

David Sanders Interview

Conducted by Katherine Markee on June 28, 2010



The following questions were sent on June 28, 2010 for an electronic interview for the Purdue Libraries Oral History program to David Sanders [DS], Director of the Purdue University Press from 1992-1995. The interview was conducted by Katherine Markee [KM], Oral History Librarian.

KM: Welcome. Tell us where and when you were born, parents, siblings, early years.

DS: I will truncate some of these answers that have no real bearing on my time at Purdue, and will try to jog my distant memory from more than fifteen years past to dig out nuggets that are germane but about which I haven't thought much in the intervening years.

DS: I was born in 1955 and raised in Hiram, a small college town in northeastern Ohio. I was the youngest of four children; my father worked as a recruiter for General Electric in Cleveland and my mother was a schoolteacher and librarian.

KM: Education K-12 teachers, student organizations, athletics, course of study; College – Professors, course of study, student organizations, campus life, buildings, athletics. Graduate/professional education – if applicable

DS: I received my BFA in creative Writing from Bowling Green State University and later got an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

KM: Career path prior to appointment at Purdue University

DS: After graduate school I owned a bookstore in Fayetteville. After I sold the bookstore, I began working for the University of Arkansas Press, first as marketing manager and associate director and later as editor-in-chief.

KM: Purdue University Press 1992-1995 First full time Director. July 1, 1992 Press became an administrative arm of the Purdue Libraries, previously part of Office of Publications

DS: In 1992 I was appointed the first director of the Purdue University Press, which was then housed in a small stand-alone building in South Campus Courts. The staff consisted of Margaret Hunt, managing editor, Donna Van Leer, receptionist and customer services, and Carol McGrew, production manager. All of them were eager and dedicated to undertake the transformation of the Press from a weak sister of OOP [Office of Publications] to an independent and thriving academic unit.

KM: Responsibilities, challenges, initiatives, goals - Director

DS: There were many growing pains involved in the switch from the Press as a part of OOP to the Libraries. These included fiscal matters such as getting permission to accept credit cards, setting up an 800 number, and instituting other generally accepted practices in the publishing world which often times did not square with the unique culture of Purdue. Nonetheless, we double the number of titles published annually from seven to fourteen, and were eventually accepted into the Association of American Presses. Even this involved some obstacles such as

drafting a letter for Robert Ringel's signature to demonstrate his commitment to the press.

KM: Facilities (moved from SCC D to SCC C)

DS: Around that time we also moved to larger quarters in South Campus Courts. We also hired a marketing person and used student help to help out.

KM: Verna Emery Prize - Poetry 1993 winner Fleda Brown Jackson "Do Not peel the Birches" – details on the prize including monetary recognition (if awarded), was the winning poem published by the Press?

DS: The Verna Emery Poetry Prize was ongoing when I arrived. However, the manuscripts were being read and evaluated by graduate students, with the help of the writing program. I elected to take it over myself and it was during those years that we published books by Lucia Perillo, Christianne Balk, and Donald Platt. The two projects that were most significant for the press in terms of publicity and sales during my time there, were *Shepherdess*, a memoir of a woman in Minnesota (I think) who sought to raise sheep in order to make her own wool. The editorial process involved a great deal of developmental editing on my part, and creative line editing on the part of Margaret. The book was designed at an odd trim size and the whole thing worked! It was an enchanting story that received much recognition. The other project was Rosie Lerner's book culled from articles and posts she and another had written for the master gardener's as part of the Ag extension program. The book was *Possum in the*

Pawpaw Tree, and again was a real collaborative effort of the writers, editors, and designer. I believe it was very successful too. One interest project involved the Special Collections librarian [Helen Schroyer]. Because I spent a fair amount of time in the administrative offices of the library either meeting with the business office or meeting with the dean, I had many occasions to also visit with the Special Collections librarian. One day, after inquiring of her if there were books being produced on campus that the Press might be able to distribute and that she might have holdings for, she said, well, no, not really, but she did have some of these old books by Bruce Rogers. Gulping, I asked if I could see them. She then took me back into her stacks and showed me box after box, unopened, of copies of a book that Bruce Rogers, the world-famous book designer and Purdue alum, had produced and which had been given to the library decades before. The book was a specimen book of Centaur Type, which Rogers had designed. I asked the Dean if we could "have" the books and add them to our list. She said sure. Because it was thought that the books were long ago lost and only a few copies were out in the world, the price in antiquarian circles was quite high. We sold them for \$50 a copy, I believe, and sold out almost immediately of the hundreds of copies we had. We reissued it in paperback, and I assume that it did okay in that edition as well. It was that sort of entrepreneurial spirit that seemed to work so well with a small staff, especially when compared to the seemingly monolithic and unmoving institution of Purdue University. While I eventually moved on to a place that was closer to home in many ways, there were

friendships at the press and at the library and elsewhere (Felix and Selma Stefanile were dear friends) that made it palatable, even in the darkest of times.

End of Interview

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