

The best of the theoretical articles is the last chapter, a keynote essay by Marshall Keys that contains his thoughtful speculations on where libraries, virtual and otherwise, are headed. His main point—at the end of all this electronic upheaval will be unprecedented improvements in user access to information—is well taken. The path to this nirvana, however, is bound to be difficult. Keys analyzes the tenuous, yet tenacious, grasp that journal publishers, electronic information aggregators, and online system vendors have on their respective high-profit businesses. Many in the library community resent the windfalls enjoyed by privately held companies in these industries and are anxious for library-based initiatives that will reduce commercial profiteering and strengthen, rather than marginalize, traditional libraries. Perhaps future editions of *The Evolving Virtual Library* will feature case histories of successful freeware-based system solutions or project reports on an electronic library clearinghouse for scholarly research.

Both editions of this title are comparable to a “special issue” journal on this topic. The price is right (about \$4/article) and no binding is required. Professional librarians dealing with the pressures and potentials of electronic resources will find useful information here. For those laboring at less-than-progressive institutions, it is interesting and even inspiring to see what is actually possible, given favorable conditions. Of course, the usual caveat about electronic topics in print applies—beware the short shelf life. The transition from cutting edge to historical in the digital world is a very swift one.—*Paul Rolland, Mesa State College.*

*The Human Face of the Book Trade: Print Culture and Its Creators.* Ed. Peter Isaac and Barry McKay, from the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Seminar on the British Book Trade, Edinburgh, June 1998. Winchester, Eng.: St. Paul Bibliographies; New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Pr., 1999. 228p. \$39.95 (ISBN 1-58456-003-7). LC 99-30585.

To resurrect pre-twentieth-century book activities from dusty volumes to vibrant tomes and from deceased book people to live (and sometimes whining or conniving) book entities, the editors have selected essays from the Sixteenth Seminar on the British Book Trade, Edinburgh, 1998. Topics range from a history of books about sheep-ear notches to contentious journalism to major eighteenth-century publishing activities. The excellence of these articles (fortuitous proximity?) leaves one to wonder about those not submitted or those rejected.

Respected authors such as librarians, professors, a senior curator, an Honorary Fellow, a Master of College, and an antiquarian bookseller have highlighted auction-house collusion, explored book salesmanship, considered the book distribution patterns, recounted philanthropic achievements of the Clark Collection (Napier College), and mused on medical mis- and mal-publishing. Organization reflects a happy combination of sustained scholarly attention (“Henry Cotton...”c1813), access to rich resources (“William Smellie and the Printer’s Role”), and the capacity of the unusual to rivet attention (“Fall of the Hammer: Auctioning of Books in Manchester...”).

Beyond the diversity of topic and time period, the magnitude of detail, and the fleshing out of factual skeletons, the strengths of this collection include its extensive documentation (one article of thirteen pages has ninety-three footnotes), detailed index, and biographical sketches that highlight the special qualifications of the authors. If one is an incidental learner (who reads the word above and below the needed dictionary entry), one can expect an abundance of grazing. The rear-cover blurb and editor Isaac’s editorials are especially well-written summaries.

Truly a buffet of riches, these essays have something for nearly everyone. Some highlights worth mentioning include: cooperative publishing where one publisher lists booksellers in another city (“Charles Elliott and the English Provincial Book Trade”), analysis of publisher distribution

records ("Country Book Trades 1784–85"), and the development of a great collection ("Edward Clark Collection..."). On the other hand, the reader might benefit from contemporary currency conversion—to better understand financial accounts from previous time periods—and brief translation of some of the Welsh titles.

This collection emphasizes the research value of publishers' records, computer analysis of trade patterns, and review of older research in light of newly noted resources. More important, the book inspires introspection that leads all professionals to consider the concept of the funnel: Each person contains knowledge and experience, much of which is unique (large part of the funnel), and unless it is shared (flow-through factor), it is lost when the flow is blocked (corked, as in death, stroke, etc.).

Useful as it may be for these reasons, this book certainly achieves its purpose of providing a *Human Face of the Book Trade*.—*Jim Presgraves, ABAA, Bookworm & Silverfish.*

**Williams, Julie Hedgepeth.** *The Significance of the Printed Word in Early America: Colonists' Thoughts on the Role of the Press.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr. (*Contributions to the Study of Mass Media and Communications*, no. 55), 1999. 298p. alk. paper (ISBN: 0-313-30923X). LC 98-41689.

As its title indicates, this is not a book shy about making claims for itself. Professor

Williams intends to reveal all concerning print culture in colonial America: what was printed, how it was received, and what its impact was. A hefty agenda. How does she fare?

First, the good news: Williams has immersed herself in a wide variety of primary source material from colonial America. She wants to write history from the document up. From her journey through archives and libraries from New England to the Carolinas, she has turned up an interesting and occasionally provocative series of episodes and anecdotes concerning print culture in early America. This is a book with voices, as its subtitle advertises—the voices heard through the printed word. And those voices, from the personal through the commercial and the political, are rich and evocative. The author wears archival dust well. Indeed, stripped of all commentary, the quotations in the book would make for a lovely sampling of colonial Americans and their struggles to get on with life in a difficult and foreign environment.

She also makes heavy use of newspapers and almanacs and so reminds us of the extraordinarily rich sources they are for documenting everything from daily life to publishing strategies. The personal ads that dot colonial gazettes—and many early modern newspapers abroad—evoke the ups and down of family and commercial life in British North America.

Williams covers some well-trodden ground: the literature of settlement, Puritan publications, practical advice guides, government documents, local culture, etc. She is not so much concerned with making the case for printing and the Revolution as she is for simply documenting the abundance of ways in which this unusually literate society used and abused print.

That said, it is difficult to recommend this book. Yes, it can be evocative and suggestive. A graduate student might find a dissertation lurking in some or other chapter. But as a piece of historical scholarship, the book has little to offer. It is one scholar's report from wide reading in

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