approved with the condition that satisfactory revisions be made and a subsidy be provided.

A considerable amount of time was devoted to the discussion of Ralph Melnick's Playing for Change: Senda Berenson and the Rise of Women's Athletics. The main issue was that the manuscript seemed to address two separate subjects and hence two different audiences. There was also some concern expressed about the quality of the writing. The committee saw the value of a book that investigated the early history and changing ideology of women's sports through the experiences of Senda Berenson. Members were less interested in a book about Senda's relationship with her famous brother, Bernard. In the end, the committee tabled the project, with the expectation that the author would be encouraged to reshape the manuscript and submit a revised version.

Thomas H. O'Connor's The Athens of American: Reflections on Social Reforms in Boston, 1825-1845 was approved with relatively little discussion. It was noted that O'Connor is regarded as "the dean" of Boston historians and that this book could easily be used in survey courses on the history of Boston or on the age of reform. The author was commended for responding so well to the readers' reports. It was suggested that an event could be held at the Boston Athenaeum to celebrate the book's publication.

Noting that the Press had successfully published other collections of letters, as well as books on the Irish famine, the committee approved The Prendergast Letters: Correspondence from Famine-Era Ireland, 1825-1845, edited by Robert O'Neill and Shelly Barber. Approval was contingent on the provision of a subsidy. One member said that the introduction seemed very dry and wondered if it could be "juiced up" or if the book could open with a more inviting essay. Another member urged the Press to market the book to the membership of the American Conference for Irish Studies.

In the case of The Humane Metropolis: People and Nature in the Twenty-first Century City, edited by Rutherford H. Platt, the committee noted the success of Platt's previous volume, The Ecological City, and approved the new project with the expectation that outside funding would be secured. There was some discussion of the title and its relationship to White's book on The Exploding Metropolis (1957). One member urged Platt to comment explicitly in his introduction on the racial bias of the Federal Housing Authority in the 1950s and 1960s.

Roger Reed's Building Victorian Boston: The Architecture of Gridley J.F. Bryant was approved with the understanding that a subsidy would be necessary. It was noted that this modest monograph would require careful copyediting.

In considering Elizabeth Stillinger's A Kind of Archeology: Collecting American Folk Art, 1876-1976, the committee again suggested flipping the title and subtitle, as a way of making the subject matter more immediately clear. Some questions were raised about the breadth of the book's coverage. It was noted that the author has focused on collectors in the Northeast and has devoted the first 90 pages to the invention and changing definition of the term "folk art" in Europe and the United States. The project was approved with the understanding that the Press would approach major museums and collectors in the field to secure a substantial subsidy to help underwrite the costs of a heavily illustrated volume.

The committee quickly approved Marta Straznicky's The Book of the Play, which will be included in the series "Massachusetts Studies in Early Modern Culture." Suggestions were made as to possible sources of funding, and one member urged Straznicky to give more attention to the pre-Shakespearean scene to balance the ample coverage of the Restoration period.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:47 p.m. No date was set for the next meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce Wilcox
Secretary

cc: Faculty Senate office