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In Memoriam: Frank F. Clasquin, 1915-2002

Connie Foster, Editor

Frank F. Clasquin was “the compleat agent,” a librarian’s friend and the mainstay of the subscription agency business. I first caught a glimpse of Frank Clasquin in 1981 when he visited Western Kentucky University to persuade the library administration of the value of using a sole-source subscription agent to manage the subscriptions of our newly formed Serials Unit. Thus began a twenty-year relationship with the Faxon Company. The last time I spoke with Frank was in July 1990 as I prepared for a sabbatical project on the history of that subscription agency. His ability to retain passion for the business and contribute articles to library literature for nearly forty years makes him a truly special person to the serials community. Although his death received scant attention, Frank Clasquin left behind an amazing legacy of loyalty, professionalism, vision, and unlimited energy.

In 1938 Clasquin received a B.S. in Chemistry Education from Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. He intended to teach and had accepted a high school position in Edwardsville, Illinois, but decided that the students deserved better. Instead, he embarked on a sixteen-year career with Cook Paint and Varnish Company, headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri. He left Cook Paint and Varnish in 1954 as manager of the Texas division based in Houston. His wife Signe had a cardiac condition, and Frank realized that Houston was not the place to be. Along with their five children, the Clasquins returned to the East Coast. Frank understood that the management skills acquired at Cook prepared him for the

subscription agency business. In 1961 he became the first vice president and general manager of the Faxon Company, an offer extended to him by his brother-in-law, Albert H. Davis, Jr. A self-confessed workaholic, Clasquin interviewed and hired every employee and dictated every customer adjustment letter from 1961-1975. His outgoing personality and his love of libraries created a complement to Davis' shy posture and behind-the-scenes style. In the mid 1960s the Faxon Company was one of the first agencies to introduce a service charge to libraries. Frank Clasquin tackled the public relations task of explaining the necessity for this fee. He affirmed that "it was a proud thing that Faxon did. We had to have a good, solid financial base or else we could not grow and would disappear like some small companies. At the time we had a two percent service charge."¹

"When Frank came" was a significant phrase not only for the Faxon Company but also for the entire serials community. Clasquin was a prolific author for three decades. He lectured in library school classes such as Bill Katz's periodicals management class at the State University of New York, Albany, served on the first editorial board of *Serials Librarian* in 1976, and established the methodology for the annual serials budget projections that remain intact today. Clasquin's "Periodical Prices: A Three-Year Comparative Study," published in *Library Journal* (v.99, no.17, Oct. 1, 1974, 2447-2449) was the result of his analysis that began earlier that year with information stored in Faxon's IBM 370.² He seized any opportunity to promote the benefits of subscription agencies and felt especially strong about the fiduciary relationship between libraries and subscription agencies.³

A Faxon co-worker once described Frank Clasquin as "the solid bullet, going at a fast pace all the time."³ Even when he retired from the Faxon Company in 1980 and moved to

Florida, he continued writing articles, never slowing down. Peter Gellatly attributed to Clasquin partial credit for the preeminence of the Faxon Company as “a measure of the esteem in which serialists hold Frank Clasquin.”⁴

Two events happened in 1990 that brought Frank out of retirement: the death of his wife in January 1990 and the request of Richard (Dick) Rowe, then president of the Faxon Company, for Frank to serve as his principal advisor with responsibilities in Moscow. In May 1990 Frank became instrumental in expanding agency business into the Soviet Union in partnership with Alexander Butrimenko, Director of the International Center for Scientific and Technical Information (ICSTI), based in Moscow. He went to Moscow in September 1990 under a six-month contract to develop a major serials control and reship operation. His initial focus was Glasnost Express, a service designed to introduce Soviet consumers to western news and business publications.⁵ In 1994 when Faxon sold its European offices to Swets & Zeitlinger, Clasquin remained in Moscow as an employee of Swets International until he retired in December 2000 as director of the Moscow office. Retired, finally, but always connected to his colleagues and friends. Russia had become his second motherland.

The “In Memoriam Frank Clasquin (1915-2002),” issued by Swets Blackwell (7 October 2002) acknowledges Frank Clasquin’s professionalism, honest and deep respect for the Russian people, his talent, vision, and great optimism—qualities that kept the Moscow office operational through good times and through times of political unrest and uncertainties. The Swets statement expresses quite aptly the sentiments of the serials

community: “We will miss his very especial kindness, his friendly and charming smile, his wisdom and unique personality. We thank him again and again for being with us.” Yes, we certainly do.

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¹ Constance L. Foster, *The Faxon Company: Linked to Three Centuries, 1881-1991*
(Westwood, Mass. : The Faxon Company, 1994), 91.

² *Ibid.*, 125.

³ Frank F. Clasquin, “The Fiduciary Relationship of Libraries and Subscription Agencies,”
Serials Librarian 17 (1989): 39-43.

⁴ Foster, *The Faxon Company*, 115.

⁵ “Editorial,” *Serials Librarian* 5, no.2 (Winter 1980): 1.

⁶ Frank Clasquin recounted this experience in “A Russian Adventure in Serials,” *Serials Review* 17.3 (Fall 1991): 21-24, 66.