Librarians as Enemies of Books??

Thomas R. Adams

H andolph G. Adams was never accused of being dull. Brash, impudent, and rambunctious, yes. He loved to create excitement, or, to use his phrase, "stir up the animals." He enjoyed the success of "Librarians as Enemies of Books," and the notoriety the five reprints brought to him. He wrote it in the spirit of the old story of the mule skinner who hit his most intelligent and docile mule over the head with a two-by-four to get its attention. Choosing five themes he, briefly and with a broad brush, highlighted certain library practices and trends that had become of increasing concern to lovers of the book everywhere. It was not a diatribe on the spur of the moment, as indicated by the authorities he cited from Gustave Flaubert to Louis Round Wilson. Indeed, Adams makes it clear that the idea came from Victor Hugo Paltsits, Keeper of Manuscripts at the New York Public Library. The continued, if dubious, place the essay occupies in library literature suggests that it said some things that some people wanted to hear. But did it really make any difference? Is the status of the book any different than it was forty-six years ago? I should like to offer a response to these questions.

Recently, important segments of the library profession have become concerned with the matter of "The Book." Deterioration of paper has made conservation a buzzword. The rising prices of antiquarian books have created a new bureaucratic term—deaccessioning. The increasing importance of electronics in recording, storing, manipulating, and presenting data is seen as posing a threat to the existence of the very thing from which librarianship takes its name. The plight of the book is being addressed from the points of view of the librarian who administers them, the curator who cares for them, the printer who makes them, the publisher who promotes them, the bookseller who distributes them, the collector who treasures them, the trustee responsible for the institution that houses them, and, last but not least, the author who writes them and the reader who uses them. Each, to varying degrees, has expressed views about the dilemma: what should we be doing about the book in our changing world? There is, however, one constituency, if I may call it that, that has not been heard from (the one which both William Blades in Enemies of Books and my father were talking about), that is, the book itself, a physical object vulnerable to hazards and mistreatment. It is from this point of view that I propose to approach my subject. To do so I shall be talking about how books relate to librarians and to libraries. By looking at the way in which books have functioned within the framework of American librarianship, I hope to point up the way in which administrative practices have responded to the needs of the book.

Photography is taken for granted today as a normal part of the life of a library. First used in the making of books in the 1840s, it was not until the 1930s that microphotography became a viable force in library affairs. In the 1950s electrostatic printing carried it one step further, reducing the...
processing of reproduction from hours or
days to seconds. This history is so familiar
that there is a tendency to forget its impact
on the relationship between the book and
librarians. For years the information con­
tained in a book and the book itself were
treated as inseparable. That unity has now
been shattered, and in the process some­
thing fundamental in the librarian’s re­
sponsibilities has emerged in full view.
The primary concern is for information, it
is that which has first claim on the librar­
ian’s administrative and management abil­
ities. As long as information and books
were embodied in the same object, books
received the full benefit of the librarian’s
attention. Today that is not necessarily
true. To understand change rationally and
accept it emotionally are different things.
It takes time to fully realize that old as­
sumptions have lost their validity. With li­
brarians this has been particularly difficult
because it was a feeling for books that
drew so many of them to the profession in
the first place. Management skills, cost­
effectiveness, an acute awareness of the
bottom line are now major considerations.
Anything that distracts from filling the
needs of the users in the most efficient
way possible becomes an amenity, accept­
able only so long as it does not interfere
with the principal business at hand.
Among the amenities is the librarian’s
feeling for books.
The realities are, needless to say, a
good deal different from that rather stark
description of how library policy operates.
For one thing, in the foreseeable future
books will still be the most effective vehi­
cle for transmitting certain kinds of infor­
mation. For another, few librarians are all
head and no heart. They are as susceptible
to the appearance of the printed page as
anybody else. The point is that when the
librarian is, in a military sense, “On
Duty,” professional responsibilities re­
quire that information receive first priority
and that the book, if necessary, be sacri­
ficed. It is important to recognize this rev­
olutionary development that separated
the book from the text it contained if we
are to understand what is happening to
rare books and those who are devoting
their careers to them.

Lying at the bottom of the complex
structure that makes up the relation of
books to libraries is the first event in that
relationship, the acquisition of the book.
Or, more to the point, why one book was
acquired rather than another. For present
purposes the motivations that lead li­
braries to build a particular kind of collec­
tion can be divided into three groups: li­
braries attempting to fill all the needs of
everyone in a particular geographical
area—normally the free public library; li­
braries devoted to filling the needs of a
self-selected part of society—in its most
developed form, the university research
library; and libraries devoted to collecting
a particular subject or subjects—in its earli­
est form, the historical society. In practice,
these three overlap and the picture is fur­
ther blurred by a fourth element: private
collectors who acquire books for their own
satisfaction. Rough as these divisions may
be, they will help focus attention on the
basic element in the relationship, the rea­
son why books are gotten in the first place.
The youngest of the three groups is the
free public library, with its evangelical zeal
to serve all the needs of the community.
The older tradition of the private circulat­
ing library was deemed undemocratic and
outside the mainstream of American li­
brarianship. A library dedicated to every­
one should make its books available to ev­
everyone. But books are among the most
cantankerous objects created by man.
There are always some that refuse to fit
even the most generously conceived
scheme. From the beginning, public li­
brarians violated their own canons and
locked up certain books out of the reach of
the normal reader. They included
naughty books, expensive books, books
prone to mutilation, even books that the li­
brarian, personally, could not bear to see
damaged by indiscriminate circulation,
and, finally, material that was awkward to
store. Thus, at the start there were excep­
tions, and exceptions are awkward things
in something as structured as a library.
These exceptions increased in size until
they began to present a special problem
and they began to be called collections. On
top of these exceptions were the demands
of what we would call “special-interest
groups, i.e., a small minority of the community who wanted the library to make an extra effort to fulfill their special needs (e.g., business interests) and did not want to go to the expense of creating their own reference collection. This was further complicated by the private collector seeking a permanent resting place for the results of his work, usually with restrictions. The addition of these things to the operation of public libraries sometimes masks the fact that the basic need to serve the ordinary user remained unchanged. Except in places like the New York Public Library, which began with important collections, special collections emerged late in public libraries and sometimes grudgingly, unless, of course, special funding was available.

The first libraries that addressed themselves to a self-selected social group were the eighteenth-century college libraries. Their purpose was to fill the needs of an elite group, the faculty and students. Until the end of the nineteenth century, their function was to respond to what was taught in the college. This function began to expand when the faculty added to their teaching the responsibility for scholarly research. The emergence of scholarship as a recognized profession and the growth of graduate education pushed libraries to add books to meet these new needs. In the early days, scholars concentrated on the study of history, in its largest sense. The libraries responded as best they could by getting books on the subjects on which the faculty was currently working. In the case of European history, this was not always easy, so some faculty members formed seminar collections, many of which later went to their university. Withal, the acquiring of books was still a response to specific needs. The next step came when American scholars had the experience of mining the great collections in the older libraries of Europe. Here were books that inspired inquiry into hitherto unsuspected aspects of history. With the optimism and self-confidence of the nineteenth century, Americans began to try to create the same thing by buying books on a large scale, books for which there was no immediate need but which stimulated scholarship. The most notable achievement was what Archibald Cary Coolidge did for the Harvard College Library. One result was that Harvard (and other universities like it) became a national resource in addition to being a local one. This became notably apparent when scholars from all over the country began to spend their sabbaticals in Cambridge. An interesting aspect of Coolidge’s approach was that he used the term special collection to describe subject collections as they stood on the shelves. Treasure room was used for the place where books were locked away. Compared to public libraries, this department emerged fairly early. The earliest rare book collection recorded is at the University of Michigan in 1899. The elitism of scholarship soon attracted private collectors, particularly those who, with ample resources, knowledge, and dedication, had built collections of distinction. The creation of rare book collections in university libraries did not demand the same kind of compromise with basic purpose required in public libraries. But they did not change that basic purpose—serving the needs of the faculty and students. One need look no further than the restrictions frequently placed on the use of a university library by those outside the university. It is worth noting however, that these restrictions are, in some cases, not applied or are relaxed for the rare book collection, a recognition of the obligation such collections have to scholarship as a whole.

Libraries concentrating on a subject or subjects took their earliest form in historical societies. Working on the assumption that until the sources have been assembled the historian cannot do his work, these societies collected as much original material as possible. In addition to books, there were manuscripts, archaeological artifacts, paintings, prints, maps, furniture, household goods, or any other object that could help illuminate the past. Ostensibly this was done in the name of the society, but it was in fact done because of the needs of the subject and was intended for the use of those working in the field. Unlike the public library or the university library, scholars had no inherent right to use the collections. They were guests of
the society. Out of this early form, there evolved other libraries and collections whose primary concern was one or more subjects. Some were the work of private collectors such as the Pierpont Morgan Library. Others, such as the Houghton Library, were created by taking existing collections and accumulations and molding them into a coherent whole offering outstanding research opportunities. Still others were older libraries with rich collections that, like the Library Company of Philadelphia, having outlived their original purpose, turned themselves into research libraries. The corporate form can vary all the way from complete autonomy, as in the case of the Henry E. Huntington Library, through a semiautonomous association with an institution, as is the case with the John Carter Brown Library, to being an integral part of the library system, as with the Lilly at Indiana. The subjects they embrace can be restricted, such as books printed in the United States before 1786 (the American Antiquarian Society) or as broad as all the humanities (the Newberry Library). Varied as the origin, organization, and fields of collecting may be, all have one thing in common. They collect originals. Facsimiles and reprints are present, but they are clearly understood to be unsatisfactory substitutes that do not foreclose obtaining the original if the opportunity presents itself.

The role of the private collector has been to strengthen and increase the ability of libraries and collections to provide resources for original research. Some do so by adding to already existing fine collections, as Albert E. Lownes did when his books on natural history were added to Brown University's already excellent collections on the history of mathematics and the physical sciences. Others stimulate work in neglected fields, as did James Ford Bell for the early history of commerce in the collection that bears his name at Minnesota. Fellowship programs and publication programs are the usual expression of the desire to see a collection expand scholarly activity. On the other hand, private collectors have not been willing to entrust the results of their work to the service-oriented philosophy of librarianship. They are frequently hedged about by restrictive conditions to protect their books from indiscriminate use or loss of identity. Finally, like historical societies, the private collector acquires books as objects, so it is not surprising that steps are taken to protect them.

In this country, then, we have two distinct basic library policies. The dominant one is to collect books (and today, other media) for the purpose of bringing together information so that it can be organized, ready for a summons from the constituency being served. The role is fundamentally a passive one: ready to answer questions. The other kind of libraries have no constituencies as such. They address themselves to abstract subjects or themes. They acquire books to ask questions.

The status of those who run rare book collections is as varied as the organization and contents of the collections themselves. However, the existence for almost twenty-five years of ACRL's Rare Book and Manuscript Section indicates that things are better than they were forty-six years ago when the group was made up of a few entrepreneurs who scorned the American Library Association and did business over three-martini lunches at Longchamps in New York. We are all conscious of the growing interest among scholars in books, as indicated by your 1980 conference, "Books and Society in History." We have long been aware of the growing attention being paid to books as aesthetic objects, significant because of their design and craftsmanship; and we all somehow sense that as a monument to a major achievement in Western civilization, books are growing to have a symbolic value in their own right. Yet our individual careers could not be more diverse.

At this meeting it would be perfectly possible for an authority on fifteenth-century typefaces to be sitting next to an expert on the deterioration of nineteenth-century paper, or a cataloger next to an archivist who isn't a librarian at all. Some curators draw attention to their collection; others do so by a kind of glorified "show and tell" designed to draw attention to the needs of the whole library. Control over
what is added to the collection may be in
the hands of the staff or those decisions
may be made outside the collection. The
head of the collection's place in the table of
organization can be anywhere from near
the top to well down toward the bottom.
Some head librarians are enthusiastic
about rare books; others find them a
bother inherited from the past and wish
they would go away. All of us feel that we
have something in common; but it isn't
necessarily librarianship.

One is reminded of George Bernard
Shaw's quip about England and America
being two countries separated by a com-
mon language. Patron is used among li-
brarians for people who use the library.
Rare book people use it for people who
support the library. Use is a positive word
indicating the ultimate objective, or it is a
negative word connoting wear and tear.
Conservation includes microfilming, and
then throwing away the original, which is,
of course, destruction. The word edition
means something different to someone
working with AACR2 cataloging rules
than to someone working with the guide-
lines of Gregg, McKerrow, and Bowers.
Subject is a category into which books are
fitted for cataloging purposes; in rare book
collections, it is the topic being explored
by someone doing research in an area for
which no categories yet exist. Cooperation
to a rare book person means to be
"coopted"; the preferred term is coordi-
nate, with the implication of working to-
gether as peers. I'm sure all of you can
think of other situations where on the sur-
face we appear to be doing the same
things, but in fact are doing them in pur-
suit of different goals. We catalog a book
primarily to describe a physical object;
normal cataloging does so to tell what is in
it and where it is on the shelf.

The one thing that seems clear to me
from all this is that we are on the fringes of
the library world. Our first concern is the
book, not information. Asking questions
is more important than answering them.
We serve history, not people. With these
different priorities, it seems unlikely we
will ever be anywhere else but on the
fringes if our present connection with the
library profession continues as it is.

Should we not be thinking about another
arrangement within which to carry out
our work?

In looking around for a "place of our
own," it is natural that the two areas with
which we share common interests, schol-
arship and museums, should come to
mind. We resemble faculty in that re-
search and writing are properly part of our
work. We differ in that the faculty teaches
and we care for our collections. I am not
proposing that tired red herring "faculty
status," which confuses form with sub-
stance. On the other hand, a large propor-
tion of us work in universities and have
more in common with the faculty than
with librarians. Somehow our position
within the university ought to reflect this.

One of the most meaningless library
sayings is "Libraries are not museums."
Meaningless if by museum you mean the
modern museum with its educational pro-
grams, its research, its publications, and
the scholars who are on its staff. Like mu-
seums we collect the original object in or-
der to find out more about what it means.
Perhaps our place should be somewhere
between libraries, museums, and the his-
tory profession. We partake of some of the
characteristics of each and add to them our
own conviction of the importance of
something that stands by itself, the book.

Assuming that there are those who can
accept the reasoning that led up to the pro-
posal that has just been made, I am sure
that they would be quick to point out that
as a practical matter it leaves a great deal
to be desired, particularly if I were proposing
it as grounds for immediate action. Such
was not my intention. It would not be ap-
propriate for someone who has become an
inactive member of the rare book profes-
sion to try to outline what you, who will be
carrying on, ought to do in the years to
come. However, there are two develop-
ments that I feel will have to take place: a
more closely knit structure for those in
rare books and a looser structure in the or-
ganization of the library profession. These
are hardly original observations, but be-
fore closing I would like to make a few
comments about them.

Work with rare books as a professional
activity stands on its own foundation. It is
Tailored to meet the needs of today's library and information science specialists

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Mayo, D. From libraries to vendors and back again: expanding employment opportunities for librarians. Ill Lib 65:301-2 My '83
Evaluation
Pagé, A. Évaluation de psychologique abstracts par l'entremise de trois systèmes en mode direct: comparaison des résultats d'une recherche bibliographique (Evaluation of Psychological abstracts using three online systems: comparing results of a bibliographical search). charts Doc et Bibl 26:81-93 Jr '80
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See Use studies—Information brokers

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE LIBRARY COMMUNITY

The essential characteristics of society in the information age are instant availability of news and access to the gargantuan amount of information.

The information age is here, but we have just begun to take advantage of the transformation, or even explore the opportunities available to us.

How does a library participate effectively in the information age? How does a library remain as one of the primary stakeholders of information?

We can't depend on “business as usual.” In the absence of a national consensus for libraries, we have become overdependent upon past concepts of what a library is supposed to do, and the role a library is supposed to play in society.

The absence of a new role and a new vision for libraries leaves the community with no visible reasons why libraries should increase their budgets, be upgraded and remain the guardians of information.

Libraries can't accept a no-growth future—a future, where their importance fades away just as the typewriter has given way to the word processor.

We can't accept the weakening of the libraries' role in the community, the disintegration to second-rate information providers or the redistribution of information access to the wealthy or advantaged.

We must guarantee that every person has equal opportunity to access information, equal access to the retrieval of information, and equal access to the use of information.

The idea that the future holds less promise than the past for libraries is unacceptable.
The best insurance against that happening is community demand for the library to play a dominant role in the future. It requires that libraries illuminate the future by becoming more relevant and of greater service and importance to the community.

What do we need?
- New vision...expanded charter
- New ideals and ideas
- New technology (patron access)
- New approaches to meeting the community
- Imaginative leadership
- Dynamism
- Creativity

To identify with the role of libraries in the future, it is necessary to think about it, to visualize it, and to bring that visualization to fruition.

Data Phase is committed to help invest in, implement, and create demand for a new realization and relevancy of the libraries' capabilities and role in society. Data Phase is committed to enhancing the libraries' role in society making sure that there is equal information access, learning opportunities, and technological dissemination, to everyone in the community, not just the privileged few.

Democracy is based on information access for all, information liberty, and information transference. We intend to play whatever role we can to guarantee that the library community comes to the forefront and is on the leading edge of the information age.

We don't mean this to be the last word on the subject, or even the first word. It is our desire to initiate a dialogue. We would like to know whatever people would like to say.

We value your ideas and your partnership. We intend to use this space in the future to publish the responses we receive so that we can continue the dialogue. Please address your correspondence to Steve Weiss, Senior Vice-President, Data Phase Corporation, 9000 West 67th Street, Shawnee Mission, Kansas, 66202.

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related to, but different from, conventional librarianship. In our attitude toward ourselves and our work, we must make it clear that dedication to books and the fields of study they represent are as important as the library profession's dedication to information and to service. Our position cannot be that of a supplicant seeking permission to do the things we know need to be done. Rather, having decided what ought to be done, we should go ahead and do them. Consultation is essential if both sides are to benefit because we will always have much in common, but contact should occur only when it is to our mutual benefit. Such an approach may, and probably does, seem arrogant. But it is essential if we are to be seen in the world beyond libraries as a force in our own right. It is to the larger world that we must, in the end, address ourselves if we are to establish what we are doing as truly viable.

Scattered as our resources are in terms of the kinds of books we deal with, the administrative structures under which we live, it is obvious that nothing is to be gained by advancing along a broad front. Instead, the process should be a series of local skirmishes, each of which will deal with individual and local matters. But these must be done with a common sense of unity in our dedication to a common goal.

We already have a number of resources that, if drawn together effectively, can assist. Bibliography, in the largest sense of that word, provides a growing scholarly and academic base. Journals, such as the Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America and Printing History, published by the American Printing History Association, are among many periodicals devoted to aspects of our subject. Those two societies are only two of many organizations that share our interests. Others include book collectors' clubs, Friends organizations, and antiquarian booksellers' organizations. These and other elements need to be connected in a way that will enable them to forcefully help further our interests.

What has just been said may seem antagonistic and combative. A closer look at the library profession today suggests an unsettled state. The explosion of information, the increasing complexity in the ways it is created, stored, and communicated has drastically modified the function that used to be associated primarily with libraries. They no longer occupy the central place they once did. The concept of one central clearinghouse for all library matters is breaking up. As has been true of historical scholarship for some time, we are in a period of specialization, but one in which the specialties work across conventional boundaries to work with other specialties without going back to some central authority for its endorsement. Fluidity is the key to the future. Each element must be freer to make its own decisions about professional education, career goals, and conditions under which work is carried out. The best analogy I can think of in trying to see what the future might hold is what happened to the British Empire.

During the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century, it was assumed that the mother country and the colonies shared the same interests. Colonial wars and isolated disputes suggested some differences, but it was felt best to leave the power to govern in the hands of the king and Parliament. All went well until 1760, when Britain found herself coping with an enlarged empire with a system of government whose primary interest was, and would continue to be, the United Kingdom. Initially the people in Westminster did not grasp their inadequacy and attempted to treat the original thirteen colonies as if nothing had changed. A great deal had changed during the 175 years since Englishmen first began to occupy this continent. After much agonizing and soul-searching, a group of strong-minded leaders were able to convince enough people to try to go it alone. The decision by Britain to resist this by force of arms was not one agreed to by all Englishmen. There was a vocal element, both in and out of Parliament, which argued that the colonies should be turned loose. But unlike the arguments used by the colonists, theirs had little to do with theories of government. Instead they took the position that the colonies caused more trouble than
they were worth, and, if given their independence, Britain stood to make more money out of them, which in fact turned out to be the case. Having learned from this mistake, Britain evolved during the next century into the British Commonwealth of Nations, a system so flexible and so decentralized that each part of the empire was allowed to develop in its own way. At the same time, the remaining connections are something more than a matter of form. The attachment to the crown has allowed the former colonies and the United Kingdom to continue the advantages of connection as long as they are useful. It seems to me that this provides a reasonable model that deserves to be looked at as the world of librarianship and the world of rare books begin to make arrangements for the future.

I would like to close by coming back to the question posed by my title, Are librarians enemies of books? The answer is clearly no. To the library profession, books are incidental, their first responsibility is the control of information. As for being "enemies," both Blades and my father misused the word. The desire to injure or to do something harmful is necessary before one can become an enemy. In no way can these words be applied to a profession as honorable as librarianship, either in 1937 or today. If books have an enemy, at all, it is change. It is change we are dealing with, and it is up to us to see that books not only do not suffer, but rather that in this new environment they flourish as they have never before.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The two question marks were used on impulse. It was not until after the paper had been delivered that I discovered among my reprints a short piece by my old friend Rudolf Hirsch using only one question mark: The Rub-Off 12, no.3 (May-June 1961), published by the Art Guild Bindry, Cincinnati, Ohio.
2. The Library Quarterly 7:317-31 (1937). The offprint was reprinted five times.
3. Louis Round Wilson, 1876-1979, at the time the dean of the Graduate Library School, University of Chicago.
6. Located at Madison near 58th, it was a popular gathering place for book people working in and around the New York Public Library.