Editorial Changes for Einstein Papers

After more than a decade that included a long bout of litigation, the first volume of the papers is out and the original editor has decided to pass the baton

THE project to publish Einstein's collected papers is facing a change in leadership. John Stachel, the Boston University physics professor who has been editor since the project was launched, has given notice that he will step down in September. Plans for a new editorial structure are expected to be developed in coming months, altering the formula that concentrates editorial responsibility in the hands of a single individual.

Stachel says that he decided to leave the editorship when his 60th birthday approached and he was prompted "to plan the rest of my active working life." He said he found that more and more of his time was spent on administrative and fund-raising aspects of the project. These provided little satisfaction and, he felt, did not play to his "strong suit." He concluded that "this was a good time to retreat to a secondary position in the project."

Publication of the papers is a joint undertaking of Princeton University Press and Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Hebrew University owns the Einstein archive as a result of a bequest in Einstein's will. Einstein died in 1955.

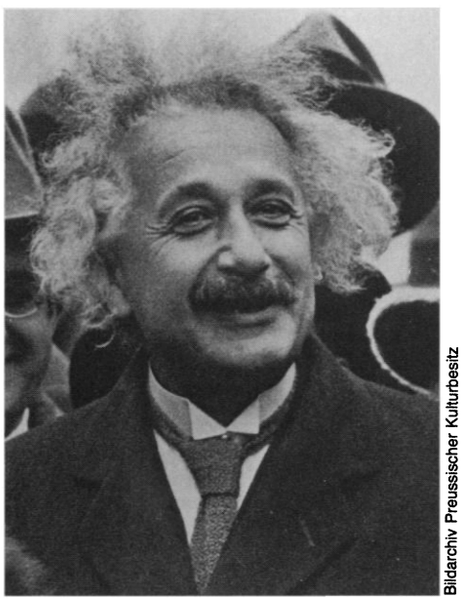
Walter Lippincott, director of the Princeton press, says he anticipates that the project will be restructured to make it possible for those involved to pursue academic careers as well as performing editing duties on the project, "so that there won't be a burnout aspect to the work."

The first volume in the series, *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*. Volume 1, *The Early Years, 1879–1902*, appeared last year. A second volume that includes scientific papers from 1901 to September 1909 is scheduled to appear next year. Three other volumes, which will contain the scientific papers that transformed physics, are in preparation.

To complete the project, a total of 40 volumes are projected. The scheduled publication rate of a volume a year has drawn criticism on grounds that Einstein's stature as a world figure and scholarly interest in his work warrant a faster schedule.

Lippincott says that one possibility is the appointment of contributing editors who will be responsible for different volumes. This would permit editing efforts to proceed in parallel and make it possible to quicken the pace of publication.

Grants from the National Science Foundation over the past decade provided startup funds and have anchored the project's operating budget. Income from a $1-million gift to Princeton by publishing executive Harold W. McGraw, Jr., has been used to "endow" the editor's salary. Over the life of the project the Sloan Foundation has made grants totaling $5.5 million. Other major sponsors currently include the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Swiss government science foundation. The project's annual budget supported by grants has been running at about $200,000 with roughly half provided by NSF.



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Lionized. *In visits here in the 1920s, Einstein got a hero's welcome from the press.*

Stachel has seen the project through its unusually protracted and painful genesis. He was appointed in 1976 after a search for an editor that began in 1971 following the signing of an agreement between the Einstein estate and the Princeton press to publish Einstein's scientific and nonscientific papers. A long delay ensued, caused by a dispute between the Princeton press and the Einstein estate. In the interim Stachel oversaw the creation of a microfilm duplicate of the papers that made it possible for the original archive to be transferred to Jerusalem and work publishing the papers to proceed in the United States. The project, with a core staff of five, has been based at Boston University.

The dispute arose over issues raised by Otto Nathan, a friend of Einstein's who was executor of his estate and a trustee of the Einstein papers. A major point of disagreement was Nathan's objection to the project's having a single editor. Nathan argued that the breadth of interests reflected in Einstein's writing was too great to be dealt with successfully by a single editor. The press contended that only a single editor would have the authority necessary to organize the project and establish the ground rules for publication. Litigation on this and other issues, a formal mediation effort, and, finally, a New York appeals court ruling in favor of the press in 1982 were required to clear the way for the project (*Science*, 12 November 1982, p. 664).

Publication of the first volume was delayed in part to include material not in the archive which had come to light, notably some 50 letters from the young Einstein to Maleva Marić, the fellow student who became his first wife.

To maximize the value of the published papers as a source for scholarship, a decision was made to print all documents and letters in the language in which they were written. This policy produced some difficulties for a project in an English-speaking country, since so much of the Einstein material, particularly from his early years, is in German. An English translation of the material in the first volume was prepared as an accompanying paperback. This translation, which apparently reflects haste in preparation required to make the deadline, has been excoriated by reviewers on the grounds of both gracelessness and inaccuracy and for lacking notes. The response is that the intention was only to provide a direct translation as a "pony," but the indications are that the translation formula will also receive a rethink.

The initial volume is hardly a best seller in commercial terms. But as scholarly scientific works go in the marketplace, its performance looks promising. Princeton's Lippincott notes that the average press run for a scientific monograph these days is 1000. In comparison, the 2000 copies of the 422-page book sold so far at $52.50 amounts to brisk sales. ■ JOHN WALSH