

Encyclopedia of
**UNION
COLLEGE
HISTORY**

COMPILED AND EDITED BY
Wayne Somers

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Schenectady
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THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF UNION COLLEGE HISTORY
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Albert K. Hill '46

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Dedicated to the memory of three Union men
of very different temperaments who shared and acted on
a conviction that the College's past deserves an accurate record.

Jonathan Pearson (Class of 1835)
Diarist and Archivist

Charles Newman Waldron (Class of 1906)
Editor and Memoirist

Codman Potter Hislop (Class of 1931)
Historian and Biographer

All future Union historians will build on their work.

In an interview with Dr. Nott today I introduced the subject of a History of Union College which has been much talked of by some.

I: Dr., you ought to write down your own recollections of men & things to serve as a historical contribution to the History of Un. College.

Dr. N. (smiling) What is there to write? There is not anything worth knowing that is not already known.

I: I differ from you there. Your reminiscences would be invaluable to the next generation. Who knows the struggles and successes of the College so well as you, or the characters of its founders?

Dr. N: Nonsense! It is small business to be raking among the dust and rubbish of the past.

Jonathan Pearson diary, March 23, 1854.

Through [all my years at Union] I have known that it was a college that deserved the respect and support of its alumni. I feel that our merit has been such that we need hide nothing. Like Cromwell, we can say: "Picture me, wart and all."

Charles N. Waldron—*The Union College I remember*, closing words.

But how to reconstruct worlds from which has disappeared the uncertainty of the future, a future now in the past?

François Jacob—*The Statue within*, p. 16.

The floors inside were a shiny brown composite, but Lucas could hear the floor boards creaking beneath the brown stuff. It felt, he thought, like a college should.

John Sandford—*Chosen prey*, p. 161.

PREFACE

What Kind of Book is This?

“One of Minerva’s laws, a law too often trammelled in the past, at Union as elsewhere, enjoins us all: Honest scholarship begins at home.” That precept headed the guidelines for contributors to this book, and it has guided the editing as well.

Although the book was commissioned and published by the College, and all but one of the contributors has some past or present connection with Union, *this is not an official publication*. Recognizing that an institution committed to free scholarly investigation can adopt no official history, the College’s administration has not tried to influence the interpretations or judgments contained in this book. For these the editor is solely responsible.

The Encyclopedia is not intended to be promotional, and contributors were discouraged from writing advertisements. If the writing lacks the self-congratulatory tone traditional in college histories, that is not because the authors or the editor are disaffected, but because they believe Union’s record is best allowed to speak for itself, and because college historians have discovered candor. It is much too late to try to conceal the fact that all institutions are conducted by fallible men and women.

The enormous labor embodied in this book would not have been justified if it had not been undertaken in the same critical spirit earlier displayed by the three men to whom it is dedicated. The editor and those who worked most closely with him tried always to be aware of the many ways historical evidence can be corrupted. We have preserved no stories simply because they are good ones; indeed, the best stories have received the most critical scrutiny. The prospectus for the book warned contributors: “We will assume that all readers were taught while in college to esteem honest history and to scorn propaganda.”

Researchers who carry the work further may want to know what was attempted.

1. The Encyclopedia aims to be most complete in its historical description of the physical campus. Virtually every present or former building or other named physical feature is described, and changes are chronicled.
2. The educational programs of the College are described thoroughly but in less detail, because a full description of the year-to-year changes would obscure the essentials.
3. All members of the faculty and the upper administration, and a selection of the most important trustees, are treated in biographical sketches if they remained at Union at least ten years and died before August 31, 1990. A few people of fewer than ten years service are included, as are all former presidents, living and dead. The length of biographical sketches is limited either by the perceived importance of the person, or by the information available.
4. The history of student life and student activities is the subject of dozens of articles.
5. The original intention to include biographies of distinguished alumni proved too ambitious and had to be abandoned, except for those who also played an important role in the College’s history. A bare list of 335 others will be found under “Alumni, Distinguished.”

Each generation finds its own way to make sense of the past, and calls it history. Although this compendium of historical data is much fuller and more accurate than anything previously attempted at Union, it is not a systematic attempt to summarize the past. Consequently it is not a history and would not become a history even if all the information in it were somehow arrayed chronologically. Because we need to comprehend

the College as a whole, and not just each of its parts, Union still needs a narrative history. The historian who fills that need may find that this book provides some of the detail on which a synthesis can be based, and that it makes unnecessary the treatment of many subjects peripheral to the narrative.

Which Parts of the Past Can We Use?

Planning this book, as editor, I could see two very different ways to proceed: I could chart only those roads which lead from the past to the present, or I could survey also the cul-de-sacs and meandering cow paths of Union's past—the roads that seem from our vantage point to have led in the wrong direction or nowhere at all.

The first course would require tracing backward the important or interesting elements of the present college—a large undertaking, but much easier than the alternative method, which would necessitate trying to read the *entire* record of nearly two centuries, without always knowing what one was seeking, and at the same time showing some sensitivity to what was unsaid.

The researcher's convenience set aside, there is in the dynamics of colleges a strong presumption in favor of the first course. Because a college exists to prepare students for the future, all its disciplines (even computer science) in one way or another employ the usable past to that end, and the utility of that past is constantly re-assessed. Moreover, recognizing that all institutions in a changing world must evolve, even if the goal is only to remain relatively unchanged, educational statesmen perennially discover that the essential tradition of their institution is the "tradition of change." When they mention the past, it is usually to urge, in Shakespeare's words or their own, that it is prologue to the future. Both teachers and administrators, then, see most clearly those elements of the past which seem to lead inevitably to the present and hence (we imagine) to the future.

This book nevertheless embodies a contrary view. To my taste, "continuous thread" history is denatured, but more important, there are reasons to suspect that excessively "useful" history is ultimately the least useful kind. I chose the more arduous course of surveying both cul-de-sacs and thruways because it is likely to be true in the future, as it has been in the past, that alongside the tradition of evolutionary change so familiar to alumni audiences there will exist an unheralded tradition of discontinuity, failed experiments and extinction. An account of the past which ignores either tradition is sure to arouse faulty expectations of the future.

When Does History End?

Except for former presidents, this book contains no biographical articles on people who were alive on August 31, 1990—the last day of the John Morris administration. It is almost impossible, within the small community of a college, to write objectively about the living or the recently deceased, nor is it ever easy to write realistically about one's late friends and colleagues. But both in commissioning articles and in editing them, I repeatedly encouraged contributors to do just that, avoiding encomia and taking the view that an honest article in a reference book is a tribute in itself.

Former presidents had to be exempted from the closing date because the book could neither ignore the Martin, Bonner and Morris administrations, nor adequately discuss them without discussing the men themselves. In any case, everyone with the courage to take a college presidency expects his or her performance to be publicly discussed and appraised.

Coverage of other topics also stops with the end of the Morris administration, except when it would be perverse not to make *very brief* mention of some *major* development in a continuing story. For technical reasons, it is never possible to produce satisfactory historical writing that comes right down to yesterday.

Why So Many Dates?

This book is rich in dates presented with a specificity that may irritate some readers, but they will be useful to others. In the nature of academic life, a September initiative often differs in significance from one in April, and there may be other reasons for wanting to know the academic year in which an event fell. On the other hand, changes often cannot be dated precisely, and when this book says something happened “by” 1910, it means it may have happened during that year or sometime earlier. “Before” and “after” 1910, likewise, mean literally that the event did *not* happen in that year.

In the nineteenth century one class followed another at exactly the same pace as now, and with as little student knowledge of what happened at the college five years before. Young faculty replaced departing faculty, presidents succeeded one another, and all were faithful to tradition and precedent—when it suited them to be. If there was once more continuity than there is now in some areas of life, in others there was less, and the historian posits continuity at his peril. I have reacted against loose talk about “the old days” by trying to be as assiduous in dating behavior as in dating events. This tends to make the past a more spacious place to visit.

Documentation

This book was initially inspired by Alexander Leitch’s *A Princeton companion* (1978). Martha Mitchell’s *Encyclopedia Brunoniana* (1993), devoted to Brown University, later provided another model. Although our book ultimately differs as much from both of these two dictionary-style volumes as they do from each other, it is like them in including no documentation. Since nearly all the sources, including the published ones, are available only at Union College, publishing the citations would have swelled an already long book to little purpose. A copy of the computer file for the book, including many citations of sources, is available at the Special Collections Department of Schaffer Library.

Some Reflections on the Use of College History

A private reward of reading for this book was the (false) sense of superiority that came from learning things about our ancestors’ past that they never knew. Over and over in Union’s history, in large matters and small, our predecessors have believed they were inventing what they were in fact reviving. President Day instituted an honors course in 1930; the College abandoned it a few years later. When President Davidson announced in 1962 the beginning of an honors course, he seemed unaware of the precedent. In 1977, the report proposing the Steinmetz Honors Curriculum made no mention of either previous honors program.

Those programs would not necessarily have thrived, or been different in any way, had they been conceived after a study of their predecessors. But with few illusions about the immediate utility of history, academics nevertheless indulge boundless faith that some function can eventually be found for it. This book, compiled in that faith, will make it harder for the reader to be ignorant of the past, but it will probably do no more than that.

In colleges, as in society at large, we all exploit history according to our needs and scruples. Standards of historical scholarship are now nearly always set and revised in academe—but only in one district of academe. While a professor in one of the historical disciplines works conscientiously at that exacting task, in another building an administrator, straining to push the college toward its best future, and mindful of the rhetorical uses of precedent, plants one of her feet anywhere in the past that promises a good foothold. In yet another building, a publicist ransacks the college’s history for colorful anecdotes, appraising what he finds by the criteria of his own profession.

It isn't surprising, then, that tales discredited sixty years ago in the *Union Alumni Monthly* are frequently repeated as true in the magazine's successors, in the College catalogue, and in speeches. History has many functions, and veracity is not equally important to them all. The distortion of college history is itself a venerable and interesting part of that history, and this book treats it as such in several articles; e.g., HISTORIES OF UNION COLLEGE and SOUTHERN STUDENTS.

What Remains to be Done?

The effort to make this book as good as it could be left those who worked on it uncomfortably aware of three major shortcomings.

1. Its approach is not sufficiently comparative. Now that college historians can write with greater frankness, and feel able to deal matter-of-factly with weaknesses and failures, it is possible to take the comparative approach that has long been common in other kinds of institutional history. Possible, but for a book as detailed as this one, not yet practical. The topical articles in this book only occasionally place developments at Union in the context of similar developments at other institutions, because comparable facts and figures about other colleges are too seldom available in published histories.
2. It scants Union's financial history. Abundant records exist from which a suitably trained historian could analyze, and compare to other institutions, the growth or stagnation of Union's endowment, its fundraising, and its allocation of resources. These factors influenced, sometimes decisively, almost every aspect of the College's history, but I had neither the expertise nor the additional years of research I would have needed to treat Union's financial history in depth.
3. It virtually ignores the College's most important activity, teaching. The history of teaching at Union awaits not just a better historian but a whole new discipline. We have, in numerous topical articles and in faculty biographies, approached as near to the subject of pedagogy as evidence seems to permit, but teaching itself has almost always taken place away from objective observation, in the classroom or in conferences, and left its record only in the memory of a few students—whose later testimonials are rarely sufficiently analytical—and in the margins of even fewer surviving papers. Still, archaeologists have reconstructed whole civilizations from less, and it may be that a new and more intensive approach will someday lead to a synthesis of the history of teaching at a given institution.

Authorship

The 726 unsigned articles were written by the editor. Abridgements of a few articles have appeared in *Union College*. The authors of the 102 signed articles approved the final edited drafts of their articles, except in the case of those who died before the book was completed; their names are followed by an asterisk.

Wayne Somers
Editor

Acknowledgments

This book was commissioned in 1991, on the recommendation of the Bicentennial Committee, by President Roger Hull, a man accustomed to getting things done on time. For his initial generous support and ultimate forbearance toward a project that ran years beyond its deadline, I am grateful, as all satisfied users of the book should be.

Weighing the proposal that I undertake this work, I was swayed by the fact that I could hope for the help of three long-time friends: Ruth Anne Evans, Frank Gado, and Jan Ludwig. Soon after the project began, I renewed contact with Bernard R. (Bob) Carman, with whom I had occasionally worked when we were both employed by the College. Each of these four gave me almost every kind of assistance; I never hesitated to approach them with problems related to the book, and they kindly concealed from me whatever annoyance they felt at my ceaseless importunities.

Ruth Anne, Frank and Bob read my completed articles, suggesting improvements to all but a few of the shortest. Until her death not long before the project's completion, Ruth Anne also helped me with the research on an almost daily basis, bringing to both the research and the reading an unparalleled knowledge of the sources of Union's history, an uncannily accurate memory for things seen or heard decades before, and the ability to spot more factual errors in my writing than I dare to think about. I learned that it paid to ask her any question that was on my mind. Among her countless contributions to the book are the solutions to several problems on which I had given up.

Frank and Bob, both professional editors, cleaned up my writing as best they could and explicated many episodes in Union's modern history that I knew only from the printed or archival record. Frank's work on my drafts constituted a better course in writing than any I took as a student, and his view of the Union College he knows constantly checked my Pollyanna tendencies. Bob's temporal distance from Union enabled him to nudge me toward a less parochial approach to many collegiate topics and his eagle eye caught far too many stylistic inconsistencies.

Jan Ludwig, who as co-chairman of the Bicentennial Committee and chairman of its Publications Subcommittee signed me up for the job, served as my infallible advisor on the contemporary College and on many sensitive issues. His wise guidance and patient advocacy brought this ship through storms and past hidden rocks to its outer harbor. Following Jan's retirement from the College, Peter Blankman took over as chairman of the Publications Subcommittee and saw the book into print.

In the first years of my work, I had the assistance of a series of Union College students working under my direction in the College archives: Rachel Conaty '94, Carolyn McKenzie '95, Tiffany Lussier '96, Diana Sedita '97, Alicia Oathout '98, and Leilani Doyle '98. All six earned my respect, but simple justice requires me to single out the young woman who assisted me longest and most enthusiastically. With no previous knowledge of Union history or of the techniques of archival research, but with a combination of intelligence, resourcefulness, and efficiency that can only be explained as a gift of the gods, Tiffany Lussier—now Tiffany Young—rendered the project aid comparable to the best I could have hoped from a full-fledged professional research assistant, and at the same time raised the morale of everyone with whom she worked.

It must be common for anyone who undertakes a long research project to go through periods of doubting its worth, but I was surprised both by my doubts and by their antidote. The capability of these students boosted, as nothing else could have, my confidence that the enterprise called Union College is at least as worthwhile now as it had been at any time in the past two centuries. An institution able to attract, educate and win the loyalty of even a few such people deserves a future longer and more distinguished than its past.

I count it one of the unexpected bonuses of this work that it brought me back into communication with one of the contributors, former president Harold C. Martin. Every editor of such a book should have, for humility's sake, at least one contributor whose writing he could not hope to equal on his best day. I have had several, but each of them—Union being still a small community—happily acknowledges “Hal” Martin’s primacy in the natural aristocracy of writers.

During the ten years I worked several mornings a week in the Special Collections Department of Schaffer Library, I felt as welcome at the end as I did in the beginning. The department’s head, Ellen Fladger, and her preternaturally efficient deputy, Betty Allen—assisted at times by Dorothy Barnes, Nancy Langford, Margaret Lanoue, Cara Molyneaux and Julianna Spallholz—cheerfully did everything they could to make my work easier. Moreover, seeing them render service in the same spirit to students and casual researchers, I felt I was watching a Union College tradition in its fullest flowering.

The library’s directors and acting director during the period of my work—Barbara Jones, Jean Sheviak, and Thomas McFadden—found library studies for me (latterly, a computer-equipped one) and did all they could to minimize the effects on our project, and on all users, of the reconstruction of the library building and the construction of an addition.

Elsewhere in the library, Donna Burton, Mary Cahill, Bruce Connolly, David Fuller, David Gerhan, Christina Glover, Gail Golderman, Marybeth Krupsak, Annette LeClair, and Kelly Lussier never failed to respond intelligently to my requests for assistance.

Equally helpful were David Cossey and his staff at the Union College Office of Computer Services—in particular, Susan Guido, Susan Boehme, and Diane Keller.

Sports Information Director George Cuttita kindly read all the athletic articles and saved me from several errors.

I worked on this book in the mornings and evenings, and on Sundays. Afternoons and Saturdays I devoted to my business, which inevitably suffered from the reduced attention. I have been very fortunate, however, in having there the highly reliable assistance throughout this time of Susan K. Gaffney, and the more so as her knowledge of the academic life of other institutions contributed to some lively office discussions which ultimately improved the book.

The time subtracted from my personal life made me less available to my wife, Jane Somers, and to my mother, Dorothy Somers, but neither of them ever complained that I might at least have devoted the time to a book they would want to read.

Few are the contributors to this book whom I did not also tax with questions unconnected to their own articles. This group includes all the members of the Publications Subcommittee, for whose support and attention to the book I am deeply grateful: Jan Ludwig, Peter Blankman, Thomas D’Andrea, Ellen Fladger, Manfred Jonas, Byron Nichols, and Robert Wells.

David Potts, whom I first knew long ago when he taught in Union’s history department, has raised the standard of scholarship in the field of college and university history with the first volume of his history of Wesleyan University and with several published papers. I have benefited not only from those, but from conversations and correspondence with him and from his comments on a few of my articles.

Even more than I wish the Encyclopedia were without error, I wish I could be sure this list of others who helped me was complete: Patrick Allen, B. Bruce-Briggs ’61, Pat Castelli, Bonnie Cramer, Arthur Kent Davis, Amy Doherty, Willard F. Enteman, Christopher Fried, Nicholas Gaffney, Richard Gaffney, Robert J. Galvin ’61, Carl George, Gail George, Anthony Gran, Benjamin and Caroline Hardy, Robert Dalton Harris, Judy E. Haven, Dvorah Heckelman, Marvin A. Humphrey MD ’39, Cynthia Davidson Kirsch, Frederick Klemm, Sarah Bradford Landau, Patricia Little, Theodore

Lockwood, Matthew Lux '97, Russell L. Martin III, Sarah Nicoli, Thomas Oram MD, Harvey Patashnick, Pat Peterson, Betsy Phelps, Eleanor Sarnacki, Robert W. Schaeffer, Calvin Schmidt '51, Gwen A. Sellie, Richard Shanebrook, Gordon Silber, Robert Sullivan, Peter Tobiessen, Cherrice Traver, Abbie Verner, William A. Waldron '35, George Williams '65, Neil Yetwin, the Brooklyn Collection at the Brooklyn Public Library, and the Schenectady County Historical Society.

The index was prepared with careful professionalism by another sometime member of the College community, Janet McQuade.

Contributors

- Dean **Frederick Alford** has been with the Dean of Students' office since 1987. [BLACKS AT UNION]
- Professor **Martin Benjamin** has taught photography at Union since 1979. [ARTS DEPARTMENT]
- Florence B. Sherwood Professor of History **Stephen M. Berk** has taught at Union since 1967. [JEWS AT UNION]
- Emeritus Professor **Theodore A. Bick '58** taught mathematics, 1966–98. [MATHEMATICS DEPARTMENT; DAVID SHERMAN MORSE]
- Director of Communications and Publications **Peter Blankman** has been at Union since 1977. [PUBLIC RELATIONS]
- Bernard R. Carman**, retired Director of Public Information at Lafayette College, served as Union's Director of Public Relations and Publications, 1960–75. [SAMUEL BYROD FORTENBAUGH JR.; JAMES EARL CARTER; HAROLD CLARK MARTIN; *THE WAY WE WERE*]
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- Emeritus Professor **Edgar Curtis** served as professor of music, 1956–79, and as first chair of the Department of the Arts. [ARNOLD IRWIN BITTLEMAN; ARTS DEPARTMENT; MUSIC]
- Emeritus Professor of Psychology **Thomas D'Andrea**, 1980–96, served as Vice President for Academic Affairs. 1980–87. [PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT]
- Dr. **Vincent C. De Baun '47** taught English at Union, 1949/50, and after an academic career at other institutions he returned, 1992–96, as Director of Corporate and Foundation Support. [RAYMOND MORSE HERRICK; BERTRAND MAX WAINGER]
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- Professor **Sharon Gmelch**, who has taught anthropology at Union since 1981, served as director of the Women's Studies Program, 1990–98. [WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM]

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The late **C. William Huntley*** '34 served as Dean of Faculty, 1947–64 and 1968; Provost, 1978–80; professor of psychology, 1947–86. He published *Thirty years in the life of a college* in 1985. [CLARE GRAVES; LANDSCAPING; ERNEST LIGON; JOHN LEWIS MARCH]

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R. Ned Landon is retired from General Electric's Research and Development Center. His friendship with Norman Johnson dated from his undergraduate years at Knox College. [NORMAN BURROWS JOHNSON]

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Dr. **Harold C. Martin**, President of Union College, 1965–74, edited the *Diaries of Jonathan Pearson*. [ELIPHALET NOTT; JONATHAN PEARSON; PEARSON DIARY]

Dr. **Janet McDonald**, now Dean of the Pace University School of Education, directed Union's Educational Studies program, 1988–92. [EDUCATIONAL STUDIES]

Thomas Lamont Professor Emeritus of Ancient and Modern Literature **William M. Murphy** taught English at Union, 1946–83. [CARTER DAVIDSON; SAMUEL STUDDIFORD STRATTON]

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Professor **Byron Nichols** has taught political science at Union since 1968. [GOVERNANCE]

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Emeritus Professor **V.E. Pilcher**, who taught physics at Union, 1956–86, is the author of *Early science and the first century of physics at Union College, 1795–1895*. (1994). [JOHN FOSTER; ISAAC JACKSON; PHYSICS DEPARTMENT; SCIENTIFIC APPARATUS (EARLY)]

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Wayne Somers '61, a member of the library staff, 1961–71, and the principal author of *Perseverance conquers much; Union College in the final decade of Eliphalet Nott's leadership, 1850–1859*. (1990), is editor of this volume and author of all unsigned articles.

Frank Bailey Professor of Classics **Christina Sorum** joined the faculty in 1982 and became Dean of Faculty in 2000. [SIDNEY GILLESPIE ASHMORE]

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Emeritus Professor **S.O.A. Ullmann** taught English at Union, 1957–92. [HANS HAINEBACH; MOHAWK DRAMA FESTIVAL; THEATRE]

Professor **James E. Underwood** has taught political science at Union since 1963 and served, 1988–94, as Dean of Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs. [POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT]

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Chauncey H. Winters Professor of History **Robert V. Wells** has taught at Union since 1969. His books include a study of death and dying in Schenectady: *Facing the king of terrors*. (2000). [CEMETERY PLOT (COLLEGE); TOWN-GOWN RELATIONS]

Florence Sherwood Professor of Physical Sciences **T. C. Werner** has taught at Union since 1971. [CHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT]

Malcolm Willison, Visting Professor of Sociology, first taught at Union, 1964–72. [SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT]

Dr. **George Wise**, the Administrator of Dudley Observatory, became an authority on the history of General Electric during his years as a Communications Specialist with that firm. [ERNST JULIUS BERG; GENERAL ELECTRIC AND UNION COLLEGE; CHARLES PROTEUS STEINMETZ]

*Contributors whose names are followed by an asterisk died before the editing of this book was completed, and consequently they did not have the opportunity to approve the final version of their articles.