In late March, Seetha Srinivasan, director of the University Press of Mississippi, visited TCU Press under a program by which the Association of American University Presses underwrites visits to smaller presses to evaluate their operation and make recommendations. Seetha’s were threefold: to increase sales, cut down on costs, and enlarge the press’ list. She felt it is essential for the press to grow and not remain at the level it has maintained for ten or fifteen years.

Her report made several specific recommendations, including the hiring of new staff, outsourcing copyediting, and strengthening the editorial program. She also recommended that more time be spent on marketing and that production should be handled exclusively by one person. Further, while recognizing the importance of our affiliation with the consortium headquartered at Texas A&M University Press, she suggested that TCU Press needs to establish its own separate identity.

In meetings with press staff, Seetha also suggested reorganizing the structure of our Editorial Advisory Board, in effect creating a faculty-based editorial board and a lay-based board that would be made up of community advocates and would become the foundation of a Friends organization.

Her plans set wheels rolling at the press. We have already implemented a few small changes—Melinda Esco is handling all production, and Susan Petty has taken on marketing, with the understanding that some of her editorial duties will be outsourced. We have re-examined our pricing structure and our print runs now and hold weekly staff meetings, instead of only occasional ones. Launch meetings will be held for each new title acquired.

Such sweeping changes as suggested by the overall review, cannot be made quickly, and the staff plans a retreat with June Koelker, dean of the libraries, in July at which time we hope to work out a thoughtful proposal on the press’ future, which will then be presented to TCU Provost Nowell Donovan.

Meantime, Robbie Dircks, CFO and associate director of the University of North Carolina Press, will evaluate the financial set-up.
Jim Lee to Retire

James Ward Lee, who has served TCU Press as acquisitions editor for seven years, has announced that he will retire at the end of the summer. Jim’s letter of appointment, dated 1999, names him “visiting editor without compensation,” a title he has proudly repeated many times over the years.

Jim came to the press after retiring as chair of the English department at the University of North Texas, where he had taught for forty-two years. At UNT he founded both the Center for Texas Studies and the UNT Press.

One of the best known authorities on Texas literature and a widely acclaimed public speaker, Jim has been invaluable to TCU Press as acquisitions editor. He knows everyone who has anything to do with books, from Texarkana to El Paso, and he has a sure eye for what will work as a book and what won’t. As he wrote rejection letter after rejection letter, he would mumble, “Well, I’m breaking hearts again.” But his letters were so kind and gracious that he often got into extended correspondence with would-be authors.

An author himself, Jim co-edited Literary Fort Worth and wrote Adventures with a Texas Humanist during his years at TCU, along with doing the foundation work for a forthcoming volume, Literary West Texas.

Whenever anyone called the press wanting an author to speak, we sent Jim, who invariably charmed audiences, especially the women. And with good humor and graciousness he represented the press at the annual meetings of the Texas State Historical Association, the Texas Book Festival, and others. We will miss him but look forward to frequent visits.

Melinda Esco Joins Staff

Melinda Esco joined the TCU Press staff in December as Publishing Services Specialist. As such, she handles production, including working with designers and printers, archiving digital files, working with online repositories and vendors, and keeping our website up to date. Both Judy Alter and Susan Petty are absolutely delighted to have Melinda take over these responsibilities.

Melinda brings a strong publishing background to the press. She holds a BA degree in communication/journalism from the University of Texas at Arlington. She has owned a typesetting/publication design business and worked at Harcourt College Publishers in Fort Worth as a production manager and, later, database administrator in the intellectual property resources department.
Several years ago, the late Jerry Flemmons began talking to several writers about a collaborative novel—wherein each author contributes a different chapter. At meetings in the TCU Press offices, we talked about Frank James, Jesse’s brother who sold menswear in Dallas. In spite of enthusiasm, it was one of those projects that just never came together.

Last fall, with the pushing of Jeff Guinn, it came together. With the board’s blessing, we enlisted authors for a collaborative novel set in Texas (well, sort of), a first we believed.

Jeff suggested a plot involving an escaped slave who becomes a buffalo soldier with the 10th Cavalry out of San Angelo. As seemed fitting to us, Texas novelist, TCU Press author, and San Angelo resident Elmer Kelton was asked to write the first chapter of the novel.

At first the title was Escape to Concho. Then we settled on Noah’s Ride. And then we were all off on a wild ride. As each chapter came in, Judy held her breath to see what direction the plot had taken, and then she edited to bring some sort of consistency to the plot. At first, it looked as if Noah was miles and years from San Angelo and becoming a buffalo soldier. The designer, Hal Normand, kept asking if he was really going to make it. Hal thought the uniforms would be great on the cover. But all we could do was shrug our shoulders and encourage authors to hurry. So Hal came up with a striking non-specific design.

At this writing, an author is working on Chapter 12, and we are biting our nails over deadlines. The Fort Worth Star-Telegram has reserved Bass Hall and scheduled an evening with all the authors onstage for October 25. So we have to have books! We’ll do it, but it’s a bit nerve-wracking.

Our New Neighbors

The press is getting new neighbors—lots of them. TCU has redecorated and refurbished the rest of our building and is moving a significant number of people from Advancement to join us. We welcome the newcomers to what had previously been a sparsely populated building. It will be nice to have company, and maybe we won’t have to lock our doors all the time!
Santa Visits TCU Press

Santa came to the TCU Press Autograph Extravaganza and brought Mrs. Claus with him. Highlighted author for the event was Jeff Guinn, whose books, *The Autobiography of Santa Claus* and *How Mrs. Claus Saved Christmas*, have become national bestsellers. For the program, Jeff interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Claus about their lives at the North Pole and Santa’s annual Christmas Eve journey.

Some ten authors in attendance wore elf caps (okay, a couple declined).

MAX LALE
1916 – 2006

Max Lale, journalist, historian, historiographer, and longtime member of the TCU Press Editorial Advisory Board, died April 22 at his home in Fort Worth. We at TCU Press valued Max’s careful and considered advice at board meetings. He was wise, thoughtful, occasionally wry, and often impatient with folly. He kept us tied to our mission, and we will miss him.

A veteran of World War II, he proudly recalled and wrote about his campaigns in Europe. After the war, Max went into journalism and spent most of his professional career in Marshall, Texas, where he was recognized as the city’s Citizen of Distinction in 1982 and served as president of the Jaycees and Red Cross blood drive chair. In 1982, the city of Marshall held "Max Lale Day" in recognition of his many civic contributions.

Max was known for his active participation in historical societies. He was a past president of the East Texas Historical Association and the Texas State Historical Association. He was a frequent contributor to the journals of those organization and the author of several books on local history.

Texas history will miss his presence, and TCU Press will miss his voice.