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**BULLETIN OF THE
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FAN HISTORY AND RESEARCH BUREAU**

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The purpose of our bureau is to work at establishing a firm basis in science fiction's history and in the history of science fiction and fantasy fandom, and to give consideration to the meaning and significance of this form of writing as well as learning and preserving its traditions and intentions. We will publish articles devoted to the intentions of science fiction as expressed by editors and makers of science fiction and speak of the events in science fiction's history. Although this is a bulletin rather than a full publication of this bureau, writing relevant to its purpose will appear here, and any writing about science fiction's history and traditions and significance that we may receive from the membership will appear here. In other words, we are encouraging contributions from the membership. In fact, we'll welcome writing and art that will improve the appearance of our bulletin, and would like it if members who do art or poetry sent us their work to be used here. A bulletin may as well be an attractive and interesting magazine too, if we can manage it, and if members feel in the mood, we assure you that your art and poetry is desired and welcomed here. Try us out! You'll be contributing to the entertainment of the rest of the membership. Help us make Origin a publication that is welcomed and looked forward to by the membership and is a credit to the fantasy and science fiction it researches.



EDITORIAL

Let's Sack Out With What We Have Achieved

When looking at the N3F and considering our place in it, it's good to take a scan of the things we know about the organization (and if that is not much, you may expect Origin to present more about its past for you to consider) and to come to a good realization of what we belong to. Most of the membership is not very overtly active in the organization at the present time, but that should change as we continue to work toward the organization's growth and speak of what it has meant to the sf field.

There has been an improvement in the NFFF in the last two years, which is about how long I have been a member of it in recent times. I think when we have an improvement we should notice it, think about it and appreciate it. Then we should think out what more is needed and set about to do it. Enjoy what you have gained when you have gotten it, and go ahead onward for more. It's good when we can be doing well.

I mentioned having a substantial background in my notes at the beginning, and Jon Swartz has written a substantiating coverage of some of the presses in the background of science fiction's progress. Jon, as you know, is the N3F Historian.

Early Specialist Science Fiction Publishers

by Jon Swartz

The early specialist (or fan) publishers came and went, almost overnight, but several of them played significant roles in the history of science fiction (SF) book publishing in the United States: Fantasy Press, Prime Press, Fantasy Publishing Company, Inc. (FPCI), Shasta, Gnome, and Arkham House.

Fantasy Press

Fantasy Press was established in 1946 by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, an SF fan, part-time author, and collector since 1919. One of the principal books from Fantasy Press was *OF WORLDS BEYOND: The Science of Science Fiction Writing*, published in 1947, a symposium on SF writing by some of the most well-known and popular writers of the time: Robert A. Heinlein, John Taine (Eric Temple Bell), Jack Williamson, A.E. Van Vogt, L. Sprague de Camp, Edward E. Smith, and John W. Campbell. Fantasy Press published novels by all these writers and others including Eric Frank Russell and Stanley G. Weinbaum, from 1947 until 1961, when its stock was sold to Donald Grant. Eshbach also established the short-lived Polaris Press in 1952.

Prime Press

Prime Press, based in Philadelphia, was founded in 1947 by Oswald Train (who was responsible for editorial matters), James Williams, and other members of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. Fewer than twenty titles were published in its brief history, but some were noteworthy in the history of SF book publishing, including the first published books of Lester del Rey (...AND SOME WERE HUMAN, 1948), Theodore Sturgeon (WITHOUT SORCERY, 1948), and George O. Smith (VENUS EQUILATERAL, 1947). It also began a reprint series of books on American utopias. Prime Press ceased publishing in 1951 after the death of Williams.

Fantasy Publishing Company, Inc. (FPCI)

FPCI, based in Los Angeles, was formed in 1947 by William H. Crawford and Forrest J. Ackerman, longtime SF fans who became publishers and editors in the field. Noted for the quality of its production values rather than the quality of the fiction it published, FPCI published most of the major authors of the day, including A.E. Van Vogt and L. Ron Hubbard, but probably not their best work.

Crawford also published magazines under the FPCI imprint, known before World War II as Fantasy Publishers. In 1959 unbound copies of FPCI's remaining books were sold to Martin Greenberg.

Shasta Publishers

Shasta Publishers, founded in 1947 by Erle Melvin Korshak, E.F. Bleiler, and Ted Diky, was a Chicago-based specialist publisher which published Bleiler's THE CHECKLIST OF FANTASTIC LITERATURE as its first title in January 1948. This compact little volume with a striking wraparound dust jacket by Hannes Bok, is much sought after today and commands very high prices in good condition. Despite this auspicious start with the first "bibliography of fantasy, weird, and science fiction books published in the English language", Shasta went on to publish fewer than twenty books in its ten-year history.

On the other hand, many of these were distinguished works of SF by Campbell, Hubbard, de Camp, Heinlein, Leinster, Van Vogt, Fredric Brown, S. Fowler Wright, Raymond F. Jones, and Alfred Bester (THE DEMOLISHED MAN in 1953, winner of the first Hugo Award).

Shasta went out of business in 1957 after attempting to publish books other than SF.

Gnome Press

Gnome Press was founded in 1948 by Martin Greenberg and David Kyle, and survived into the 1960s. Described by some authorities as the most eminent of the small presses (and the most financially successful), it published more than fifty SF books in its history, and most of the major SF authors. In some cases (e.g., Asimov's FOUNDATION series and Clifford Simak's CITY), Gnome Press was also responsible, at least in part, for the manner in which SF magazine stories were collected into book form. Some juveniles and some soft-cover editions of the hard-cover titles also were published.

Gnome Press is sometimes described as having been important in the transition between magazine SF and mass-market book publishing by general publishers. It

ceased publishing in 1962 after a lawsuit over reprint rights.

Many of Gnome's titles were reprinted in England by Boardman Books.

Arkham House

Arkham House is unlike other specialty small presses in many ways, but it also played a significant role in the history of SF book publishing during the 1940s. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, friends of H.P. Lovecraft (who had died in 1937) tried to publish an omnibus volume of Lovecraft's best stories with an established hardcover publisher. Unable to find a major publisher willing to undertake such a book, they founded Arkham House with the stated purpose of publishing all of Lovecraft's fiction.

Despite considerable hardship, most of it financial, 1,268 copies of THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS (Containing thirty-six stories and HPL's classic article, "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (and with a dust jacket by Virgil Finlay) were published late in 1939.

Other books in the horror and fantasy genres followed, and in 1946 Arkham House published SLAN, A.E. Van Vogt's first science fiction book. The following year the first books by Ray Bradbury and Fritz Leiber, Jr., were published. Subsequently, these three men became world-famous SF and fantasy writers.

In addition to important early books in the field, in 1948-1949 Arkham House published eight issues of THE ARKHAM SAMPLER, a literary magazine featuring fiction, poetry and articles of interest to SF and fantasy readers. The Winter 1949 issue was especially memorable to the SF field, containing, among others, contributions by Bradbury, Van Vogt, Verne, Bleiler, Leiber, Robert Bloch and John Wyndham (writing as John Beynon Harris).

The crowning jewel of the issue, however, was "A Basic Science Fiction Library", by Forrest J. Ackerman, Everett Bleiler, David H. Keller, Sam Merwin, Jr., P. Schuyler Miller, Sam Moskowitz, Lewis Padgett, Paul L. Payne, A. Langley Searles, Theodore Sturgeon, A.E. Van Vogt, and Donald Wandrei. This section of the sampler was pored over by SF collectors for years afterward as they assembled their own libraries.

In 2010 THE ARKHAM SAMPLER (1948-49) was re-issued in a limited edition, two-volume facsimile reprint of the now-rare magazine.

Arkham House was the first truly successful fan press. Unlike the other specialty presses, it still is publishing today, although only a few of his books are considered to be SF.

Bibliography

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Nicholls, Peter (editor): THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION, New York, Dolphin Books, 1979.

Tuck, Donald H.: THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY, Volume 3: Miscellaneous, Chicago, Illinois. Advent, 1982.

Note: In addition to the above, several SF websites were consulted.

Editor's note: New such presses were being contemplated and attempted in the early 60s.

We had a fairly good letter column last issue, but this time no one has written a letter of comment, except a John Whateley, but his letter was not much about the issue, but only about its title. I'd like to point out that a letter column would be an asset to this publication, and we'd like to have letters of comment to go in it. There are a lot of people in the NFFF, but apparently not very many of them are interested in writing letters of comment. But I'd like to say that perhaps they would enjoy doing so if they tried. We want LoCs, why not send them?

TWO REFERENCE BOOKS PRESENTLY AVAILABLE

A history of science fiction fandom of the 50s: A WEALTH OF FABLE by Harry Warner, Jr., Scifi Press, 1992.

A history of science fiction authors: WHO SHAPED SCIENCE FICTION by Robert Sabella, Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 227 Main Street, Suite 100, Huntington, New York 11743, s000. Novascience@earthlink.net.

That does it on another issue, and I hope you have enjoyed its contents. We'll make it longer if we get material to put in it, so send those articles and letters you might have in mind, and we will welcome you here.

