Eavesdropping on
American business talking to itself

THE FIFTH ESTATE

BY DAVID OWEN

"IF THE BIRD IS TAME," FREUD WROTE, "I LIKE TO place him on a stand and then, while telling him what a good bird he is, I get behind him and lift one of his feet. ... Birds which are not tame will generally require handling by two individuals with one holding the patient in a towel and the other doing the cutting."

There's a lot more to it than that. I'm just touching on the major points. Before trying this yourself you'd want to read Arthur Freud's entire article, "Proper Nail Clipping of Birds," in the January issue of PSM. PSM is a magazine for pet-store owners. Its name stands for Pets Supplies Marketing. Say that aloud a few times and you'll understand why they use only the initials.

Let's see. On August 4, 1984, nearly 300 people in Las Vegas stood up and said, "Bowling belongs in the Olympic Games, and I pledge that I will do everything I can for that goal," according to Bowling Proprietor. The bowling industry's Olympic aspirations are "rapidly becoming the talk of the town," the magazine says. Still, bowling lineage was down a bit in 1984. Perhaps hoping to reverse that trend, residents of Indiana last year contributed $296 to B-PAC, the bowling political-action committee. B-PAC tries to entice politicians to adopt a more pro-bowling stance. One of its beneficiaries is my own congressman, Bill Green, of New York City, whose district contains exactly one bowling alley.

Here are a few of the magazines that are piled up on the table in my dining room: Turkey World, Iron Age, American Carwash Review, National Jeweler (edited by S. Lynn Diamond), Fur Rancher, Lab Animal, Hosiery & Underwear, Weeds Trees & Turf (incorporating Golf Daily), Infections in Surgery, American Cemetery. I also have Kitchen & Bath Business, Ground Water Age, Beverage World (the average American drank 43.2 gallons of soft drinks in 1984), National Mall Monitor, Quick Frozen Foods, Lodging Hospitality, Hardware Age, The National Notary ("Only in Florida, Maine and South Carolina may Notaries join couples in matrimony"), Meat Plant, Pulp & Paper, Pizza Today, and a couple of hundred others.

Although according to my wife it is now impossible to sit down in our apartment without landing on a copy of Cemetery Management, my collection of trade and professional magazines is really just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what's available. Standard Rate & Data Service's directory of business publications, which comes out monthly and is larger than the Manhattan Yellow Pages, has more than 5,000 entries. The largest single publisher is

David Owen's book about the Educational Testing Service, None of the Above: Behind the Myth of Scholastic Aptitude, has just been published.
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, whose hundred or so titles include Plastics Focus, Pit & Quarry, and the brand-new Food Sanitation. Though little known outside their fields, such magazines can be enormously profitable. Last year Rupert Murdoch bought twelve of Ziff-Davis’s trade magazines, including Meetings & Conventions and Aerospace Daily, for $350 million.

Rupert Murdoch notwithstanding, most trade magazines don’t attract much public attention. When people talk about “the media,” they are usually not referring to Laundry News. In fact, aside from the 15,387 people who receive it every month, how many Americans are even aware that there is an entire magazine devoted to laundry? (Actually, I saw in the February Standard Rate & Data directory that such magazines abound; they include American Coin-Op, American Drycleaner, American Laundry Digest, Clean Scene Quarterly, Coin Launderer & Cleaner, Coinmatic Age, Drycleaners News, National Clothesline, New Era Laundry & Cleaning Lines, Textile Maintenance Reporter, and Western Cleaner & Launderer.) The specialized focus of trade magazines assures their editors a certain privacy: they can speak to their readers with a candor that is impossible in the popular media. One could never find out from reading Time or Newsweek, for example, that people who make pretzels are considered to be somewhat boring by people who make potato chips. This is a fact that to the best of my knowledge can be found in print nowhere except in the pages of Snack Food.

Before I started piling up trade magazines, I had a vague, free-floating sense—derived mostly from watching the evening news—that there were only about a dozen different jobs in the United States: my job, Dan Rather’s job, the President’s job, steelworking, farming, banking, law enforcement, driving taxis, several others. But now I realize that the economy is almost inconceivably various and that in addition to the occupations just mentioned there are jobs involving, for example, the building of clam bunk skidders, the marketing of feller-bunchers, and the repairing of log forks (Wood World). I also know that 42 percent of men believe that they have sensitive skin (Progressive Grocer) and that the 1973 Arab oil embargo, though disastrous for almost everybody else, was about the best thing that ever happened to the people who make chain saws (Chain Saw Age, not to be confused with Chain Store Age).

Trade and professional magazines make some of the most esoteric reading in the world. They are the forum where American business talks to itself. Flipping through them is like eavesdropping on private conversations.

If keeping up with all these magazines didn’t take so darned much time, I might be tempted to start a magazine of my own. It would be a sort of compilation of the best parts of all my favorite trade and professional publications. I wouldn’t be able to call it Magazine Age, Communication World, or Editor & Publisher, because there are already magazines with those names. Perhaps I would call it The Other Media or The Fifth Estate. It would be
filled with page after page of arresting facts. For example:

- Coffee aroma consists of 100 to 200 volatile chemical compounds derived from the thermal degradation of primarily sucrose in the process of roasting the coffee bean. [Tea and Coffee Trade Journal]

- Astronaut Sally Ride’s recent space mission not only advanced the space program, but also prosthetic dentistry. Material used to make her urinary catheter device is now being used to make soft denture liners. [Dental Management]

- Some people call it polish. Others say class. We term it professionalism. Trying to sum up just what professionalism is, is somewhat like trying to define beauty or honesty. It’s either there, or it isn’t, but its presence adds a very special lustre. And Uniforms by Mindy has it. [Uniforms & Accessories Review]

- Ironically, Notaries are rarely seen in modern American dramas and musicals—although this nation has more Notaries than any other and their role is an important one. The reason is that the office of Notary is viewed as an auxiliary rather than a primary vocation in modern America (except in Louisiana, with its French heritage), and characters are identified by their primary vocations—as in Arthur Miller’s “Death of a Salesman.” [The National Notary. This may be the world’s most self-absorbed magazine. An article in a recent issue explained that Vanessa Williams lost her Miss America title because she “violated the morals provision of a notarized agreement.”]

- Finally, combining the edible with the collectible, freelance will introduce Goofy Pops®, a lollypop on a “squiggly straw.” The candy will be wrapped in a cellophane which will have a puffy sticker with rolly eyes attached to it. Extra stickers will come with the Goofy Pop. [Giftware Business]

Every now and then my magazine would cover certain stories in greater depth. I might, for example, consider running an entire article about Goofy Pops, which in the taxonomy of giftware are classified as “stationery.” (So are Mello Smello Mini Duffles, stick-on Mello Smello scratch-and-smell tattoos, Wild & Wacky Mello Smellos, Smell & Spell fragranced message stickers, and Smellolopads.)

Stationery is a category of giftware, but it isn’t the same thing as a gift. Before I started reading Giftware Business, I was a little confused on this point. Now I understand that a gift in the giftware sense isn’t something like a fishing rod, a set of golf clubs, or anything else you wish someone would give you. Rather, it is something like a pewter figurine of a scuba diver, a tiny panda sculpted from “hydrostone,” a pencil sharpener in the shape of a monkey standing in a shoe, or a ball-point pen packaged with a color-coordinated lady’s bow tie. It is, in brief, a thing that no sensible person would ever buy for himself or herself. It is a thing that is generally thrown away shortly after it is received.

One place where people buy a lot of giftware (according to a recent issue of Souvenirs & Novelties, a magazine whose readership overlaps somewhat with that of Giftware Business) is the souvenir shop at the Oklahoma City Zoo. Another place is the gift shop at almost any hospital. In fact, hospital gift shops have their own trade magazine, called Hospital Gift Shop Management. In an article titled “Zoo Shop Employees Create Functional Displays,” Judy Rowe, the manager of the zoo shop, explains the secret of her success: “When someone walks in and asks for something penguin- or tiger-themed, we’ll show the shopper whatever is currently in stock. We don’t stop after showing one item. I prefer to take a few extra moments and make sure my customer is aware of everything—the plush, statues, and pictures.” Plush is the giftware word for fuzzy stuffed things. According to Giftware Business, teddy bears led the plush list last year, “but lambs did pick up momentum.”

The line between gifts and souvenirs is thin. Souvenirs are generally a bit less inhibited: a baseball cap covered with golf-ball-sized plastic peas and a huge plastic pat of melting butter; “underwear that’s funtawear,” from British Bulldog, Ltd.; toilet paper printed with sayings like “Show business is my life”; a pair of hat-wearing Maw and Paw ‘Zarky Doodler Hillbilly Character Pens, sold in a 2-holer outhouse display-gift package”; Famous Amish Dolls; fake tomahawks made by Cherokee Indians from North Carolina (“We’re on the warpath to bring you fast selling items that bring high profits for you!”).

Cherokee tomahawks aside, gifts and souvenirs tend to be made on islands in the Pacific. This sometimes causes tension. An article in Souvenirs & Novelties discusses the perceived delicacy of selling Japanese-made souvenirs in American battleground museums. The problem can usually be overcome. “In the past three years I have had only one person who, after discussing this issue, still refused to buy,” reports Hattie Horton, the retail manager of the gift shop at Battleship Alabama Memorial Park.

If you just bought up your local battleground museum’s entire supply of Bother Me greeting cards (for example, “It bothers me when you eat with your mouth open!”) but don’t have anyone in particular you want to send them to, you might consider buying a mailing list consisting of the names of, say, all the people who between January and August of 1984 bought the phonograph record Floyd Cramer Piano Favorites, “featuring World Famous Love Songs and a Treasury of Favorites.” There are 59,000 such people, 90 percent of them female. Finding out who they are costs fifty dollars per thousand names.

Selling names and addresses is a very big business. Popular lists, according to recent issues of Direct Marketing and Fund Raising Management, include people in the state of California who have rented or purchased wheelchairs, canes, walking chairs, or crutches; women who subscribed to Redbook after responding to a sweepstakes offer; members of the Association of Handicapped Artists; Americans “concerned about the growing Soviet military threat to peace”; buyers of the Thompson Chain Reference Bible; buyers of the Perry County Pizza Kit; and “people inter-
rested in the welfare of children and who support building character, teaching valuable skills, providing adequate education and suitable housing, along with developing networks to help abused, lost, stolen and abandoned children." (Another popular mailing list consists, apparently, of the names of people who subscribe to magazines dealing with popular mailing lists. Shortly after I began reading Direct Marketing and Fund Raising Management, I received a piece of junk mail urging me to buy three books by someone named Cecil C. Hoge, Sr.: Mail Order Survival & Success, Mail Order Know-How, and Mail Order Moonlighting.)

For a couple of summers when I was in college, I worked as a reporter for a trade magazine called Milling & Baking News. Shortly before I took the job, the magazine had come to something resembling national prominence by breaking the story on the famous Russian wheat deal—the Soviet Union's enormous purchase of American grain in 1972. For several weeks that year Walter Cronkite, The New York Times, and the rest of the popular media relied on Milling & Baking News for virtually all their information about the transaction. This information was uncannily accurate. The magazine's editor, Morton I. Sosland, was getting it from an anonymous source, who, Sosland gradually realized, was probably a Soviet official (the source always addressed Sosland as "Mr. Morton," something an American Deep Throat wouldn't do). Excitement about the wheat-deal story had mostly died down by the time I signed on, although work in the office was still occasionally disrupted by a British or Japanese television crew looking for an offbeat American feature story.

As is true of many trade publications, Milling & Baking News has a tiny circulation—just a little over 5,500. Even so, The Wall Street Journal once described the magazine as "indispensable" to its industry. Its influence derives not from the number of people who read it but from who those people are. About a fifth of the magazine's readers are the chief executives of milling or baking companies. Most of these people read every issue carefully, and advertisers pay a premium to reach them. A full-page, full-color ad in Milling & Baking News costs about $2,500. That's not much money in absolute terms, but it works out to nearly half a dollar per subscriber, or about what it would cost to read the ad aloud to each one over the phone. A similar advertisement in Time, in contrast, has a cost per paying reader of less than three cents.

It is a general rule that the more carefully a trade maga-

zine is read by its trade, the more stultifying its content is to outsiders. Indispensable or not, Milling & Baking News is pretty grim reading for anyone who doesn't care deeply about milling and baking. "In the face [of] sharply higher prices last week," begins a typical article in a recent issue, shortening business was very sluggish. Soybean oil for nearby jumped 2½@3½c a lb on the heels of 1½c gain the previous week. Deferred prices rose 1½@3¼c. Virtually all other oil varieties also were considerably higher. Loose lard finished up 1½@2c and edible tallow gained 3½c.

The magazine can keep this up for pages and pages. Still, trade writing is not without its charms. Milling & Baking News's use of the symbol @ in place of a dash in price ranges is, I believe, unique. The News is also the only publication I know of that consistently uses the word firm precisely. Most business writers treat firm as a synonym for company or corporation. It is not, in strict usage. A firm, according to Webster's Third New International Dictionary, is "a partnership of two or more persons not recognized as a legal person distinct from the members composing it." Editor Sosland—who once had a brand of flour named after him (Big Boy)—also maintains an idiosyncratic but absolute ban on the word however.

As a summer intern at Milling & Baking News, I wasn't qualified to write the dense grain-market analyses that are the heart of the magazine (I was, though, once allowed to contribute an editorial praising an astronaut who had smuggled a sandwich into outer space). My usual beat was much humbler: obituaries, new-product announcements, rewritten press releases. Most trade magazines depend heavily on press releases, often printing them verbatim. It was a matter of pride at Milling & Baking News that a press release was never run without our at least switching around the order of the clauses and changing all the "he stated"s to "he said"s.

New-product announcements are the most fascinating part of almost any food-related trade magazine. "Ex-Cel, a microcrystalline cellulose powder, adds bulk to food products without adding calories," the January issue of Prepared Foods reports. "When mixed with water, Ex-Cel forms a ribbon paste ideal for low-calorie spaghetti, macaroni and other forms products." Another issue of the same magazine announces "a fluid, oil-based coloring" ingredient that "yields a butter color on popcorn or extruded snacks." Butter color has what the prepared-food industry calls "eye appeal." A closely related concept is that of "mouthfeel," as in "Our formulary explains how to use Avicol MCC [another cellulose bulking additive] to make a cole slaw dressing with controlled flow, cling, and improved creaminess without sacrificing high-fat mouthfeel." (Eye appeal and mouthfeel are often difficult to improve without sacrificing yet another desirable quality—"consumer labeling appeal.")

Some of the most popular new food products are ones
that enable manufacturers to replace expensive ingredients. "HOW TO MILK CHOCOLATE," reads the headline on an advertisement in Candy Industry for Durkee's line of "coating fats," "cocoa butter equivalents," and other chocolate extenders and substitutes. A similar product is Viobin Cocoa Replacer, which, according to an announcement in the January issue of Food Technology, "is made from defatted wheat germ and 5% added carbohydrate which is pressure toasted to a rich brown. It is then ground to a fine powder which is similar in color and texture to processed cocoa."

Even better than new-product announcements are patents for new processes and ingredients. Here are a few garnered from recent issues of Food Technology:

**U.S. 4,473,592. . . .** Process for producing a meat-based product having a meat core of substantially constant cross-section of relatively dense compacted meat and an outer coating of fat which is mobile in the uniform state.

**U.S. 4,477,476. . . .** Method for converting salmon-green eggs into a roe product in which the green egg is agitated in a saturated aqueous solution of salt containing a nitrite to impart a scarlet color, after which the salted egg is dried and agitated in a saturated aqueous solution of a malate containing sufficient nitrite to impart scarlet coloring.

**U.S. 4,478,861. . . .** Method of preparing a frozen food product in which a plurality of cooked pieces is treated to remove free water to form voids after which food mass is subjected to a freezing gas to surface freeze pieces while leaving some unfrozen moisture thereon. Dry powder additives are then introduced with agitation to uniformly coat pieces, after which they are fully frozen throughout and transferred to a storage container for later reconstitution.

Most people probably think they would never eat a frozen food product in which a plurality of cooked pieces had been treated to remove free water to form voids. But in fact almost everybody cheerfully eats stuff like this. Much of the food that is served in modern restaurants traces its ancestry directly to the patents page of Food Technology. "Pre-cooked," "pre-browned," and "portion-controlled" frozen-food items are "microwaved" and either "plated" immediately or, in the fancier establishments, gussied up with inexpensive "profit-makers" like olive bits or almond slivers before being "menued" as expensive, "signature" entrées. There isn't much need for chefs anymore. Kitchen technology has advanced to the point at which a pre-browned slice of portion-controlled prime rib can be microwaved in a minute or two and then kept in a holding oven for eight hours or more without losing eye appeal.

---

**THE WIDE AND VARIED WORLD**

*Women, women, what do they want?*

The first ones in the door of the plant-filled office were the twins, fresh from the upper grades, their matched coats dangling open.

And then their more compliant brother, leading the dear stuffed tottering creature—amazing that she could lift her leg high enough to cross the threshold to the waiting-room.

Then the woman, the patient, carrying the baby in an infant seat, his every inch of flesh swaddled against the vicious weather.

Once inside, how skillfully the mother unwound the many layers—

and now so quickly must restore them: news from the lab has passed through the nurse's sliding window.

The youngest, strapped again into his shell, fusses for the breast, the twins tease their sister, the eight-year-old looks almost wise as his mother struggles into her coat with one hand and with the other pinches his sweaty neck, her hissed threats swarming his face like flies.

Now she's gone.

The women remaining don't need to speak.

Outside, snow falls in the streets and quiet hills, and seems, in the window, framed by the room's continuous greenery, to obliterate the wide and varied world.

We half-smile, half-nod to one another.

One returns to her magazine.

One shifts gently to the right arm her sleeping newborn, unfurls the bud of its hand.

One of us takes her turn in the inner office—where she submits to the steel table and removes from her body its stubborn wish.

We want what you want, only we have to want it more.

—Ellen Bryant Voigt
"EYE APPEAL," ACCORDING TO AN ADVERTISEMENT in the January issue of The Director, "is still the main reason people buy!" The ad is for "Aurora's new 18 gauge 1500 shell with accent stripes. . . . This new ACCENT series features a stripe on the top and base moldings that color coordinates with the shell finish. Notice how the interior shade completes this color combination. The striping has been market tested and found to be widely accepted." The ACCENT series also features "adjustable bed, seam welded bottom, metal gimp and material-lined foot end."

Aurora is the Aurora Casket Company, of Aurora, Indiana. The Director is the official publication of the National Funeral Directors Association. Food-related publications are a lot of fun, but for pure, bone-chilling enjoyment there's nothing like a funeral magazine. The Director, Casket & Sunnyside, American Funeral Director, Stone in America (gravestones, that is), Cemetery Management, Morticians of the Southwest, American Cemetery, Southern Funeral Director—if I had to choose a single trade magazine to accompany me into an 18-gauge 1500 shell, it would probably be one of these.

"Silver Taupe with Ash Grey Crepe interior, it does sound exciting, doesn't it?" Gene C. Hunter, the president of the Marshall Casket Company, asks in a recent issue of Morticians of the Southwest. "More families are wanting caskets with new interior designs that are different and stand out over others."

A modern casket is a remarkable piece of merchandise. It is the single most expensive piece of furniture that many people will ever own, yet its only real function is to be lowered into the ground and covered with dirt. Its numerous optional features serve no purpose except to increase the final bill. With racing stripes, or plain? How firm a Sealy mattress? Should the interior upholstery coordinate or contrast with the exterior finish? Persuading grieving relatives to buy these unnecessary amenities is known to the trade as "loading the casket." It is the mainstay of the funeral business.

Many expensive casket features are seemingly meant to prevent or delay what has already occurred. Batesville caskets are treated with "an exclusive Chemgard coating" intended to provide "additional protection," according to advertisements in various funeral magazines. Marshall's premium Signature caskets (the Monarch Blue, the West Coast Blue, and the Silver Taupe) offer a "one-piece rubber gasket" and a "50-Year Warranty." Belmont's Bronze Masterpiece caskets are protected by "a lustrous 4-millimeter, twice-baked, hand-rubbed Dupont finish" applied over a generous coat of "Dupont Adhesion Promoting Primer." Batesville's Sapphire, Mediterranean, and Tourmaline models have both inner and outer lids, the better to protect a loved one from—well, from what?

Loading the casket doesn't stop with the casket. Most caskets, even ones with two lids, aren't buried in the ground; they're buried in other caskets, known as vaults. Wilbert's Monticello, Continental, Venetian, and Triune models (with Strentex and Marbelon liners) all provide "the very finest in underground protection." According to an ad in The Director, Wilbert tests these vaults in an "immersing tank" that subjects them to a side wall force of over 18,000 pounds at a depth of twelve feet. In another test, a freeze/thaw machine takes Wilbert burial vaults to temperatures of 30° below zero. And Wilbert's instrumented burial vault provides accurate technical data from a Wilbert burial vault buried at a normal depth, through sensing devices attached to an external digital readout device.

Sazonian's top-of-the-line vault is made of twelve-gauge steel and "designed like a real I-Beam to give it plenty of self-supporting strength"; optional "Electro-Shield protection" is also available.

Another profit-maker for funeral directors is burial clothing. "A Thing of Beauty, a Joy Forever" is the motto of Willingham Tailoring Company, manufacturers of funeral dresses and jobbers of burial underpants. Morticians can also order the second revised edition of Desairology: Hair-styling for the Deceased.

It's all an elaborate rip-off. And yet these magazines are fascinating, no? The best of them is American Funeral Director, a monthly journal that contains, in addition to advertisements for caskets, vaults, burial clothes, and other paraphernalia (including SnFF, the non-formaldehyde arterial chemical that "has no smell"), and King Tut, the popular cavity fluid from Egyptian Chemical & Funeral Supply), articles with headlines like "LUNG CANCER IN WOMEN UP 152.5% IN TENNESSEE," "FIND BONES IN ATTIC," and "JOB-RELATED DEATHS HIT RECORD LOW IN '83" (I've got some good news and some bad news). A chart in the February issue reveals that Hawaii, Nevada, Rhode Island, and South Dakota suffered no weather-related deaths in 1983, while Texas led the nation, with sixty-six. Like all good trade magazines, American Funeral Director is obsessed with its subject; unlike most trade magazines, it has a subject that lends itself to obsession.

Reading the funeral magazines can be a peculiar experience. They make mortality seem simultaneously vivid and unreal: vivid because nothing could be more vivid than a bottle of SnFF, unrealistic because you can almost begin to believe that the color or texture of the inside of your casket is something that might one day make a difference to you. As Freud wrote, "No one believes in his own death."

That's the other Freud, incidentally—the one who didn't know anything about birds. □
We covered 16,000 years, 38 wars, 7 continents and the lives of over 500 world leaders to come up with one historic special offer.

Take any 3 for 99¢ each.

(values up to $110.00 with Trial Membership)

$18.95/$14.50

$14.95/$10.95

$19.95/$13.95

2985. $19.95/$13.95
2022. $29.95/$19.95
2022. $29.95/$19.95

2985. $19.95/$13.95

8631. The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History, by Robert Darnton. The people and their views.
$17.95/$12.95

$20.00/$14.50

2865. $25.95/$17.50
2816. $24.95/$18.95
3186. $22.95/$15.95

$22.50/$12.95
$15.95/$13.50
2840. Byzantium: The Empire Of New Rome, by Cyril Mango. The years 324 to 1453 are brought brilliantly to life.
$17.50/$12.95
6718. Miracle At Midway, by Gordon Prange. $19.95/$13.95

$15.95/$12.95


The History Book Club has put it all together in one incredible Introductory Offer. Our selection of history books is bigger, broader, better than ever before. And our introductory savings are simply unforgettable.

Join HBC now, and you can take any three books shown here for just 99¢ each (values up to $110.00). All you have to do is purchase a fourth book at the low Members’ Price. Your total savings as a Trial Member, including this Introductory Offer, can be more than 50%!

But the savings don’t stop there. Our members get an average of 33% off publishers’ list prices on all books purchased from HBC. And we’re not talking about “economy” reprints. HBC handles only first-quality publishers’ editions. The kind of books you’ll always be proud to own.

So join the Club today and discover how our comprehensive coverage of history can bring you up to date.

How the Club works: A membership account will be opened for you to which your purchases will be charged. You need only take four more selections during the next two years, always at the low Members’ Price. Once you have completed your initial membership, you can qualify for additional savings through Bonus books that you can select from our entire list.

Every four weeks (12 times a year), you will receive our Reader: the HBC magazine, and a dated reply card. If you want the Editors’ Choice, do nothing—the book will come automatically. If you want another book, or no book at all, return the card by the date specified. (Book shipments will be charged to your account at low Members’ Prices, plus postage and packing.)

If you should get an unwanted book because you had less than 10 days to decide, you may return it and pay nothing. We guarantee postage.

You’ll receive
How to Visit a Museum
when you join The History Book Club

An invaluable guide to getting the most out of any museum. 144 pages, 66 illustrations.

(6 3/4" X 9 3/4")

The History Book Club, Dept. N, 40 Guernsey Street, Box 790, Stamford, CT 06904-0790

Please enroll me as a Trial Member and send me the four books whose numbers I have listed below. Bill those on the left at 99¢ each and the fourth at the low Members’ Price, plus postage and packing.

[Blank space for selection]

I may return the books within three weeks at your expense and owe nothing. Or, I will buy four more selections within the next two years, not including my choices above. I can cancel my membership anytime thereafter. All Club purchases are at low Members’ Prices, and a postage-and-packing fee is added to all shipments.

AA46MB

Print Name ____________________________________________

Address ________________________________________________

Apt*

City __________________________ State __________ Zip __________

In Canada: Mail to U.S. Address
might combat overproduction just as well as reduced price supports—a point the article acknowledged. He is pulling a fast one, though, by implying that such regulation offers a simple solution. Enacting meaningful limits would entail at least as much political furor as enacting price cuts, and enforcing them by routine physical inspection of 2.4 million American farms (the only way to give strict limits teeth) would be a bureaucratic nightmare, assuming it could be done at all. This doesn’t make production controls a bad idea. But I feel that on balance reduced price supports are a better idea, especially since they promise lower rather than higher federal spending.

Mr. Roos and Mr. Ostler make the related point that a cut in the number of farmers does not necessarily mean a drop in overproduction. Strictly speaking, they’ve got me. But does the point stand scrutiny? If federal price supports were reduced, causing some farmers to quit and sell their land to other farmers who didn’t quit—yes, those other farmers might keep the land in production. But now, because of the reduced federal price supports, they are doing so at their own risk. If they produce too much, they must bear the cost, just as suppliers in other businesses must bear the cost of any overproduction. It can’t be that farm prices are too low for the little guy to get by and high enough for the big guy to make a killing on the same land at the same time. Provided that tax-shelter laws are altered so that the wealthy investors Mr. Ostler cautions against cannot indirectly bill the public, overproduction under the circumstances described above should be less likely. And if it does continue, consumers will reap low food prices at the wealthy investors’ expense.

Professor Reubens chastises me for using 1983–1984 statistics. These were the latest available when the article was written. In most cases they are still the latest available; 1985 isn’t over yet. One statistic that can be updated involves foreclosure predictions. It now appears that only about four percent of applications to commercial banks for spring planting loans were denied. Production-credit associations cut back by about six percent, while the Farmers Home Administration approved 84,000 more planting loans than it did last year, picking up some of those turned down elsewhere. This hardly means that farm debt problems are over, but it does appear to explain why the nationwide wave of foreclosures predicted last winter never occurred. Mr. Reubens says that when noting the smallness of deficiency payments I ignored larger sums involved in price supports. A sentence in the article reads, “Farmers benefit from a variety of other subsidies…” He complains that I “slide rather lightly” over increasing food production worldwide. There was an entire page on that subject.

The Funeral Industry

The section of David Owen’s article “The Fifth Estate” (July Atlantic) that deals with the funeral industry’s trade magazines hardly presented an accurate view of the funeral industry.

Mr. Owen places little importance on caskets, since to him their “only real function is to be lowered into the ground and covered with dirt.” He considers interiors, mattresses, rubber gaskets, and watertight warranties as “unnecessary amenities.” To many people, however, those features are quite important, not just items “that increase the final bill.”

When selecting a casket, the consumer may choose a finished wood box or a solid bronze casket, nonwatertight or watertight. The consumer chooses; funeral directors make all options known and available. What is not important to one consumer may be quite important to another.

Mr. Owen failed to mention that an alternative to the sealed vault is the nonsealed grave liner. Many cemeteries require that the casket be lowered into an outer receptacle first. This prevents the grave from caving in owing to erosion or the weight of the cemetery’s tractors or digging equipment. To some people a watertight vault is important; to others it is not.

Owing to the sensitive and emotional nature of funerals, the director must establish a great deal of trust between himself and the clients he serves. How long would this moral and ethical bond last, how long would the funeral director remain in business, if he did not make his clients’ wishes his top priority?

Frank R. Marik
Frank Marik & Sons Funeral Home
Chicago, Ill.

David Owen replies:
Contrary to Mr. Marik’s claim, most consumers are offered very little choice.