A Brief History of Scholarly Publishing

50,000 Stone Age publisher demands that all manuscripts be double-spaced, and hacked on one side of stone only.

1455 Johannes Gutenberg applies to Ford Foundation for money to buy unlafts. First subsidized publishing venture.

1483 Invention of *ibid*.

1507 First use of circumlocution.

1859 “Without whom” is used for the first time in list of acknowledgments.

1888 Martyrdom of Ralph Thwaites, an author who deletes 53 commas from his galleys and is stoned by a copy editor.

1897 Famous old university press in England announces that its Urdu dictionary has been in print 400 years. Entire edition, accidentally misplaced by a shipping clerk in 1497, is found during quadricecentennial inventory.

1901 First free desk copy distributed (known as Black Thursday).

1916 First successful divorce case based on failure of husband to thank his wife, in the foreword of his book, for typing the manuscript.

1927 Minor official in publishing house, who suggests that his firm issue books in gay paper covers and market them through drug houses, is passed over for promotion.

1928 Early use of ambiguous rejection letter, beginning, “While we have many good things to say about your manuscript, we feel that we are not now in position to...”

1934 Bookstore sends for two copies of Glee’s *Origin of Species* from University Press and instead receives three copies of Darwin’s *Storage of Fleece* plus half of stale peanut butter sandwich from stockroom clerk’s lunch. Beginning of a famous Brentano Rebellion, resulting in temporary improvement in shipping practices.

1952 Scholarly writing begins to pay. Professor Harley Biddle’s publishing contract for royalty on his book after 1,000 copies have been sold to defray printing costs. Total sales: 1,009 copies.

1961 Important case of *Dulany vs McDaniel*, in which Judge Kelley rules to call a doctoral dissertation a nonbook is libelous per se.

1962 Copy editors’ anthem “Revise or Delete” is first sung at national convention. Quartel over hyphen in second stanza delays official acceptance.

By Donald D Jackson

Permission obtained from University of Illinois Press.

CBE Annual Meeting
2–5 May 1998
DoubleTree Hotel
Salt Lake City, Utah

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“The mind is a wonderful thing. It starts working the minute you’re born & never stops until you get up to speak in public.”

—Roscoe Drummond