

Report from Rutgers

NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.
TO THE Delegates to the Forthcoming Annual Meeting of the Association of American University Presses:

Dutiful as ever on your behalf, your advance field agent in charge of scouting the locale of your next convention—the one that begins tomorrow, June 12, on Douglass Campus of Rutgers University—is ready with his report. He doesn't mind telling you that this called for a bit of work, his acquaintanceship with Rutgers having been hitherto on the vague side. Indeed, it was limited to that ancient legend of the local football hero who, felled on the field of glory in combat with Princeton in 1891, remained conscious long enough to exclaim, "I'd die for dear old Rutgers!" and thus found his way to immortality.

The trouble is, it seems that this never really happened (although another Rutgers warrior of a later vintage was to claim that *he* uttered those deathless words, even if his forerunner did not). The authoritative rejection of this tale gave me a bad turn, I must say, shortly after I arrived on the banks of the pretty if polluted Raritan River. But presently, this disenchantment having subsided, I was learning that you will have rather more to occupy you here during your four-day session than a stricken quarter-back's bugle call.

"Rutgers—The State University," they call the institution that was born on November 10, 1766, as Queen's College and now, as a quick bit of arithmetic suggests, is celebrating its bicentennial. As it happens, your host, Rutgers University Press, also is marking an anniversary: its thirtieth. The coincidence of these twin occasions doubtless has something to do with your presence in this largely industrial city, which hasn't much to recommend it esthetically but a good deal intellectually, thanks to a charter granted so long ago by our old enemy, George III, at the request of his Colonial subjects in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Just at first, if you have bothered to look up the Rutgers enrollment figures before you come here, you may well wonder, as you look out across old Queen's Campus from the 126-year-old building that houses the Press, exactly where the 25,554 students are. They surely aren't visible in any such numbers on this venerable and leafy campus, and they could hardly be strolling around in subterranean corridors. The explanation is that

Rutgers University is actually a number of places. There is Rutgers College for men, right here, with an undergraduate body of 5,871. Across town is its coordinate college for women, Douglass, with 2,766 students. Beyond the Raritan, on the University Heights Campus, you can see the walls of the new medical school rising in a nexus that includes microbiology, engineering, chemistry and physics, the biological sciences, and a nuclear research center. Other major campuses, all coeducational, are in Newark (the College of Arts and Sciences, with affiliated schools of nursing, pharmacy, business, law) and in Camden (the College of South Jersey, offering the liberal arts, dentistry, and nursing, and the South Jersey division of the Law School). There are research branches and "teaching stations" in Jersey City, Paterson, Sussex, Pemberton, Adelphia, Cream Ridge, and Bivalve.

Bivalve? It's the site of a laboratory where scientists are looking for whatever it is that is afflicting the oyster population along the Atlantic Seaboard.

Naturally all this was a good bit of time coming together under, so to speak, a single administrative umbrella. In 1825 Queen's College was renamed in honor of Colonel Henry Rutgers, a Revolutionary War soldier and perhaps the leading philanthropist of New York City in the 1820s. In 1864 the New Jersey Legislature designated the then Rutgers Scientific School as New Jersey's Land-Grant college in accordance with the provisions of the federal Morrill Act of 1862. In due course, a school or college here and there around the state having been added to the original one, what had been the privately endowed Rutgers College became today's Rutgers—The State University. Its annual operating budget in \$58,000,000, which includes a state appropriation of \$26,000,000. Tuition, endowment income, research grants, and so on make up the rest. Rutgers alumni total 43,000, about three-fourths of whom have gone right on living in New Jersey.



Colophon of Rutgers University Press

Under an administration generally recognized as brilliantly creative and imaginative — *i.e.*, the presidency of Mason Welch Gross, who took office in 1959 — the university has grown at an all but incredible rate. In terms of its budget at the operating level it has expanded 300 per cent in the last decade. The structural growth has been even greater. Fortunately for the reason that brings you here, President Gross, professor of philosophy and a combat intelligence officer in World War II, is also a deeply dedicated bookman.

So too is William Sloane, director of Rutgers University Press, who came to this post in 1955 after a distinguished publishing career in New York. Miss Helen Stewart, who had been associated with him at Henry Holt & Co., William Sloane Associates, and Funk & Wagnalls, joined the Press as executive editor at the same time.

Before Mr. Sloane's arrival the Press had had its successes under one or another of his five predecessors as full-time director. Notable among them were *The Lincoln Reader*, edited and compiled by Paul M. Angle (still the Press's all-time best-seller); *The Life Records of John Milton*, edited by Professor J. Milton of Rutgers, a monumental work of scholarship; and the beginnings of a fine regional series in John Cunningham's *This Is New Jersey* and *Made in New Jersey* and Henry Beck's *Jersey Genesis*. Still, there was work to be done.

As of 1955, through nobody's fault in particular, the Press's backlist contained no more than four or five titles selling as many as 200 copies a year. Only a handful of future books were under contract. Total sales came to something like \$70,000 annually. Today, of the 450 titles Rutgers University Press has published in its thirty years (230 of them in the last eleven years), 70 per cent are available. First printings run from 2,000 to 3,500 copies. Gross sales average from \$250,000 to \$300,000 annually. Thirty books will be published this year, the director hopes; five of them will be in the New Jersey Books series, and of the remaining twenty-five most will be scholarly, as becomes a university press — learned studies, contributions to knowledge, with libraries as their principal market — but some will be for the general reader as well.

As things go in the university press world, where thanks to subsidies and tax exemptions books don't *have* to pay their way, Rutgers Press certainly seems to be operating on a sound basis. But Mr. Sloane is too old a hand at this profession to be rushing down to the footlights, taking bows as he goes. "I think our Press in thirty years has made a good beginning," he said without false humility to this visitor. The visitor believed him. Big projects are ahead at the

Press—the twenty-volume *History of the Jewish People*, of which Volume I appeared last year; the complete letters of Dostoevsky; a series on American painters and sculptors; definitive one-volume surveys of the Asiatic heartland and Islam. No, Mr. Sloane is anything but complacent or given to looking over his shoulder at the past.

"I believe that we should have fewer books merely representing the orthodox academic disciplines," he will tell you. "I want to have more that have an interdisciplinary synthesis—psychologists writing about the social sciences, historians writing about the arts." But the unhappy fact is that most academicians don't write very well. At the end of his freshman year as director Mr. Sloane went on record as saying, in *SR*:

The commercial writer is continuously exposed to the sharpening and educative influence of public acceptance or rejection. He stands or falls by the extent to which he can attract and interest readers. The scholar in his writing is not shaped and tempered on this anvil. Instead he starts off his writing career with a doctoral thesis. Now, doctoral theses are valuable in many ways. Each one presumably adds to the barrier reef against the sea of ignorance. . . . They accomplish much good, but they do not make trained writers out of the men who produce them.

He still, regretfully, holds to this. "Too many of them disregard the reader as a buyer or a listening ear," he finds. Editors with the patience and skill to make their manuscripts readable for the general public—editors able to "reduce sentences of jargon to a simulacrum of the English language"—are hard to come by, at university press salaries. There are other frustrations, such as what a university press publisher would most like to publish and what he can publish, because in their higher reaches universities tend to be conservative and certainly to stop well this side of the avant-garde. And there is what Mr. Sloane calls "a big difference between commercial and academic publishing—that is, the lack of public exposure. Outside an occasional review in the popular press, you can't tell whether anybody gives a damn. You just can't tell."

There are gratifying exceptions, notably in the New Jersey Books series of fifty volumes. Bookstores being scarce in New Jersey, the Press takes them by truck to gift shops, department stores, and the like, some 200 outlets in all. They represent about 30 per cent of the Press's book sales.

Whatever is finally selected for publication by the Press must survive readings by two or more outside authorities and then meet with the approval of the Rutgers University Press Council, headed by Richard Schletter, vice president and

provost of the University. If it makes the grade there, it is on its way to production. The manufacturing cost of a book will average \$6,500, plus the cost of editing, distribution, etc. Its first home will be one of the quartermaster's warehouses assigned to the Press across the Raritan at the otherwise ghostly remains of Camp Kilmer, where two employees stand ready to fill orders on a twenty-four-hour basis for any book in stock.

Will a book sell? Rutgers Press doesn't lie awake at night worrying about it. The author, of course, cares, and he gets the usual royalty, generally beginning at 10 per cent. Most of the Press's books apparently make their way, within the context of university press economics, because the Press's profit or loss usually is \$2,000 or \$3,000, one way or the other, on the basis of that annual \$250,000 to \$350,000 sales volume.

IN the course of your New Brunswick stay you almost certainly will be dropping in at the old house at 30 College Avenue, once a private home, and then for fifty years the Rutgers preparatory elementary school. It still is a home, in a way, because you get a distinct notion that the director and his staff of twenty are a family. The homelike air is enhanced by the paneled Book Room, a wing attached several years ago to the old house, where students come to browse along shelves of books donated by alumni and friends, play chess, talk, or sit around in a small adjoining garden enclosed by a privet hedge.

Student interest in the Press is, in fact, a source of much satisfaction to the director. They are proud of it, he says, perhaps not in quite the same way they are proud of a football team that once in a great while beats Princeton, but proud nonetheless. Three recognition awards of different sorts are awarded by Rutgers students to faculty and staff. The director of the Press has received all three.

Indeed, it struck your field agent that the fifty-nine-year-old Mr. Sloane must be one of the busiest people on Queen's Campus—so busy that he has not in the last twelve years had time to add to the four books that he wrote or edited between 1937 and 1954. Besides presiding over the Press, he is adviser to the student literary magazine, *The Anthologist*; teaches a creative writing course for Rutgers College and Douglass upper-classmen; serves on the New Jersey State Commission on the Arts (its report on the arts at all levels in the state will soon

be published), and serves on the Publishing Committee of the Association Press. In summer he teaches, as he has for the last twenty-five years, at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference at Middlebury College, Vermont.

But, then, he was a busy man too in his New York publishing years, always available for services outside his regular publishing duties—director of the Council on Books in Wartime, chairman of the Editorial Committee for the Armed Services Editions, and representative of the Book Publishers Committee sent to Germany in 1948.

Does he miss those days and that New York scene where he made the reputation that brought him to Rutgers? He does not. He pulled on a pipe and said, "I am happier here, in the good sense of the word, than I have ever been in my life." It isn't that academic publishing is quieter, softer than the frenzy of Publishers' Row in Manhattan. "The phone rings as often in New Brunswick as in New York," he once observed. His day begins at 8:30 A.M., and ends with the afternoon's last appointment. The rewards are many.

"I can't understand," he said, "why more people can't see the joy of small publishing, the kind of publishing where the publisher plays a real part, accepts a book, works on it. It's a good life, the best life going. A man ought to be willing to work himself to death to have so good a life as this."

The rewards further include the company of a knowledgeable college community, he added, quoting Dr. Johnson's aphorism to the effect that life holds few pleasures comparable to the conversation of enlightened men.

Three hundred and fifty of you ladies and gentlemen are expected at the assembly that begins tomorrow with a buffet lunch at Neilson Dining Room and opening remarks by Earl Schenck Miers, perhaps Rutgers's most widely published living alumnus-author and Rutgers Press's first full-time director. Among other speakers during the convention will be David Horne, assistant director for editorial affairs at Harvard University Press; Dan Lacy, managing director of the American Book Publishers Council; Ben Shahn, the artist; August Heckscher, and Rutgers's own Mary V. Gaver, a professor in its much-acclaimed Graduate School of Library Service and currently president of the American Library Association. There will be a cookout in a park beside the Raritan, a tour to the garden and home of the Governor's mansion at Princeton, and, as a finale, dancing for those who are still up to it after four days of talking and listening.

So have a good time, and try not to fret too much about that football player who never said what the legend says he said.

—JOHN K. HUTCHENS.



What a Way to Grow

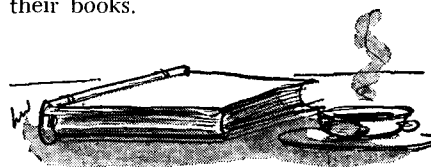
NOT LONG ago the world of scholarly publishing was mildly jolted by an advertisement that appeared under the imprint of Columbia University Press. "The modern educated American female never had it so good," ran the headline for Professor Eli Ginzberg's *Life Styles of Educated Women*; and there, next to the big type, was a drawing of an attractive, educated-looking female. Sex had at last been introduced into UP sales appeal.

Last fall, the Book-of-the-Month Club selected *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* as a dividend book—elegant fare for BOMC members, and an unexpected coup for Yale University Press, whose director, Chester Kerr, was justifiably proud of breaking into the big time with a UP book. Even so, as Harvard's David Horne reported in *Scholarly Books in America*, "Not quite all Americans got excited about the map and the controversy over whether Leif Ericson or Christopher Columbus should be regarded as the discoverer of America. Chester Kerr . . . chanced to meet Richard Halfmoon, a chief of the Nez Perce Indian Tribe, soon after the map was published. 'You will forgive me for saying,' Mr. Halfmoon said to Mr. Kerr, 'that this controversy does not interest me or my people.'"

This spring, Indiana University Press confounded the book trade by publishing James Meredith's *Three Years in Mississippi*. Why had Meredith's story gone to a university press rather than a commercial publisher? Meredith signed with Indiana because "Indiana was willing to let me write the book I wanted to write," i.e., without a collaborator. Even so, does it belong on a UP list?

Belong or not, a good many comparable books are finding their way to the university publisher, who is no longer the Sherpa guide of the publishing world, leading the way to new heights of obscurity. To reduce their deficit, and enhance their public reputation, the presses today are quite willing to set up rest camps for the "midcult" traveler, and it is here that we pause—those of us who were never intended to make the peak—with such items as *Love Incantations of the Oklahoma Cherokees* (Southern Methodist) or, if we are not yet out of breath, *The Climate of Southern California* (California). Too much learning has become a dangerous thing, at least for the new breed of scholarly publisher.

It would be overstating the case to say that the UPs are going crassly commercial; but the trend toward more popular books is creating rumblings of dissent within the field, and it is a subject that is certain to be discussed, over cocktails anyway, during the annual meeting this week of the Association of American University Presses at Rutgers University. The fact is that this branch of publishing is responding to the same pressures that have influenced commercial output—the need to meet an expanding market without being able to show an increase in "quality" products. The UPs can't afford to be as particular—or as purist—as they were when only scholars bought their books.



It used to be said that a scholarly book was one that cost more than the true scholar could afford, but this is no longer quite so true. Prices haven't gone down, but salaries have gone up, and there has been an expanded readership resulting from the education explosion, which shows no sign of slowing down; student enrollment in colleges is expected to increase at least 70 per cent over the next ten years, with a somewhat less sizable jump in faculty. All of this is grist for the university publisher, who is already grinding an exceptional harvest from the college boom that began about ten years ago. In 1957, the UPs collectively brought out 1,200 titles; last year, the figure was 2,600. (This includes the American branches of Oxford and Cambridge.) Dollar sales during the period more than doubled, from \$10 million to almost \$25 million. Boyle's Law doesn't operate here; as pressure increases so does the volume, and with it an increasing percentage of marginal books. What's more, it's becoming easier to sell them. A good many college libraries will buy almost any book put out by some UPs these days (California supplies certain libraries, for example, on a "standing order" basis for its entire list), apparently because it's easier for the librarian to do this than to make individual selections. The new sales push—20 per cent of some UP budgets go for promotion—plus the proliferation of new presses (from thirty-eight in 1949 to sixty-five today) has

glutted the market with scholarship's own version of the nonbook: symposia, collections of articles and lectures, regional picture albums, old editions with new introductions.

Publishing has become a new form of status for the American university, especially those that recently made the jump from colleges; and, where once a school was satisfied to be known for its football team, today there is a strong urge to achieve recognition through an imprint. Administrations pour money into their presses the way they used to into athletics. (As many of the new presses have discovered, however, it is almost never enough money.) All of this, I suppose, is a good sign, or at least makes a good impression, even if the end product may not. For the small, new publisher comes cold into a field largely pre-empted by the prestige institutions. Needing manuscripts, he must actively solicit them, yet he lacks the leverage to attract first-rate scholars. At the same time, he can't always fend off the unpublishable authors on his own campus.

Part of the new aggressiveness stems from a realization that UP publishing is no longer quite so "Off-Broadway," as captioned by Datus Smith, director of the Franklin Book Program and for a good many years the helmsman at Princeton University Press. To my knowledge, at least eight major UPs are run by directors recruited from New York commercial publishing; and in any case the presses as a group, with their paperback lines, their entry into the trade bookshop with a "midcult" or big-ticket item, have brought a new spirit of competition.

The danger, as Datus Smith has warned, is the temptation to field too many winning teams. "The press that cuts corners as to scholarly standards in the hope of financial gain—with the flattering unctious that the income will be used, some day, for noble purposes—not only betrays its principle but gives away its most valuable asset. The scholarly vigor of the whole 'backlist' is of far greater importance to the financial well-being of a university press than the pyrotechnics, however beautiful, of a few current titles."

Whenever I am depressed about this (which is not very often), I turn to some of the current catalogues for reassurance. The discovery that Harvard is publishing *The Armenian Communities in Syria Under Ottoman Dominion*, that Johns Hopkins produced *Forestry in Communist China*, Rutgers *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and California a *German Lexicon to Finnegans Wake* is proof that although scholarship can be deadly it is far from dead. The problem with the university press is that there is not enough of it to go around, which, come to think of it, may be a good thing. —DAVID DEMPSEY.