

Assessment of prestige and price of professional publications: Corrections and additions

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A number of corrections to the first half of the text of my 1987 presidential address to the Mineralogical Society of America (Ribbe, 1988) have been brought to my attention. I will discuss them, together with additional observations about the pricing of certain publications, under headings of the journals involved.

Mineralogy and Petrology

I have received letters from Springer-Verlag, Vienna, and from E. F. Stumpfl, editor of *Mineralogy and Petrology* (formerly *Tschermaks mineralogische und petrographische Mitteilungen*), calling attention to a “serious error regarding the price of *Mineralogy and Petrology*” in my recent paper (Ribbe, 1988). The real problem is not with the prices that I had obtained from the New York office of Springer-Verlag (\$262 for 1987 and \$320 for 1988, see my Table 4), but with the *prices per source item*. These were greatly overestimated in my Table 5 and Figure 7 because I was not informed that *Mineralogy and Petrology* would publish two volumes (~38 source items) each year, rather than one volume (~21 papers each). As I stated at the time of writing, the “exact numbers of articles are still unknown for 1987 and 1988, and averages for the three previous years were used to calculate the data points for both years.” So the corrected values are \$6.89 and \$8.42 per source item rather than the \$11.91 and \$14.55 I had estimated, a very large difference indeed! I sincerely apologize to the publisher, to the editor, E. F. Stumpfl, and to the members of Österreichischen Mineralogischen Gesellschaft for the distress that this mistake has caused them.

In Figure 1, the estimated prices per source item and the corrected ones have been plotted together with inflation-adjusted prices in 1980 dollars. Discrepancies between estimated and corrected values for years 1981–1986 resulted from the fact that the publisher has occasionally dated the issues from a single volume in two different years. Prices per source item for *Mineralogical Magazine* and *American Mineralogist* are added to Figure 1 as examples of the substantially lower costs of not-for-profit professional publications.

There is an additional minor error in respect to *Mineralogy and Petrology*. The actual price charged by Springer-Verlag in 1986 for Volume 35 (22 source items) was \$91, not \$95 (as published in the journal and reported in my Table 4), and since the cost in 1985 for Volume 34 (20 source items) was \$87 (not \$91 as I reported), the average price per source item for those years is \$4.24 (not \$4.33 as I had calculated). This led to an

error in the “mean normalized institutional price divided by the mean impact factor [for 1983–1985]” which in my Table 3 is recorded as 10.43. The value should be $4.24 \div 0.426 = 9.95$. This does not substantially change my Figure 8 or in any way alter the conclusions drawn therefrom.

Economic Geology

A “grievous mistake” was brought to my attention by Brian Skinner, editor of *Economic Geology*. He pointed out that *Economic Geology* is not published by the Society of Economic Geologists but by the Economic Geology Publishing Company, a separate not-for-profit company.

Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta

Several colleagues have commented that *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* is in fact a “for-profit” journal and that its reasonable prices have resulted from low-cost (high-quality) editing and from the Geochemical Society’s skillful negotiating with Pergamon Press. The annual cost of the journal to individual members has increased this year from \$34 to \$50, and to institutional subscribers from \$375 to \$475.

Mineralogical Magazine, Clay Minerals and Mineralogical Abstracts

Recent letters from the President and the Treasurer of the Mineralogical Society (London) reprimanded me for accusing the “Society of ‘discriminatory pricing’ and the application of a ‘surcharge’ to North American subscribers” for *Mineralogical Magazine* (*MM*), *Clay Minerals* (*CM*), and *Mineralogical Abstracts* (*MA*). I based my conclusions (p. 461) on advertised prices found inside the back covers of *MM*, which in 1983 began listing prices in the following manner: *MM*—“£65.00 (\$160.00 US)”; *CM*—“£40.00 (\$100.00 US)”; *MA*—“\$175.00 US or £70.00.” The respective dollar-equivalents of these 1983 sterling prices were \$98.50, \$60.64, and \$106.12, a full 61% less than the advertised dollar prices for that year. This would appear to be a “surcharge.”

Treasurer Alan Criddle wrote: “It is indeed true that the exchange rate worked to the disadvantage of dollar subscribers in the period 1984–1987 [also 1981–1983], however, Library subscribers in N. America (and elsewhere) are at liberty to pay their subscriptions at the dollar or the sterling rate. This is made quite clear on our invoices.”

I had never seen such an invoice, but a telephone en-

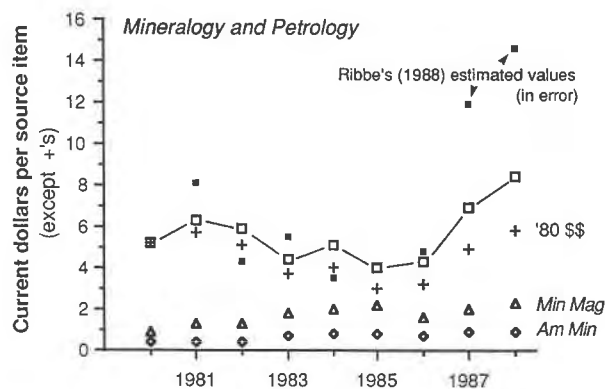


Fig. 1. Plot of current U.S. dollars per source item for the journal, *Mineralogy and Petrology*, 1980–1988: □, values from Springer-Verlag, Vienna (personal communication); + same, in inflation-adjusted 1980 dollars; ■, values from Ribbe (1988), the uppermost two being estimates seriously in error; △, values for *Mineralogical Magazine* (*Min Mag*); ◇, values for *American Mineralogists* (*Am Min*).

quiry to a major subscription agency confirmed that at least in 1987 they indeed had been given a choice of payment in pounds sterling or in U.S. dollars for the *Mineralogical Society's* publications. A manager in the agency was surprised by this and immediately instituted a policy that will result in the agency henceforth choosing to pay for all their journals in the lower-valued currency.

Further investigation showed that our university library has been paying in U.S. dollars for all three journals through the same American subscription agency I had contacted. The amounts our library paid to the agency are compared in Figure 1 with dollar-equivalent sterling prices (based on then-current exchange rates) and the advertised U.S. dollar prices. In the years 1980–1988 the library paid the agency \$4125, and the agency paid the *Mineralogical Society* the U.S. dollar price (\$3820) less a 10% discount, bringing their total “mark-up” to a comfortable 17%. Had the agency been astute and paid the *Society* in sterling (\$2865 less 10%), their “mark-up” could have been \$1547 or 37.5% of the amount billed to the university. Or they could have passed on the \$859.50 difference to our university library and to each of hundreds of other libraries here and abroad. A manager in the agency I contacted assured me that they would do just that in the future.

Of course, there are legitimate surcharges for overseas postage. The *Mineralogical Society of America* (MSA) has found that surcharges are a nuisance to collect and difficult to predict fairly, so they currently pay \$8.04 to mail six yearly issues of the *American Mineralogist* to Great Britain (a mere \$2.64 over the domestic postage rate), and they sell the journal *postpaid* to individual members and institutional subscribers alike. The *Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland* gives a 10% discount to subscription agencies, but MSA pleads “nonprofit” and offers no discounts. To attempt to re-

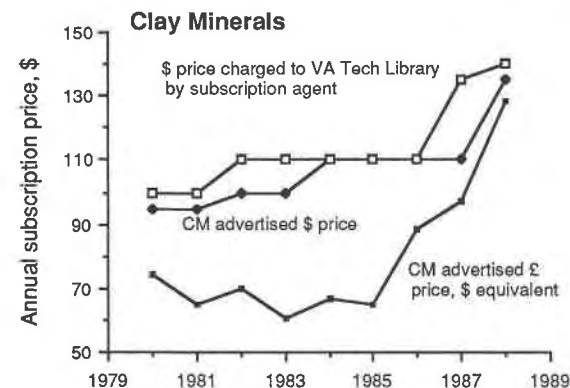
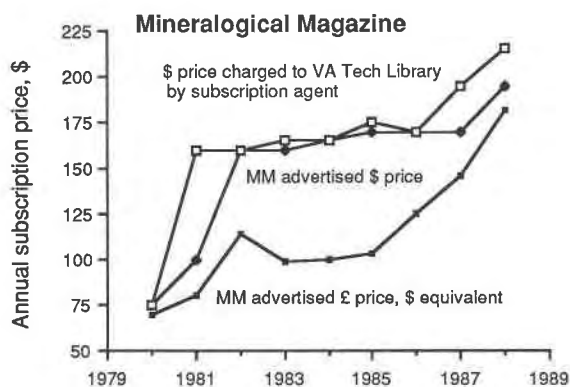
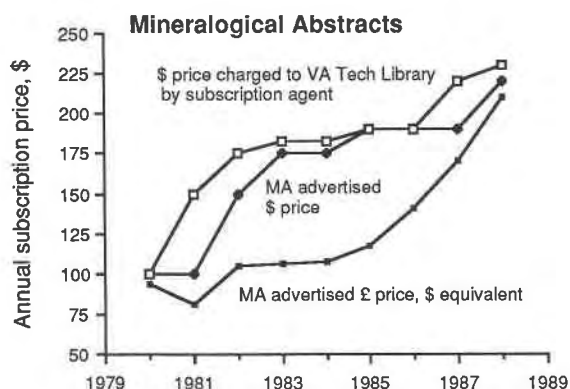


Fig. 2. Plots of subscription costs (in U.S. dollars) based on dollar-equivalent advertised sterling prices (■), advertised U.S. dollar prices (●), and the price that Newman Library at Virginia Tech paid to its subscription agency (□) over the years 1980–1988 for *Mineralogical Abstracts*, *Mineralogical Magazine*, and *Clay Minerals* (formerly *Clay Minerals Bulletin*). I will send data on request.

coup discounts to agencies by surcharges to libraries defeats the attempts of the latter to keep expenditures down but adds substantially to the profit margins of subscription agencies. Nonetheless, if there are to be surcharges for whatever reasons, I prefer that they be advertised as such and not “hidden” in currency conversions. For ex-

ample, in 1982 *Clay Minerals Bulletin* was quoted in *MM* at £32 for Great Britain and £38·50 for “overseas” [a 20% surcharge].

To have folded certain operating expenses into a U.S. dollar price and to have fixed that price well in advance of the billing date was very profitable (though perhaps accidentally so) for the journals administered by the Mineralogical Society between 1982 and 1986, but by 1988 the gap had narrowed to the point where the 10% discount to agencies brought the current dollar price (at \$1.83/£) to somewhat lower than the nondiscounted sterling price for all three journals (A. Criddle, personal com-

munication). Recent history to the contrary, this certainly indicates that “discriminatory pricing” is no longer practiced by the Mineralogical Society. To the extent that my statements (based on earlier data) offended members of our sister society—many of them also members of MSA—I offer my regrets.

REFERENCE CITED

Ribbe, P.H. (1988) Assessment of prestige and price of professional publications. *American Mineralogist*, 73, 449–469.

MANUSCRIPT RECEIVED JANUARY 25, 1989

MANUSCRIPT ACCEPTED FEBRUARY 10, 1989