Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large
Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Bibs & Blather
End of a Volume, End of an Era

This is the final issue of *Cites & Insights* Volume 9. (The index and title page will appear later, probably still in November 2009.) It's not quite a single-essay issue, but close to it—and I'd like to think that essay winds up the year on a bright note.

I'd apologize for the absurd length of this volume (the book edition's going to be *fat*). I still have dreams of aiming for 144—no, make that 192—no, make that 240 pages a year, but instead this is the first time the ejournal's passed the 400-page mark. Oddly enough, that's partly because this has been a busy year, what with house-hunting, moving, etc., and I kept trying to make sure there would be *some* material ready for "the next issue." And I published large parts of three different books, none of which sold very well…

It's also the end of an era, five years of sponsorship by YBP Library Services, a division of Baker & Taylor. I'm grateful for the sponsorship and should note that YBP *never* influenced editorial content, something that was made clear from the beginning.

New Sponsor Needed

Cites & Insights needs a new sponsor—and I'd be happy to discuss a sponsorship that includes *Walt at Random* as well. Basics:

➢ The ideal sponsor would have interests in the library field but, if a business, would be in an area I don't discuss—e.g., integrated library systems, bibliographic services, library schools, consortia, distributors...

➢ Sponsorship would yield an identification on the first page of each *C&I*, a sentence and a logo on the last page of each *new* issue, a sentence on each *new* HTML version and a sponsorship ac-

knowledgement and link on the *C&I* home-page—and, for *Walt at Random*, a mutually-agreeable link or ad on all pages. (The YBP sponsorship stays on all issues they sponsored.)

➢ We could discuss messages from the sponsor, signed as such.

➢ *C&I* readership is substantial. Over a six-month period (May 2-November 1, 2009), there were 206,000 pageviews in 77,000 sessions, including 48,000 full-issue downloads and 119,000 HTML pageviews.

➢ To my continued astonishment, *Walt at Random* seems to be a bigger draw: Currently, it's averaging more than 4,000 pageviews a day.

➢ Want to reuse selected material on a "company site" or have me speak at a company-sponsored event? That's certainly possible.

➢ Get in touch with me at waltcrawford at gmail.com.

I'm not suggesting *C&I* will go away if there's no sponsor. I *am* saying *C&I*'s future would be more assured with a sponsor.

Inside This Issue

New Book Likely

But Still They Blog: The Liblog Landscape 2007-2009 should be out before the end of the year and possibly before the first *C&I* for 2010. (As I write this, the first nine of 11 to 13 chapters are in second-draft stage.) It doesn't entirely replace *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2008* and that book continues to be available.

The new book covers a more selective portion of the liblog landscape, although still a large one (it includes 521 blogs, 41 of them not in the earlier study). It's somewhat more narrative, although still heavy on tables and graphs. It *does* include brief subjective comments on some (but not all) blogs—and those

blogs aren't all described in one humongous chapter at the end of the book.

Watch for the announcement, either in *Cites & Insights* 10:1 or on *Walt at Random*.

Making it Work

Purpose, Values and All That Jazz

I'm not a librarian and certainly not a philosopher—but it's hard to discuss real-world librarianship without considering philosophical issues at times. This is one of those times, although "philosophical issues" can overlap into specific practical considerations.

Because MAKING IT WORK essays and perspectives almost always focus on one or more clusters of related items, some items definitely worth discussing get lost in the cracks. The first section of this installment considers a bunch of those, going back as far as October 2007. For these items, "mixed issues" seems like the best label—and "all that jazz" is a good alias, if you accept that jazz is not frivolity. These are *all* serious discussions; they just jump around more than usual.

As usual, most commentary deals with source material in chronological order within sections, and most subsection headings (in italics) are titles of blog posts or other source material. No, this isn't a wholly original "On"-style essay—and I wonder whether those essays are the best use of my limited talents. Coming back to this preface after preparing the bulk of the essay (admittedly heavy on quoted material), I'm delighted to see that it's largely upbeat, which I find appropriate for the end of year.

John's eight laws of library technology
This article originally appeared in one of John Miedema's earlier blogs and has been retained in his current *I, Reader*. You'll find it at johnmiedema.ca/2007/10/23/johns-eight-laws-of-library-technology/

Miedema comes to librarianship from IT, specifically IBM. He found, to his surprise, that "what I learned at library school was that I was less interested in library technology than librarianship." This post discusses "eight rules"; I'm including the rules and portions of Miedema's expansions, which are worth reading and thinking about.

1. **It all comes down to data and rules…** No one can learn it all. So just dive in and learn something; in time you will see that it all comes down to two things: data and rules… In the end, there is not much new under the sun. It all comes down to data being sloshed around by the application of programmatic rules. Content and syntax. I hope that helps describe the big picture, and gives you courage to try anything in the field.

2. **Organized information is handier than disorganized information**. Just like closets. It sounds obvious, almost a definition of cataloging. Now let me offer this slant—*any* degree of increased order is helpful. There are many methods of increasing order: back-of-the-book indexes, full-text indexes, controlled vocabularies, taxonomies, etc. The thing all of these tools have in common is that they reduce the state of disorder or chaos in information to some degree… The task of a librarian in the information age isn't necessarily to bring high-end classification systems to the web. Things like social tagging are catching on because they bring just a measure of order to large bodies of content…

3. **The rate at which data is being recorded is accelerating faster than our ability to manage it…** The information technology industry keeps inventing new ways to cope with the situation—content management, business intelligence, tagging, and so on—but there is another practical option: collect less information. Will we be less informed? Not if we apply an old-fashioned solution, the scientific method. Scientists collect a finite number of observations from the natural world, apply scientific rigor (repeatability, etc.), and make valid conclusions more often than not. They don't try to record everything…

4. **Librarians should not build their own software systems [except as part of open-source teams].** Librarians should experiment with every new technology out there. Librarians should become very technically literate…in order to know what they want, and what they are getting when they go to a vendor to purchase a system… Web 2.0 widgets are a long cry from a software system… Think very hard about what patrons want; most don't know… In truth, design is a two-step between users and experts… I'll make one significant exception; open source development has the potential to harness all levels of development skills into a worthy product; it just takes longer.

5. **These days there is only one way to acquire a system: buy a package, and two, custom build it.** [Paraphrasing: Most library systems aren't "finished" for a given installation.] Just because it's shrink-wrapped doesn't mean it's a package. Think configuration. Ask your vendor how much configuration is required. Is it custom programming in disguise? That's where the dollars drain out…

6. **RSS and XML are cooler than you think**. RSS is a simple Web 2.0 technology that completely changes our relationship with the web. Instead of having to go to the web, the web comes to you! If you learn nothing else about Web 2.0, learn RSS… If you want to

learn the next most important thing, learn XML, god's gift to the web. XML is a character based data format that allows disparate systems to talk to each other…

7. Print is the next evolution in information technology. If technology evolved in the order of its importance, then print would be the next big thing. There's no question that digital technology is better for finding information… But finding information is only half the picture… People talk about the continuum of data to knowledge. Data is something out there, on the web perhaps; knowledge is something in your head. We go through of process of taking information that's out there, and internalizing it. That's where print is so important… When it comes down to serious reading, especially of challenging material, there is no equal for print and books.

8. Library technology is less interesting than librarianship. It is important to remember this. It is becoming a more distant memory now, but remember that not so long ago it was believed by many that digital technology would replace libraries. Librarians were told they could become knowledge workers in the private sector…

I could quote more and maybe should (it's legitimate with Miedema's blog). Do I agree with all of these? Well…#3 gives me a *lot* of pause and I simply don't have enough experience to discuss #5. (I spent most of my career designing and writing library systems—but never as packages to be installed at many locations.) I would note that a fair number of people *still* believe digital technology will replace *libraries* and that print books are outmoded—although there, I'm definitely on Miedema's side.

What we have here is *not* a manifesto. It's a set of eight observations ("laws" is an uncomfortable term), one that encourages librarians to step back and look at things in broader and more balanced ways. Two years later, it's worth a reminder: If you never encountered this, maybe you should—and if you've read it and forgotten it, try reading it again.

The ALA Code is not enough…

Ryan Deschamps, The Other Librarian, posted this on February 18, 2008; the full title is "The ALA code is not enough: Thoughts and case studies on librarian ethics" (Click on "ethics" in the topic cloud at *The other librarian*, otherlibrarian.wordpress.com).

Deschamps notes suggestions that people post the ALA Code of Ethics on office walls and says, "Ethics are extremely important, but I am here to say that a statement of a code is not enough." He prefers to discuss four "things ethical." Excerpts:

1. Do Not Put Library Values before Core Human Values. The most important values in library service have nothing to do with libraries…. In this order, these are the values you should aspire to:

Integrity—Your word is your bond. You do what you say you are going to do…

Honesty—You do not lie, even when it hurts.

Accountability—You take responsibility for what happens under your watch, and refrain from the blame game when the results do not come through…

Compassion—You never behave as an automaton. Rules and policies often do cause harm to some at the benefit to others—you see your job as making the harm as little as possible when this happens…

Librarians and Library Associations are so often focused on their status as professions that they miss the core points related to any public service. *Be good first; be a good librarian second*.

I would argue that *total* honesty is neither always virtuous nor always ethical. There are cases where social untruths—little white lies—are necessary and valuable social lubricants.

2. Ethics is Hard: The Case of the Justified Whistle-blower

Sometimes, the most obvious right thing to do is, in retrospect the absolute worst thing to do. The most serious example I can think of is the issue of whistle blowing in the public service….

Paraphrasing Deschamps' argument, he believes it would be wrong and selfish to call a reporter if you know a manager is engaging in nepotism—because a "media feeding frenzy" could damage the library. Deschamps says you should only blow the whistle publicly if you're sure of your facts, higher officials are informed and doing nothing and "the problem is of a very serious, life-threatening nature." By adding **life-threatening**, Deschamps essentially says that *no* librarian (possibly outside of some medical libraries) should ever blow the whistle!

This is all to say that the first action that comes to mind may not be the most ethical action after all… You have to think before acting.

You should read Deschamps' full discussion here. I'm not convinced by the general case, although I agree with the final paragraph.

3. Ethics Hurts

Here, the "case study" doesn't seem to exist, except to the extent that he's saying it's easy for individuals to "accuse institutions of heinous acts" and difficult for institutions to defend themselves. The useful and legitimate point Deschamps makes is that it is typically unethical to breach confidentiality rules in order to refute an attack.

4. Ethics are Contradictory

If you haven't already figured it out, I have already said "honesty" and "integrity" are the most important values on one side of my mouth, and on the other side said "don't rat on your boss" or "don't tell the truth about that disgruntled patron."

That's the reason why I think ethical codes are so problematic. Honesty and Integrity ought to be the default settings for your behavior, but sometimes you have to change those settings to suit the circumstances. (*Paraphrased slightly:*) Perhaps the fifth and most important value is **Alertness**: keeping the mind open and aware of both small details and the big picture. [Which also requires:] Humility.

The post received one comment, primarily putting down a book on library values. Looking at it not quite two years later, I think Deschamps is saying important things—ethics *is* more about attitude and consistency than specific professional codes—and I think he provides reasons for you to think through some issues, even though you may disagree with his conclusions.

False public libraries

A provocative title and post—by "Bo" on February 18, 2008 at *The letter Z*. It's about DRM, more specifically "one particularly pernicious aspect of DRM, and other digital technologies: the way they limit the devices you can use to play protected files."

Bo works in mobile services—which means using bookmobiles to "bring services to people with other barriers to library use: low-income young children, seniors, and people with disabilities." That work has "made me more sensitive to the ways…citizens are commonly excluded from public services."

A co-worker asked me the other day whether I had noticed an increase in the number of new library materials that were available only in downloadable electronic formats. He pointed out that many of our hard-of-hearing or deaf patrons had only bought CD players because of the library's recent decision to stop buying any new audio cassettes. "Now they have to buy computers and MP3 players?" he asked.

Bo notes that DRM isn't new—and, relating this issue to a call by one group for public libraries to get rid of *any* resources with DRM, quotes my comment on that proposal (as reported at LISNews):

Maybe it's a good idea–maybe public libraries should not have any resources that contain DRM–but that does rule out almost all DVD (and, by the way, almost all videocassettes, except that the restrictions weren't digital), pretty much all subscription audiobook/music/etc. digital resources, Playaway, many (if not most) licensed databases…

Bo doesn't quote my final paragraph: "I'm not wild about DRM either. But trying to 'throw out' all of it is essentially arguing for a return to nothing but books and physical sound recordings." Bo notes that DRM gives producers much more control over use of materials—and argues, I believe overstating the case, that DRM helps companies in their efforts to "make…players obsolete as quickly as possible in order to sell newer models." Bo cites ATRAC players as an example. I don't find the case or the example all that convincing—ATRAC was discontinued because it failed in the marketplace, and CD players have been in production for nearly three decades now. For that matter, the oldest MP3 players work just fine with today's MP3s (and in this case, DRM was driven *out* of a particular marketplace).

But that's not really Bo's point. Bo is claiming something more fundamental:

The more materials libraries collect in electronic formats, with or without the added restrictions of DRM, the more dubious their status as true public utilities, and the more they resemble a public service to the owners of CD and MP3 players.

That's pretty striking: the condemnation literally includes *everything except books*. After all, LPs don't work unless you have a turntable (and CD players are almost certainly cheaper than turntables ever were!) and audiocassettes are worthless without a cassette player (which probably used to cost as much in real dollars as today's cheapest CD or MP3 players). It may be worth noting that Bo cites an argument on "false public utilities" that seems to say the highway system is a "false public utility"—which, presumably, should not have been built?

As a philosophical statement, I find it wanting. When we get to the point of suggesting that it's against the spirit of a *true* public library to provide anything except books, I'd go one step further: There are lots of people out there who can't or won't read book-length text. Therefore, public libraries shouldn't have books either.

Is that an overstatement? As I write this, I can buy a 2GB MP3 player for $19 and a portable CD player (including earbuds) for $20—or a DVD player for $10 ($40 for a complete player, including screen). Do those prices represent barriers to full public use, at such a level that it would be a greater good to the public to eliminate public library purchases of those media? I'm unwilling to make such a claim. (Should public libraries offer to circulate MP3 players or DVD players or CD players to those who can't afford their own? That's a different question, and I might have a different answer—for libraries that could actually identify a significant number of people who will use

the services and for whom a $10 or $20 purchase would be a legitimate hardship.)

There's more to the post, and I may be missing key points.

The story of my profession

This one's from Iris Jastram, posted April 9, 2008 at *Pegasus librarian*. Technically, she's talking about the Computers in Libraries conference, her difficulties in blogging and twittering directly from the conference and the extent to which this "lack of communication" (she was *talking* with people face-to-face, which certainly qualifies to me) contradicts "what I think has become the unofficial theme of this conference: telling stories." Jastram likes stories.

> At its heart, Story requires interaction, communication, and therefore community. I've also found that narrative stirs some deep and vital part of people. We'll believe a narrative that hangs together even without the "evidence" that we train ourselves from school onward to interrogate. And we'll often remember evidence-based narratives but forget all the actual evidence itself. On the flip side of that, facts without a narrative to tie them together are just about the epitome of "boring" and "forgettable" for me. And what's more, Story is fun! It taps into the not-work-but-fun part of my psyche and sets my default mode to trust and enjoyment rather than skepticism. (Why do you think it takes so long to teach students to read fiction critically?… because it's made up of good stories.)

> All this talk of Story has inspired me to be on the lookout for the narratives we present and narratives we could present to our communities. I know we do, and we often even do it intentionally. I'm just interested in being mindful, myself, of the power of Story for my library.

> But I actually think it should be more than just an inspiration. I think this idea of Story should be a great comfort to those who feel forced to think that the only way forward is to obliterate everything on which libraries are built. Quite the contrary. Our history of service and of meeting our community's needs is fundamentally part of our story. It's the part that's implied when we start *in medias res*. It's the part that sets the stage when we begin "once upon a time." It's the part that, if forgotten, renders the rest of the narrative stilted, limp, and ultimately boring. Moving forward is the rising action of the story, not a new story.

I love this, but then I wrote a series of "marketing" pieces for WebJunction, back in the day, on telling the library story and how libraries could tell community stories. I've always thought, and said, that it's *Story* that sets books apart as powerful media—they're great ways to tell long, well-narrated stories. (Yes, I did add

a comment along those lines. And "media" is intentional: Even narrative books make up several media, not just one medium.)

John's seven laws of progressive library technology

Remember "John's eight laws" at the start of this essay? Same John (Miedema), same blog (now called *I, reader* but still at johnmiedema.ca), posted July 18, 2008. Miedema read and reviewed *Revolting Librarians* and *Revolting Librarians Redux* and decided to offer an "unofficial (and uninvited) contribution to past or future volumes," suggesting that each generation of library students should have its own revolting volume.

I'm going to quote nearly the whole post because it's thought provoking and doesn't lend itself to easy excerpting.

> ➢ **1. The New Front of Intellectual Freedom is Relevance**. While there are still challenged materials, the bigger problem today is finding relevant information amidst the abundance on the web. A problem of plenty seems a good thing, but it is laced with agendas to obscure facts with advertising and misinformation.

> ➢ **2. Information Technology is Part of the Problem**. Better search technologies are not enough. Philosophers have a puzzle they call the frame problem, the still unsolved difficulty of programming effective relevance criteria for a dynamic environment. Notice that no one talks about artificial intelligence anymore. In direct proportion to the growth of the web, information seekers need curated information, librarians.

> ➢ **3. Information has an Identity**. Would the quality of the web improve if information was linked to an identity? My domain is johnmiedema.ca, my name and geography. It's something Facebook got right, organizing information around profiles. There is a time for anonymity, but not most of the time. Information is bound to be better when someone has to put their real name on it.

> ➢ **4. Information has a Location.** Information seems ethereal, but every byte exists on a physical disk somewhere in the physical plane. Metadata supplies a context on data; context is locality; one cannot escape the local in library. Information has an impact on the planet; think energy use and landfills. We better connect the dots between information and the earth while we can.

> ➢ **5. Information is Ecological**. Tweets, emails, blogs, e-books, print, books, stone tablets. All have a role in our information ecology. Status updates lend themselves to tweets, sustained thinking to blog posts or print. *Don't let the library blogosphere wither away into tweets alone.*

> ➢ **6. Code is Political**. Does it matter if your code counts toys or war machines? It is convenient to talk about "information"; it sounds so neutral. But technology changes the balance of power. In whose hands can it be trusted? Private business? Non-profits? If having an agenda is a dangerous thing, which of us is free from danger? Information is personal is political.
>
> ➢ **7. Keep it FOSS**. Politics has never been as simple as left and right, public vs private sector. Does private interest always poison the well? We can all collaborate more often through free and open source projects (FOSS) that protect the interests of everyone. Be careful. Not everything open source is FOSS. When it's FOSS, no one has the right to yank the plug, ever.

Could I quibble with some of these? Probably—but I think they deserve your own thought, so I'll just remind you that, more than a year later, this is still good stuff worth reading and thinking about.

What do you think you are doing?

An interesting post by Kathryn Greenhill, posted August 11, 2008 at *Librarians matter*. This one's not about mindfulness but "about understanding the motivations of other people, especially those well intentioned folk who get right up your nose." Or—well, she uses a phrase that drives *me* nuts, one she notes being used frequently by librarians "who are passionate about new technology and its transformative power": "they just don't get it."

> One of my stock answers—"Maybe they get it but just don't *want* it"—is apparently not acceptable. Greenhill believes asking "what does this person think she is doing"—as a *real* question, not a dismissal— could yield some understanding.
>
> Let's take a couple of examples.
>
> When you are answering a student question on the reference desk, what are you doing? If you believe you are there giving the student the information that she needs, you will give a very different answer than a co-worker who believes she is there educating the student how to find information for herself.

If you're trying to teach a student to fish on an occasion where the student *really just needs the damn fish*, you may be serving both yourself and the student badly because there's a mismatch.

> If you think that you come to work to catalogue books, you are going to do things very differently than your colleague who believes she is there to provide access to information. If you think you come to work so you can fund your real passion—restoring old lawnmowers—you are going to behave very differently than someone who comes to work because

they would go around the bend looking after their small children all day. That's different from someone who comes to work because she believes what she is doing changes lives in a good way, or that doing a good day's work is reward in itself.

Here I wonder, frankly…not that there will be differences but that one perspective necessarily results in better or more effective work than another. Someone who regards good work as its own reward may very well do a less effective job than one who does *great* work in order to pay for that expensive avocation.

> And then, how about adding in who your co-workers think they are serving? What if you are in a public library and think you are there to serve people who cannot otherwise buy books or navigate information, when your boss thinks you are there to serve the councillors on local government who fund your library? How about in an academic library? What if you think you are serving the students and need to be up to date with the technology they are using in their everyday lives, whereas your colleague believes she is serving the academics and needs to support the traditional teaching methods used by these people?

Also good questions—although I'd be saddened to think a public librarian felt they were there only or even primarily to serve those who couldn't afford their own books, that the library is *primarily* a welfare agency.

> I guess that it's useful to throw "charitable reading" into the mix of questions. Looking at what other people are doing and where you have no information to the contrary, interpreting it in the best-intentioned way on their part.

I'd like this better if it didn't mention "charitable reading," which in my experience is a wildly asymmetric notion—that is, "you are supposed to read *my* stuff charitably, but I'm free to attack you viciously *and personally* because of something I misinterpret or overinterpret." Cutting people slack? A great idea—but it doesn't work when it only works one way.

> I think it's easy, when you see someone who is not jumping on your bandwagon, to think it is because they are uncaring, or wrong, or not passionately engaged in their work. It's probably worth taking time out to ask a few questions:
>
> 1. Why am I doing this job?
>
> 2. Who do I think I am serving?
>
> 3. What do I think I am doing?
>
> 4. Why is she doing this job?
>
> 5. Who does she think she is serving?
>
> 6. What does she think she is doing?
>
> 7. How could I read what she is doing in the most charitable possible way?

Maybe, just maybe, it would be a useful exercise to write down 10 different answers to these questions, and see whether the obvious drops away and something a little closer to the truth emerges.

Then, how about going back and answering this question:

8. How would she answer the questions above?

When those questions are done with, you will probably be better equipped to answer the important question:

9. Where does the bridge need to be built and what's the best way to do it?

This list omits questions that *should* be fundamental for those touting new things and building bandwagons (which is what Greenhill is talking about).

➢ 10. Is it possible that they have a *valid* objection to the bandwagon I'm building?

➢ 11. Am I *sure* this new thing is beneficial in this environment—so sure that my role is to convince them, not to listen to their pushback?

I see questions one through nine all pointing to "how do I get this person to go along?"—and maybe that's not always the right question.

There's also the question of whether "passionately engaged" is the ideal or even the optimal position for librarians and other workers, but that philosophical discussion—which has been raised recently—goes *way* beyond this post. Is passion always the ideal? Are there times when a more balanced, more dispassionate approach might serve everyone better?

Greenhill writes well and carefully and thinks through her posts. I don't feel I *need* to cut her slack—and if it isn't clear that I think she's saying worthwhile things here, things I poke at while strongly recommending, then I haven't written this clearly enough.

Thinking about time

Maybe this relates back to Kathryn Greenhill's "What do you think you are doing?"—philosophical issues about librarians and others, not libraries themselves. This one's from Doug Johnson, posted January 13, 2009 at *Blue skunk blog*. He begins by quoting five paragraphs from another blog:

> Do you find yourself with too much free time to devote to your family, hobbies, or charity work?
>
> Do you feel like you're wasting time reading books, taking walks, or working on a Master's Degree?
>
> Is your mind so demented that you believe people want to read your every waking thought?
>
> Do you want to come home from a full-time job and then work some more?
>
> If you answered YES to all four, Congratulations… you have what it takes to blog. And it is quite possible that you are a moron, slightly creepy, and

in a word…breathtakingly odd (sorry, two words … and there is no chance I want to ever meet you in person). from *The PrincipalsPage blog*

One of my favorite quotes comes from Annie Dillard who writes, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." Seems like quite a number of bloggers have been reflecting lately on how best to spend their time… [cites five examples]

So how we spend our days is how we spend our lives, eh, Annie? I've been thinking a lot lately about how I use my writing time. In an old column on time management I once asked:

> **Is this a job that will have a long-term effect?…** too often, the minutia of the job pin us down, like Gulliver trapped by the Lilliputians, and we make small progress toward major accomplishments. Remind yourself that that the big projects you work on often have more impact on your students and staff than the little attentions paid to them. Spend at least one part of everyday on the big stuff.

Am I following my own advice? You have to know that I have about six primo hours of writing time each week—Saturday and Sunday mornings. It's the only time my brain really works well enough to think very hard about things. (I suppose that is why I can blog any old time…)

Which leads me to ask which sort of writing has the potential of making the greatest contribution to one's profession—books, articles or blog posts? I'm leaning toward the first. The first of my poor, sad books has not been revised for a dozen years.

I can't stop blogging—too much fun and too addictive. I like writing articles and columns, and it is still a thrill after all these years to see one's name in print.

But this year I am revising at least one book.

Hold me to it!

I suspect most *C&I* readers don't subscribe to *Blue skunk blog*, and those who do may have missed the broader implications of Johnson's discussion; I know I did. I also commented:

> It depends. I'd like to say books, but I suspect some of my ejournal issues and essays will have at least as long-lasting effects as any of my books. (On the other hand, I would never EVER suggest anybody emulate my founding of an ejournal. Never. Sharpen that stake and aim for the heart.)
>
> So, yes, in general, a good book should have more long-term effect than most any article—and a lot more lasting impact than a blog post.

I'll stand by that answer, noting that if I had been sensible and never started this ejournal, much of what appears here would have appeared as blog posts. Much, but not all, and the essays that have had the most im-

pact (do I need to cite the one that's been read by more people than all of my books put together?) would *never* have appeared as one post or a series of posts.

But that's me. Nobody else writes the same peculiar mix; nobody else should. The next comment after mine, signed "Janice," was strong and very different. Portions of that comment, slightly edited:

> BLOGS NOT BOOKS!
>
> A "long term effect" to me means something that will still be around a couple generations from now.
>
> For example—your grandchildren's generation will still be able to read the book you wrote, but SO WHAT?
>
> More important than the long-term effect IMHO (especially considering how quickly book ideas become dated) is the widespread immediate effect.
>
> You asked "which sort of writing has the potential of making the greatest contribution to one's profession—books, articles or blog posts?" and then you said, "I'm leaning toward the first."
>
> WHY do you think a book makes the greatest contribution to your profession? Here's why I don't think it does.
>
> A) Lots of people can't afford to buy a book and read it, but most people can afford to read a blog so with a book you have a limited audience.
>
> B) Some people don't want to read a book, but will read a blog (shorter time commitment)
>
> C) You probably have NO idea how many lurkers you've influenced with your blog posts, and you never will know! Those readers link or point others to your words, and they tell two friends and so on and so on. Lots of people don't pass on books in the same fashion..
>
> A carefully crafted, established blog contributes immeasurably to our profession. It is a noble gesture to share a piece of yourself so publicly with people who often will give you nothing in return—no money, no fame, and sadly, often not even any thanks or praise. So... since you asked—I think your blog is an extremely valuable and generous use of time; precious as it is…

Yes, this post and comment could go in a metablogging essay, but I think the questions and comments apply broadly. After looking at it again, I think everybody's right. Long-term impact *is* significant (and the ideas in good professional books *don't* age all that rapidly)—but broad short-term impact is *also* significant. There, blogs still have advantages over any more formal medium, at least in some areas.

Looking beyond the technolust

I'll use the title of Meredith Farkas' April 6, 2009 post at *Information wants to be free* as home base for convenience—but this discussion also includes "The importance of the non-techie or how I learned to stop pulling out my hair and love my Luddite" by Mick Jacobsen,

posted at *Tame the web* on March 11, 2009 (a post I didn't flag partly because that particular L-word is so patently offensive and dismissive) and Angel Rivera's "You should listen to the non-techies too," a same-day *The gypsy librarian* commentary on Jacobsen's post.

Here's the money quote, from Farkas:

> I feel strongly that we should not engage in dialogue with people who aren't into the technologies we're into just to convince them that we're right, because, frankly, we might not be.

It's always interesting to see high-profile library people change their stance on something—and how rarely they'll admit either that there's been a change or that, just possibly, they could have been wrong. Farkas is not in that always-right group, just one of her many strengths. We'll get back to her later.

Jacobsen begins—after offending me (not personally) in the post title—by citing his wife as one who makes light of social media, summarizing "I think it is safe to say she pretty much dislikes any 2.0 technology on contact." (Side-note to Jacobsen: *lots* of us refer to "aggravators" when dealing with RSS...for good reason, even as I follow 500 feeds.)

But now: His wife's using LibraryThing, his Facebook account (why not her own?), Delicious and Google Reader—and created a blog. So?

> What does this have to do with librarianship? Well, doesn't that first paragraph (besides the wife part) describe a significant portion of your coworkers? **Wouldn't it be great if you could move them to the second?** [Emphasis added.]

Would it? Not necessarily…but this is a post about effective evangelism, so here's Jacobsen's three-part solution—*in full* so there can be no question of quoting out of context:

> 1. **Listen**. Never dismiss what your Luddite says. You may not see how it applies, but it surely does in their eyes. When, and it is most certainly when, not if, they have misgivings about a technology it may be necessary to move on. You might be introducing the wrong technology at that particular time or you may need to reexamine the technology. The Luddite may very well have thought of something you haven't and it may not be as useful as you hope (I can't tell you how many times this has happened to me).
>
> 2. **Don't push too hard** (if you can avoid it). Sometimes all it takes is talking to them at the right time. Understand their schedule. Some people are ready to play at the start of the day, some after lunch, some while eating lunch, etc. The first time I introduced my wife to LibraryThing she wasn't interested. A few months later she noticed me using it (looking at all my pretty book covers) and asked "What is this and

why did you never tell me about it before?" A minute or two of introduction and away she went. This also has proven to be true with a few of my coworkers in regards to the newly created blogs at MPOW .

3. **Respect**. Their concerns are not generated from hate of tech. (well in most cases) or lack of intelligence; it is because they don't see the point. Show how you are personally using this new technology, how others are using it, and how they specifically could. Hypothetical situations just don't seem to work.

There's that magic word again—twice in one paragraph, which for me undercuts the admission that the shiny thing may not be the *right* shiny thing for this occasion. Much of the rest of this may be perfectly reasonable, but this is a case of "what I tell you three times is true": I'm *so* convinced at this point that Jacobsen doesn't *really* believe others have legitimate objections, but is only finding ways around their Luddism, that I'm nearly incapable of reading the rest charitably. It's sort of like finding someone who questions something you're doing and says "Hey jackass, let's discuss this": The flag's already gone up.

Sure, Jacobsen finishes with "As a side note it is probably better not call anybody a Luddite." But that begs the question. Clearly, he *thinks* of people as Luddites, else he wouldn't use the word repeatedly. Am I unreasonable to read "Listen" as "Pretend to listen" and "Respect" as "Pretend to respect"? (He already undercuts the second point.)

One comment says: "Maybe the question is why do we so badly want to convert people?" The last two comments are interesting in a different way: You'd think that the highest of the high-tech liblogs, in a post about converting doubters, would catch obvious spam—but there are four spamments in a row, one of which has been there two months at this writing. I may be a Luddite, but I know enough to keep spam out of my blog.

Rivera likes the post:

It resonated with me because one of the problems I have with the whole L2 phenomenon is that they often do not listen and that they tend to push way too hard to get people to use whatever the toy du jour happens to be.

He mentions some of his own experiences and how resistant he is to L2 evangelism, and why.

And notice that as I talk about what I do, I do emphasize the concept of "what I do" or for what I need it. What I am saying is that some things work for me and others do not. If they work for you, more power to you, but please don't get all pushy about it and try to convert me. That just puts you in the same bracket as religious fundamentalists who want to convert eve-

ryone and hold the view of "I am right; I have the truth, and you do not," and I hate those people with a passion. If you are a promoter of 2.0 technologies, do you really want to be in the same category as fundamentalist bullies? My guess is probably not.

So please, I would appreciate it if certain people chill a bit. I am not a luddite by any means; I am blogging, aren't I? And if you look on the right side column of my blogs, you find the links to my other online tools. But I can certainly see the point of some non-techie people that they may just not be ready or that they do not find a particular tool useful. Maybe like me, they just prefer a different tool, or they prefer not to use something at all. That is not a bad thing.

And yes, I also agree you probably should not label those people as "luddites."

Rivera notes that Twitter doesn't work *for him*—and the very first commenter feels the need to write "in defense of twitter" and why it's better than other tools. (This person loves "the minute details from our daily lives," so this isn't "Twitter is a great business tool.") The commenter either didn't *read* the post or didn't understand it at all—or got to the point where Rivera didn't use Twitter and immediately responded, as a good evangelist should. (Rivera responded politely.)

So far, we have a post that makes some good points but is flawed by red-flag language and a tone suggesting that these points have little to do with the possibility that a tool isn't right for the person and a lot to do with wearing them down while not wholly offending them. Let's get back to Farkas. Here's her first paragraph:

Let me preface this post with the statement that I *hate* the term Luddite. I think it's often used to dismiss people and ideas that differ from our own. It's much easier to dismiss someone as being anti-tech than to try and understand what may be their very rational argument against something you love or want to do.

She read Rivera's post first and was predisposed to pass over Jacobsen's language, although she does say: "The use of the term Luddite throughout the former post really made it difficult for me to read, which is a shame, because the arguments are quite good." And she sees things clearly, I believe:

Both Angel and Mick talk about opening a dialogue with non-techies instead of writing them off as being anti-tech. But Mick is coming at this from the standpoint of someone who loves tech and wants to share that love with others (the evangelist) and Angel is coming from the standpoint of someone who likes tech that is useful to him and is sick to death of people trying to push him to use technologies that just aren't for him.

Farkas offers a personal example—an internal wiki she began several years ago to share knowledge among staff workers. The need may have been there, but the tool wasn't used much. "The wiki didn't fail because it was a wiki (or because my colleagues were anti-tech). It failed because fixing that problem was not a top priority. It still isn't." (On the other hand, a wiki for subject guides *has* worked because reference and instruction *are* priorities.)

I feel as though there should be blinking text here: Meredith Farkas, who I've called "Queen of the wikis" because she's provided so much useful information and good examples of them, states publicly that a wiki she created **did not work**. Which does not, as she notes, mean "wikis are worthless"—not even close. It does suggest, once again, that "Just do it!" isn't the most useful approach for shiny new tools. Let's move on from Farkas demonstrating once again why she's one of the best bloggers in the field (and, I'm inclined to say, one of the best thinkers as well) to quote another great paragraph:

> I really like what Angel said about the pushiness of some people who just can't understand why someone wouldn't think their technology of choice isn't the best thing since sliced bread (and are sometimes rude and dismissive towards those who disagree). There's being a pragmatist about tech—and you can even really love the tech you use and still be pragmatic about it—and then there's being religious about tech. We don't need proselytizing. We don't all have to use the same tools and just because we don't like something you love doesn't mean we need to be educated (ugh! I hate when someone makes the assumption that a person must not agree with them because they haven't been educated about it properly—it really does stink of fundamentalism at that point, doesn't it?). While there are certain technologies I can hardly live without, there are plenty that just don't fit into my life. They may be "cool" and they may be really useful to you, but they're just not for me. Twitter is one thing that I use extremely sporadically and I've found just doesn't fit my day-to-day lifestyle. It's great for conferences (and I'm sure I'll use it at ALA Annual), but I don't have the time to stick with it and I have a hard time multitasking between work and Twitter. It doesn't mean I "don't get it." I just don't need it.

I want to boldface pieces of that paragraph, but that might weaken other pieces. Just in case you don't want to read the whole paragraph again, here's what I would have boldfaced:

> **We don't need proselytizing. We don't all have to use the same tools and just because we don't like something you love doesn't mean we need to be educated… It doesn't mean I "don't get it." I just don't need it.**

I'll admit that I may be less charitable than I should be. To me, Jacobsen's post is *still* all about proselytizing, but doing so in a more sophisticated way. It's about "getting through to the Luddites," not "recognizing that we all have different needs."

That's just part of Farkas' post. She notes a two-sided issue for *library* use of new technologies. Side one: "Just because we use it, our friends use it, and we think it's the best thing since sliced bread doesn't mean that our patrons use it." (By and large, libraries don't *know* what their patrons are using, and sometimes it doesn't matter quite as much.) Side two, with a nod to Brian Mathews: "We need to keep assessing…because…these things change all the time. While Twitter may not be hot right now with your population, it may be hot in a few months, so we really need to keep our finger on the pulse of our patrons. And there may be times when it makes sense to step out in front of your patrons with new tech."

Farkas' final paragraph:

> I think sometimes we all need to try and step outside of our personal feelings about these technologies, which isn't easy when we think they're the best thing since sliced bread. When we are talking to others about technology, we need to realize that what we find useful may not be useful to them (and that's OK). When we are thinking about implementing new tech with our patrons, we need to understand how our patrons use tech and whether this is really a good fit for that population. Charging in with an "I know better" attitude rarely leads to positive outcomes. Effective two-way communication and understanding other perspectives is critical.

The first commenter puts down "someone who refuses to purchase a computer for home use because they see no value to computers." Later, Farkas notes: "Not everyone necessarily needs a computer in their life and not seeing the need for one doesn't necessarily equate to being against technological progress." I'm guessing that to many people (including Pew Internet), the very *idea* that some people really *don't* need home computers is so heretical as to be unthinkable.

Jacobsen adds a comment, semi-apologizing for using "Luddite" so often. I've gone back and read his three points yet again, trying to read them as something other than tools for persuasion. Maybe I'm just tired today, but I'm not getting there—I still see little but lip service for the concept that some people (and some libraries) may simply not have the need for the tools being pushed.

Twitter is evil. Elsevier is evil. Wikipedia is evil.
After that lengthy (and more heated than I'd intended) discussion, it's time for a short one—noting Kathryn Greenhill's May 10, 2009 post at *Librarians matter*. She notes that librarians need to know about authoritative sources and teach other people how to evaluate reliability, then provides three examples. The first is Twitter's sheer power to misinform (in this case about swine flu). The second is Elsevier's series of "Australasian journals of…" fake journals. The third is a deliberate hoax within Wikipedia that resulted in a phony quotation being used in obituaries around the world. The concluding paragraphs (slightly edited):

> **What conclusions can we draw from these articles?**
>
> 1. Twitter, Elsevier and Wikipedia should be legally stopped before they can do any more damage?
>
> 2. There is no context in which Twitter, Elsevier and Wikipedia will be a reliable or useful information source?
>
> 3. Librarians don't need to understand the many different ways Twitter can be used, the funding patterns of academic journals nor how references are quality controlled in Wikipedia?
>
> Nope. Librarians need to understand how information on Twitter, in academic journals and Wikipedia is created, distributed, re-used, re-purposed and the criteria for sensible evaluation.

To which I would say: True enough—but how, exactly, do librarians go about unearthing the Wikipedia hoax or discouraging uncritical use of Wikipedia or the other resources? That's a legitimate question, one that should get raised any time a reference librarian uses Wikipedia as a resource and doesn't crosscheck things against another source. (That never happens? Really? Do *you* always crosscheck Wikipedia? I don't, but then I'm not a reference librarian.)

Is Good Enough good enough?

Let's end this segment with an interesting question, one where the best answer may be "Yes, no, sometimes and maybe." I think that's where Bobbi L. Newman lands in her September 2009 *Librarian by day* post.

> She quotes Jason Griffey:
>
> Think about the services in your library, and the amount of effort and resources poured into making your services as good as they can possibly be. What if good enough is really enough, and instead we should be expanding our range of services instead of seeking perfection in any single one? How does that change the way libraries operate?

Griffey was citing a *Wired* article, and you probably know how I feel about *Wired* as a source of truth and understanding. The "good enough" concept is the old 20:80 Pareto principle with a shiny new name. Since I've said (in *American Libraries)* that libraries should be aiming at the 20% of needs that *isn't* readily met by 20% of effort—the "counter-Pareto" principle—calling it by another name is unlikely to change my distrust.

Aaron Schmidt commented on the post:

> This is great, mostly because just yesterday I was thinking about just the opposite! My thoughts aren't fully formed but my basic line of thinking is that good enough services are probably wholly unremarkable and don't leave any sort of impression on our users. Doing Things Right (even if we have to do fewer things) with pride and quality, on the other hand, could make libraries stand out and make our users admire us.

Newman did more reading, tried to decide who she agreed with and finds "I'm still not certain."

> Sometimes good enough is good enough. Insisting on great product can mean you miss the boat, time wise. It can mean you're so invested in the finished product that you're resistant to changing it. It could mean you produce a Porsche when a Saturn could produce the same result, getting you from point A to point B.
>
> Let's say you can spend a lot of time and money developing a new system or product. Since we're talking about libraries and it's timely let's say it's a new service that helps patrons find a new job. You could insist that you've covered all your bases, considered every possible problem, question and need before you make it available. But while you're doing that there are people who need your help who aren't getting it. Or you could make it available when it's good enough. People will have access to a service they need and you'll learn as you go what needs improvement. Remember holding on to it until it's perfect doesn't guarantee you won't run into problems later. In this case, as long as you're willing to make modifications as you go along, and you should be, it is good enough.
>
> I can also see problems with doing things that are good enough. Patrons who encounter problems and obstacles to their goals may become frustrated and never come back. They won't be around to know when you've improved the system or service.

The second comment, by "sylvie," starts out where I'm inclined to be: "I think both are right, it just depends on the service." And, to be sure, my "counter-Pareto" assertion has to do with *serving the community*— reaching out to the 20% of special needs, not being satisfied with serving the 80% that's easy to do. For a given service, good enough *as a starting point* may be exactly the right place—but I don't think that's what Griffey's going for. I'm not sure. Which, I suppose, is the likely outcome of much philosophical debate.

Reading this in late 2009 is interesting given the example. "Good enough" Saturn is no longer with us. Porsche? Doing just fine. (To me, Saturns always were "good enough," a phrase I'd never use for my beloved Honda Civics.) Analogies are tricky things.

Purpose

What is a library? That's the title of the first piece in this section, more than two years old and decidedly worth rereading. The post was written by Betsy McKenzie and appeared October 3, 2007 on *Out of the jungle*, typically a "blawg" or law-oriented liblog. The whole essay is just over 1,000 words. I'm offering limited excerpts, with emphases added and minor editing.

> Libraries these days have a lot of different dimensions–they function in different ways for different patrons, and at different times for the same users…
>
> Libraries today function, as they always have, as repositories of books and other materials. Librarians select titles, whether for print books and journals or for online databases. Once selected, the library must acquire the resource, either buying it or licensing it. And once acquired, the library is also responsible for keeping the material and (usually) making it available on a fair basis to users… So, in one major dimension, **libraries select, acquire and preserve information.**
>
> As always, there are various specialized tools to locate what you want in that mass of stuff… In this dimension, libraries help people **find the information that has been gathered and preserved**. This ranges from cataloging and labeling to reference work.
>
> A third dimension for academic libraries is as **teaching resources**. We select books, indexes, and databases with a special eye toward their use in teaching students… We also host tours and instruction sessions in the library itself…
>
> A fourth dimension in academic libraries is their use as **study spaces**. In this function, libraries need to ensure quiet (well we try!) space without distractions. We reserve study rooms for groups. We referee arguments between students over the use of study rooms and study space. We also stock study aids.
>
> A fifth dimension of *all* libraries is as **social centers**. Students meet in the library for shared tasks. They also meet friends and potential mates in the library…
>
> A sixth dimension is as **retreats**. Students who feel pressured by faculty often feel they can relax with the librarians. We make a point of being friendly and welcoming. We don't assign grades…
>
> And the last dimension…is as **showcases**. Libraries usually are made (at least partially) on a grand scale, with views, and/or large, impressive reading rooms.

> The library is used on tours for potential students and for recruiting faculty and deans as well…
>
> So much of what we do every day fits into one or another of these dimensions… When we plan or work out shared use of space, we need to think of the library in all its varied dimensions–sure you can save space by using all compact shelving, or by ditching all the print, but what does shrinking the library to a database do to the other services the library provides? So librarians try to communicate to decision-makers the different levels or dimensions of library service. It's not just about buying a book and putting it on the shelf. I don't think it ever was.

That's a bit less than half the essay; read the whole thing. For public libraries, I'd probably change "information" to "resources," since entertainment and enlightenment are valid and valuable outcomes of library use that may not relate directly to facts—but overall, I think this serves as a good reminder that, while books continue to be core to most libraries (and, at least for public libraries, it would be suicidal to abandon them in the foreseeable future), it's *never* been just about buying books and putting them on the shelf.

Happy New Year to libraries

This one's from Stan Katz and appeared at "Brainstorm" in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on December 27, 2007 (chronicle.com/blogPost/Happy-New-Year-to-Libraries/5577/).

> At the year's end, I am thinking fondly of the humanities scholar's best friend: the library. Scientists and social scientists and professional school scholars also use the library, but the humanist lives in and of the library…
>
> For the moment, I want to notice only the concept of "authority," for which libraries are crucial… [Referring to an ARL keynote by Hunter Rawlings: He says] that "In the realm of scholarship we speak of an 'authority' on Plato or Shakespeare, or on government, by which we mean an expert whose knowledge is to be trusted as the best available on a given topic." Until recently, such authority was collected in books and serials, which in turn were preserved and made accessible by libraries. The library, in short, in collaboration with scholars, was the accumulated depository of authority. It is, after all, the business of humanities scholars continually to question and add to our founts of authority. We are joined at the hip to libraries and archives.
>
> For today I want to ignore the challenge to authority (and the library) posed by the World Wide Web and digital information, the world in which authority is hardest to establish and maintain –- except to say that it is the great libraries that are probably our best hope of maintaining the concept of authority in an age in which truth seems only a keystroke away. I think, by the way, that it is easy to make the case that we need librarians to

mediate digital information for us. I want also, at least for today, to ignore the extent to which humanists have complexified the concept of authority in a generation-long outburst of postmodernist casting of doubt upon truth. My tribute for the new year is to the ancient institution that has so nobly served those of us who care about knowledge, and to the trained scholar-technicians who have so patiently created and sustained it.

Long live libraries, long live librarians, long live archivists! These days none of them can and should be taken for granted.

You'll find Rawlings' keynote at www.arl.org/bm~doc/mm-f07-rawlings.pdf. I'm not sure I have anything to add to Katz' message.

The library: It's boxy but it's good

AL—not *that* AL but the *Academic Librarian*, Wayne Bivens-Tatum, has a quartet of 2008 posts relating to library purpose that strike me as worth noting. The first dates from April 1, 2008. Extensive excerpts with comments as appropriate:

> I've been reading a *Time Magazine* article on Starbuck's attempt to freshen their brand I was struck by a line from the past and current CEO of Starbucks… "The three of us stand and look at the area by the cash register—a clutter of CDs, breath mints, chocolate-covered graham crackers, chewing gum and trail mixes. 'There's no story,' Roberts says. Schultz adds, 'We're selling a lot, but the point is to take a step back and ask, Is it appropriate? We've been selling teddy bears, and we've been selling hundreds of thousands of them, but to what end?'"

> The first thing I thought of was my own local Starbucks and the way I've seen it transform in the past few years from a coffeeshop into something resembling an upscale convenience store… I've certainly bought my share of grande coffees over the years. What I haven't liked is everything else…

Truncated significantly (I'm not fond of Starbucks coffee, so I can't speak from personal experience), but this is far from the only case of diluting a store's core identity through too much extension. Which brings us to…

> I thought about the many librarians trying to brand or perhaps rebrand the library... Libraries can open up pubs and hold square dances, but that will never make them any more popular *qua libraries*. The old library brand is, I suppose, *Books*. My library has millions of books and buys tens of thousands more every year, but *Books* doesn't work well as a brand because it captures only a portion of what we do. *Information* is too broad. Perhaps *Scholarly Research* would be the best brand, because the library and its resources are central to and indispensable for scholarly research in the humanities and social sciences.

> If Scholarly Research is the brand of the academic library (and I'm arguing it should be), then do we dilute our brand if we focus on other things? I think we do. Usually when I see discussions of the problem of branding, they're talking about public libraries and trying to make the case that libraries have more than books. However, academic libraries have some of the same issue problems. Should we create blogs? Should we be on Facebook? How can we appeal to and more importantly communicate with students? Having a mission—Scholarly Research—helps answer some of these other questions. Should we have a space on Facebook? Sure, if it helps the mission, but not if it's just to have a page up to show that we're hep to the latest fashion. Should we blog? Definitely, if it serves the mission of scholarly research somehow. Our mission is scholarly research, and that should be central to how we brand ourselves.

Note what's being said here: Social networking and other extensions make perfectly good sense *if* they serve the central purpose—the mission—of a library, but not if they distract from that purpose.

> Scholarly Research may sound like a humdrum or humorless mission, but it has to be the identity of the academic library. It might not appeal to 18-year-olds as much as something trendier, but the library is what it is, and the struggle of marketing is to make things popular, not to change the things into something else. We can experiment with and investigate trends and fads to see what might help us in our mission, as long as we remember the mission and don't get caught up in frivolities that we think might make us more popular. It might be best for our image to sell scholarly research as the worthwhile endeavor we all think it is than hanker for something sexier. There's an old Dudley Moore movie about an advertising executive who ends up in an asylum, Crazy People. One of the crazy ads he comes up with is, "Volvo: We're Boxy But We're Good." We will probably be better off selling the library as what it is than trying to pretend it's something else.

> **The Library: It's Boxy but It's Good**.

John Dupuis commented on the slightly different mission of scitech libraries, since most scientists *don't* do their research in libraries. Agreeing, Bivens-Tatum said he wasn't even sure about social sciences—but for humanities, it's clear.

Maybe a more important point here, when people talk about the mission of "The Library": **There is no such thing as "The Library"**—and the mission of Princeton University Library (where Bivens-Tatum works) is not the same as the mission of Livermore Public Library (where I borrow books). (About that bald-faced, bold-faced assertion: I'm not much for manifestos and I'm not going to get to discussions of

some recent sets of statements—but part of me wants to start building an "unmanifesto" of messy but useful truths about libraries, at least as I see them. If I do that, the very first one would be "**There is no such thing as 'The Library.'**" That's not Bivens-Tatum speaking; that's Walt Crawford.)

Research libraries support research

Same author, same blog, August 20, 2008—and maybe those four words don't require the 1,699-word expansion of the post, but I think there's considerable value here as well. (OK, so Bivens-Tatum starts out by saying what I just bold-faced, albeit in a different manner. What can I say?) Here's most of the post:

> I've long thought that the concept of "library" isn't a very coherent one. The small town (pop. 300 or so) public library that serves my grandmother and the very large research library I work in are both called libraries, and yet their staff, collections and mission couldn't be more different. There are also often large differences in outlook even among academic librarians…
>
> I'm thinking about this because of the juxtaposition of topics I've encountered so far today. This morning I attended a presentation by Bernard Reilly, President of the Center for Research Libraries. He discussed a lot of the initiatives currently underway at CRL, including a number of their digitization projects. One of them involves Latin American newspapers, and as part of an effort to make the materials more useful to the libraries in the region digital copies will be made available to those libraries as well as to CRL libraries, though not freely on the Internet. My favorite quote was that this project is "built on the assumption that an Internet cafe is not a library." Though the CRL hopes to digitize a lot of material in the coming years, I seriously doubt that everything they have will ever be digitized. I wasn't aware until today of how much of it isn't even *cataloged* yet.
>
> To the undigitized, and possibly never digitized collections of CRL, add the archives scattered across the globe. Then the book collections that aren't now, and may never be digitized. That's a lot of material that will never be freely available from an Internet cafe or your laptop, or even your university should they have the money to pay for such things.
>
> Now let us turn to a blog post at ACRLog I read just after the presentation: "Library as Place—For Air Conditioning Books." In it Steven Bell comments on a presentation by Adrian Sannier, Chief Technology Officer at Arizona State University. Bell excerpts a couple of tasty quotes. Here's part of one:
>
>> If you were starting [an educational institution] today, how many books would you have? I know what I would do. I'd have none. I'd have zero. Well that would change my cost picture relevant to you and that would make my university's know-ledge so much more accessible to you both when you're there and when you weren't there. That kind of reinvention is what we're talking about.

About that, I'm not sure what to say, except it wouldn't be much of an educational institution, but more on that later.

Here's part of another juicy one:

> Burn down the library. C'mon, all the books in the world are already digitized….Stop air conditioning the books. Enough already. None of us has the Alexandria Library. Michigan, Stanford, Oxford, Indiana. Those guys have digitized their collections. What have you got that they haven't got? Why are you buying a new book? Buy digitial….How many people are using the indices we're all paying so much for….

Bell certainly realizes how ignorant (or perhaps deliberately provocative) Sannier is about book digitization and higher education, though he opines that maybe some IT people have it in for us librarians. Bell's response is that If "academic libraries are being dismissed as one big book air conditioner then we better start doing some of our own transforming to make sure our operations are lean yet productive, and that we have the data to prove to the top administrators that our libraries deliver the best service for the tuition dollar. It must be shown that academic libraries directly contribute to students achieving learning outcomes and persistence to graduation." That's certainly a sensible approach, but there are other considerations to make about Sannier's poorly informed presentation.

First of all, I find it difficult to take even remotely seriously…as an expert on university research or teaching more broadly, that is, outside of the technological and digital portions of it. Obviously Google has not digitized all the books in the Google Book project libraries, and just as obviously the copyrighted ones they have digitized are not freely available online. Obviously also, as Bell notes, curricula differ widely among educational institutions, and it's not at all clear that even the complete collections available freely online at some of these libraries would satisfy all comers, which of course we know isn't going to happen anyway.

…Based on the excerpts as well as Bell's reaction, neither of them are necessarily taking into account the larger mission of the research library. Bell's response is to recommend that libraries make the case that tuition dollars are used wisely and student learning outcomes are met and they graduate. That's all good stuff, and I think natural from a public services AUL at an urban state university.

But teaching students is but one mission of a research university, and not necessarily the most important one, if we judge by what professors get the most re-

wards for. The purpose of a research university is to research, to create knowledge, to contribute to the scholarly record, etc… In the sciences, engineering, computer science, and other areas, this may not require anything that can't be accessed by a computer. In the humanities, area studies, and some of the social sciences, it does, and it most likely will for decades to come, if not forever. Yes, it's possible that eventually every archive and book collection in the world will be digitized and available to researchers, even if not for free, like some of the collections coming out of the CRL are now available to research libraries. It's possible, but it doesn't seem very likely.

Another possibility is that enough material will be digitized that future researchers will be content with what is digitally available and not worry about the rest. That's pretty sloppy research, but as we know everyone, scholars included, prefers the good but easily available to the best but difficult to obtain. This could happen, but it wouldn't negate the ideal of the research university or research library; it would just cheapen it.

It's this perspective that makes it difficult for research libraries. Sannier rightly notes that no library is a universal library. No one has everything [or ever has had]. The CRL, for example, was founded in 1949 to address this issue. That's why we have cooperative agreements with other libraries…

I don't think every institution of higher education should be a research university or every library a research library. I also don't think that large libraries are necessary for most undergraduate education… Despite its dependence on monographs, a strong liberal arts education could probably be supported by a library of 10,000 books or so… And perhaps all those books would be digitally available to a new college today, or at least relatively soon…

However, once we turn away from undergraduate education, the whole notion breaks down completely, and for any research university worth the name such a scheme is unthinkable if the library is actually designed to support any research. And the argument that no library is universal only goes so far. No library is a universal library, but it seems clear to me that the top 25 libraries or so plus places like CRL together constitute about as universal library as we are about to get… There have to be a number of libraries that do their best to build just-in-case research collections for some fields so that we can all satisfy our otherwise insatiable just-in-time research needs.

A "research library" without print materials and climate control to protect them is an oxymoron. That might not always be the case, and I wouldn't feel at all bad if the situation went away, but it's here to stay for a long time to come. Print materials are still needed for research, and the purpose of a research library is to sup-

port research. I suppose some would consider me an excessive technophobe or bibliophile for saying that, but such is far from the case. I just want to protect research libraries and the universities they support from the excessive technophiles and bibliophobes that could destroy them if given a chance.

I'd add to that mission: At least at the ARL level, institutions and their libraries should have *some* commitment to preserving the culture—and large collections of print materials are part of that commitment. Hearing a high official at my alma mater essentially trash the significance of large central libraries did not make my day…

Steven Bell commented on the post. In part:

When I write my *ACRLog* posts I'm thinking about the full spectrum of academic libraries—from community colleges to research libraries and everyone in between. For the vast majority the emphasis on the teaching and learning role far outweighs the building of a collection or supporting faculty research. Heck, at many of them the faculty aren't doing much research. But I appreciate your take on the "burn the library" guy from the research library perspective—that's why I found his statements more shocking—because he's from ASU. But even when it comes to research universities, I don't think just resting on the laurels of a research mission may be sustainable… What we can bring to the classroom—for both faculty and students—can't be offshored or done better by a computer. I can easily foresee a future when academic institutions—even the premier research universities—could have all of their collection work, book buying, gatewaying—managed by the ACME Research Library Company. I doubt that the faculty, who depend on these libraries for their research, would even notice the difference.

Bivens-Tatum agrees in part, noting that up to half of his collection development is already done through approval plans, and stresses the human contact in instruction and elsewhere. "I agree that in general as long as the professors get what they want from the library, they don't care what goes on inside it. Nor should they from a professional perspective."

What more to say here? I shudder at the thought of research universities without large central libraries including large numbers of books, but that's just me. (Or maybe not.) Maybe it's because I don't see any other institution serving that purpose; maybe it's because I think it's a valuable purpose.

Humanities and the research library

The next month—September 29, 2008—Bivens-Tatum considered reports from Ithaka and CLIR about transforming and reconceiving libraries.

As I've argued before, though perhaps not convincingly, some things about the humanities don't change. We continue to ask the same basic questions and continue to study texts in a way that fundamentally has remained the same since the Renaissance…

[Even with new techniques, a lot is the same.] Studying texts, interpreting culture, making arguments about human things… Central questions will remain: What does this cultural text or artifact mean? What does it tell us about ourselves and our world? What happened at such and such a time and what does it mean? And, it seems, for a long time to come traditional methods will also apply. Some people criticize libraries as slow to change, but the traditions of humanities scholarship might be even slower. There have been humanist scholars around a long time. Humanists think libraries, even traditional libraries, will still be important for their future…

Humanists are much less likely than anyone, including librarians, to want to do away with print journal collections even if electronic versions were available. Humanists are more likely to feel comfortable in the library, and less likely to think they'll be more reliant upon electronic resources.

It's possible that humanists are just going to have to be disappointed in the short run, especially with print journals, but the transition might take a very long time, and is unlikely to be complete in the foreseeable future. By then they will have adapted, or gone extinct, as will the libraries they love now.

Despite the heated change rhetoric from some quarters, libraries seem to be adapting to the future already…What seems clear to me is not how much has or will change, but how much will stay the same even after huge changes.

Same Roles, **Same Techniques**: Collection, Organization, Preservation, Authority

Things we'll continue to do and in more or less the same ways:

➢ Buying books, organizing them, making them accessible in many of the same ways we do now, maybe using digital vendor slips instead of paper, but still more or less the same.

➢ For scholarly works, we'll continue to combine with scholarly presses to put our collective imprimatur on such works.

➢ Building special collections and archives. If nothing else, they have to be built before they can be digitized.

Same Roles, **Different Techniques**: Collection, Organization, Preservation, Accessibility, Discovery

We'll continue to collect, but with new techniques we can even make our traditional collections more discoverable and accessible.

➢ Collection will increasingly be digital. Hardly a surprise. But even providing access to print collections should improve…

➢ Organizing it, providing metadata, better web portals, better OPACs

➢ Preserving the digital collection

➢ Ensuring quality…

➢ Making it accessible

➢ Making it discoverable! Not just a sealed off archive, but easily findable…

Different Roles, New Techniques: Creation, Collaboration

These are a couple of roles some people are predicting for research libraries in the future, obviously based on activities at least of the fringe of a lot of library operations now.

Creation

➢ Creators of Digital Content—digital libraries, institutional repositories, open access journals, academic publishers. Obviously we're already doing some of this, but doing more of this will make the library more central to scholarship.

➢ Creators of information tools: Zotero, Omeka, LibX toolbar

➢ Helping scholars create digital content, like at the Center for History and New Media

Collaboration

➢ Between libraries: Print repositories, keeping ready access to our own copies, but sharing in an organized fashion.

➢ Between libraries and other campus units: Working with information technologists, for example.

➢ Between librarians and faculty: collaborating with faculty or enabling faculty to collaborate

Some libraries are doing these things now, and more will probably have to to adapt, but nevertheless many of the traditional roles are likely to remain, especially in the humanities…

This post generated some conversation on FriendFeed, which Bivens-Tatum responded to in an October 2, 2008 post. Dorothea Salo said he was dodging the hard question: "What are we going to have to *stop doing* in order to do the new stuff? Because we *are* going to have to stop doing *something*. There aren't enough resources in the world." She added to that later—but I'm leaving out that comment and his response as falling outside the scope of *my* discussion. Excerpts from his post:

It seems I'm being criticized for failing to do something I never set out to do in the first place, which is hardly a meaningful criticism. After all, it was a blog post, not a management treatise. Thus, I wasn't "dodging" the "hard questions." The supposedly hard

questions were merely not part of the subject of the blog post. The topic was what I saw as a possible future of humanities scholarship and research libraries in about a thousand words…

…The most serious criticism is that I'm arguing that some changes won't or perhaps shouldn't be occurring. That's not what I'm saying at all. What I will say, and what I have said before, is that *some things* just aren't changing, and the traditions and practices of humanities scholarship are among those things. It's not a question of wanting or not wanting "change." It's a question of looking around at what scholars in the humanities are actually doing, and for the most part they're doing the same things they've been doing for centuries, and they're not showing any signs of rapidly changing.

The world of information may be changing rapidly, but humanists for the most part just don't care… Humanists engage texts and arguments; thus they need texts and arguments to engage. Giving them a nice data set won't please them. Libraries are there to serve scholars, not the other way around. It would be hubris to say scholars in the humanities need to change the way they work because we librarians just aren't happy with their slow pace. Humanities librarians may be among the slowest to change, but it seems to me they're still changing faster than humanities scholars might be comfortable with.

As for what we might give up, I don't have many concrete answers. Part of my goal is to try to articulate in a small way what an ideal research library might be. Whether or not any library can live up to the ideal doesn't really matter. Just because we fail at a worthwhile goal doesn't mean the goal isn't worthwhile. It just means we're failures…

Some libraries subscribe to fewer journals. Some cut their book budgets to the bone. Some give up buying European monographs. I'm not interested in the question of what libraries should give up, but of what they should provide. If research libraries can't at a minimum provide the resources that their current cohort of scholars needs, then those research libraries are failing in their most important mission. If that means that humanists still need those scholarly monographs, but librarians aren't buying them for whatever reason, the library has failed. Period. To some extent, we're all failures, but we should have the courage to admit it, not challenge the facts of scholarship…

Collecting in the humanities is cheap relative to the sciences. While some of those STM serials might be $10,000 a year and rising, that's not the case in the humanities. Some of the best or most important journals might be a couple hundred dollars. Monographs are often under a hundred dollars, at least ones from this country. It's not humanities collections that are breaking library budgets.

As for giving things up, we would have to look at the library more broadly than just humanities collection development, which to some extent was the main topic of my last post. Some of the changes seem quite easy. A reference librarian retires. We don't have as much reference as we used to. But hey, we need a digital photographer if we're going to digitize stuff. Let's take the reference librarian line and hire a digital photographer instead. It's library science, not rocket science. Regardless, I'm not the one making those large decisions for any library, and I'm not in a position to speculate on the future of every part of the research library or how every library should address their hard questions. I just write about what I know. The problem might be that I just don't know that much.

One somewhat-justified criticism made of some Open Access advocates is that they paint nonprofit scholarly societies—those that price their journals fairly (by no means all of them)—with the same brush as the big STM publishers. One recent criticism of librarians who support OA is that the top library periodicals mostly aren't OA—but, with one or two exceptions, they also *don't cost much*. I don't believe you'd spend $1,000 a year for *all* of ALA's refereed journals, just to give one example.

Bivens-Tatum's primary point in both posts is that humanities research isn't changing all that rapidly, and that research libraries that change *too* rapidly may be failing to serve their scholars, abandoning their missions. Is he wrong?

the public library is for: the public

This one's from a possibly unusual source: Richard Akerman, writing July 22, 2008 at *Science library pad*—in this case not about science libraries. It has to do with a proposed new central Ottawa Public Library—a CA$200 million proposal—and the "business case" for it. Akerman begins with five key points:

➢ the city is for its citizens
➢ the public library is for the public
➢ public space is essential to a healthy urban environment
➢ the central public library provides one of the few remaining opportunities to enhance and enlarge public space
➢ you can't use business terms or voodoo business math to analyze public good

A newspaper article on the proposed library asks: "What's the business case for a $200-million central library? What return will taxpayers get for that investment? How will it result in better service to users of the library? What are the alternatives and why were they ruled out?"

Looking further at that article, the newspaper writer challenges "place" as part of a public library's role, suggests that having more small branches with book delivery (hey, keep the books in a warehouse) might be more beneficial and more. Here's what Akerman has to say (excerpted):

> Flawed assumptions lead to flawed conclusions. Our society favours many flawed assumptions and metaphors. In particular, the idea of the world as an efficient assembly line producing business value. Government is not a business. Public good does not have direct monetary ROI. Cities are not factories that bring components in on assembly lines (i.e. people in on highways) in the morning, get them to do a bunch of work, and then ship them out for storage (i.e. to the suburbs, on the highways again) in the evening. At least, they shouldn't be.
>
> If you follow these assumptions, what you get is a city with wide highways cutting through all parts of it, as highways always have a "business case," and private space (like say, $300 million convention centres) easily approved, as private space provides an easy "business case," while public concert halls and public libraries languish…
>
> So you end up with some Disneyland city full of private space where the idea of return on investment is to provide lots of parking near the wide streets so tourists can zoom around and "contribute to the local economy" by buying a burger at McDonald's.
>
> So let's ditch that nonsense and get back to reality.
>
> The "reality case" for a new central Ottawa Public Library is this:
>
> A vibrant city has people living downtown. It serves primarily its actual residents. It provides them with many amenities, not least of which is beautiful places and spaces. Ottawa, land of the cheap glass tower office building (interspersed, for variety, with the cheap concrete stalinist tower), is starving for public space…
>
> The case for a central Ottawa Public Library is that people need a place to meet and think and be outside in the city…
>
> *Wallpaper* had a feature "Loan Rangers" in the June 2008 issue, about interesting new public libraries, [including this quote]:
>
>> There are those who think [libraries] are an anachronism in the digital age, a sort of urbanised village hall, frequented only by disoriented immigrants doing DIY language courses. Then there are those who insist they are still vital amenities, 'universities of the street corner,' crucial municipal centres at the heart of the community.

Do strong cities need strong central libraries as places, not just sets of services? Let's just say that Ottawa seems to be forging ahead…and that all the best plac-es I know *have* strong central libraries that blend space, collection, programs and service.

Means, not ends

For a *very* different take on the purpose of libraries, in this case from a medical librarian (but seemingly referring to *all* libraries), we go back a year—to T. Scott Plutchak's October 5, 2007 post at *T.Scott*. His principal assertion: "As long as the library is serving a need, it will be valued, but it has no value as an end in itself."

He notes some doom and gloom he sees—from a young academic librarian who worries that "our profession may retire before I do" and from another academic librarian who asserts that "We need libraries that are highly integrated into and tightly connected to what happens in the classroom, both physical and virtual." To which T. Scott responds:

> The skeptical contrarian in me reads this last quote and wonders, "Why?"…
>
> Suppose that a decade from now, librarianship no longer exists as a profession. No more library schools, no more librarians (except a few civil servants or tenured faculty who can't be fired). No more new jobs, libraries shuttered and turned into dormitories, study halls and rest homes.
>
> So what?
>
> Does it happen because people truly no longer need us and what we can provide? That, by using the internet wisely, by relying on the big technology companies (Amazooglesoft), and the smart publishers who've figured out how to organize and provide information directly to people while bypassing libraries, the people in our communities (be they universities, schools, companies, or society in general) are able to connect with the recorded knowledge that they need even more effectively than they could in the age of libraries?
>
> If that's the case, wouldn't it be a good thing?
>
> Sure, it'd be a bummer for those of us who like our library jobs, but it's not like we—the actual individual persons—are going to wink out of existence. We'll figure out something to do. And we may be nostalgic for what we've lost, but if society has figured out better ways to achieve what we used to help them achieve, aren't we all better off as a whole? So I don't get to be a librarian anymore. I don't have the option of being a blacksmith, or a riverboat captain, or the guy who delivers milk in glass bottles from a horse drawn wagon, either.
>
> The point is, I don't think we're telling the right story, and I don't think we're worrying about the right stuff. I don't want to hear anymore about what we need to do to make ourselves relevant so that our libraries can survive. I want to hear people telling the stories about why we're essential, about how society can't

thrive without us, about how students and teachers won't have the kinds of experiences that they deserve if we, well-trained, passionate, technologically-savvy librarians aren't working with them in the classrooms and the labs. I don't want to hear about how "we need libraries that are well integrated…" if the "we" refers to librarians. I don't care what we think we need. I want to hear us explaining why the students and the faculty need us to be tightly integrated into what happens in the classroom. I want to be told why a town without good public librarians is impoverished and why we're here to save the day. I don't want to hear about what we need to do to be relevant—I want to hear the story about why our communities so desperately need us.

If we can't tell that story, then we should wink out of existence, and a decade is longer than we deserve.

In one sense T. Scott's right: The purpose of libraries is *not* to employ librarians, and if everything librarians do can be done better without them, then they become obsolete. (There *are* riverboat captains these days, although not many. There *are*, blacksmiths—there are, after all, a *lot* of horses. But never mind.) He's also right that some libraries don't tell their stories as effectively as they should.

I take issue with T. Scott's apparent implicit assertion that *the* purpose of libraries—and in this case I'll stress public libraries—is to connect people with recorded knowledge. I think the case has been made that public libraries are about a lot more than that. If that's the only purpose of medical libraries, fine: Stick with that narrower assertion. Tossing in "so desperately need us" is a rhetorical swipe: Should society fund only those things that are "desperately needed"? Do we *desperately* need public parks? Do we *desperately* need police dealing with nonviolent crimes or safety issues? Even in responding to comments, T. Scott overplays the criticality card—we do, and should, have lots of things that make life better, that make us better people, but that can't be called indispensible. Is that wrong?

To preserve and protect

Steven Harris asks some interesting and possibly disturbing questions about how academic librarians view the purpose(s) of academic libraries, in this June 19, 2009 post at *Collections 2.0*. Excerpts, leaving out half of the events:

A few events have me thinking about the long-standing academic library philosophy of building comprehensive collections for the purpose of preserving, protecting, and archiving our cultural heritage. I am wondering to what extent there might be a philosophical shift going on to move towards serving cur-

rent needs and not worrying so much about being the cultural time capsule…

1. A blog called *Awful Library Books* is geared mostly toward public libraries. It identifies (humorously) books that really don't need to be in a public library collection anymore. Got me thinking. We often think that this "awful" stuff needs to be in an academic library for historical purposes. But how many of these do we really need to save? Can we really know if there is any "just-in-case" need? Maybe the fact that we don't know says we should keep it in the collection, but can we afford to?...

4. I was giving a presentation recently about the need to augment our ebook collections in my library. The argument was mainly that there are many remote demands that can be more readily served by electronic collections. The collection that we opted to license is a "rented" collection. Our library patrons now have a huge number of ebooks at their disposal, but there is no "perpetual access," as we say in the library world. We have it as long as we pay the rent. All goes away, if we don't…

6. In a blog post entitled "Better Than Owning" Kevin Kelly points out the benefit of "renting" services in the cloud or on the Internet. He compares this remote service to a traditional print library. We don't own the books in the library, but we can make use of them. I wonder about pushing that concept even further. The *library* itself doesn't own the resources, but it can make use of them and provide access to its own customers…

Is there really a professional groundswell moving academic libraries toward a "current use" versus a "future use" philosophy? Do we want there to be such a groundswell? I support the idea that my library should save many things, regardless of the current demand. But I also want us to serve as many current demands as possible…

To my surprise, there have been no comments to date. Harris is at the University of New Mexico. Would it make a difference if he was at Yale? At a small community college? At a liberal arts college?

Restore the noble purpose of libraries

This one's by William H. Wisner, from the July 17, 2009 *Christian Science Monitor*—and the tagline is "Focusing so much on their technology actually dumbs them down." You can find it at www.csmonitor.com/2009/0717/p09s01-coop.html, it's 800 words long, Wisner's been a librarian for 22 years…and I'm not quoting very much of it. A few bits:

Libraries were once a sacred secular space of silence and reverence – a place where one automatically lowered one's voice. As a direct heir to the Enlightenment, the establishment of libraries was a testament to the self-evident integrity of mankind, the belief that we all desire to find the truth through knowledge.

Librarians once framed our mission in those terms–before libraries became the noisy computer labs they now are, with their jingle of ringtones, clattering keyboards, and unquenchable printers…

In some libraries today it is actually impossible to find any place quiet enough to simply read and study undisturbed. What I call the postmodern library–the library plus technology–deconstructs itself…

My once gentle profession has prostituted itself, aided by library schools, which, embarrassed even to call their graduates "librarians," now opt for the sexier term "information scientists."..

Once the captains of the information superhighway, librarians are now thumbing a ride into history…

In focusing on access in all its forms and hoping for the best librarians have slowly stepped away from being readers or scholars, like their forebears in the Middle Ages who could recite whole books from memory. You cannot defend what you do not know. And you cannot know what you do not love…

There is a way for libraries to uphold their noble purpose. They must carefully balance wants and needs of the community – they must stop being one-stop shopping centers.

There's more—for example, he says his own public library has "gotten everything exactly wrong" because he saw a TV monitor playing videos in the children's section and didn't see kids in the stacks, and really seems to hate refilling printer paper as a reference librarian. I wonder at the tone and the sheer negativity of this. I wonder about those early librarians who quoted whole books from memory. I wonder.

"Andy" at *Agnostic, maybe* wondered as well, and posted "Enjoy the silence" on July 22, 2009. He offers two modestly extreme paraphrases of the entire piece, including all the stuff I did *not* quote:

If I read it correctly, the library needs to (1) restore the silence of the library by removing any technology that makes any noise, including ones carried by patrons; (2) remove any form of visual, audio, or interactive technology from the children's section; (3) librarians need to learn books to the point of oral recitation, regardless of specialty; (4) comes to grips with the fact that libraries are popular because they are free despite our professional ethics which tout that we provide access to all regardless of their ability to provide supporting payment; and (5) that we stop being "information scientists" and start being scholars again through rote memorization of printed materials so we can once again love and defend our societal purpose.

Or, the funnier way of summarizing his article:

I need to stop prostituting myself, learn Middle English, write humorous non-existent interviews with celebrities who used to date while handing out

beverages to make the library "personalized" again and restore the public trust.

Note that I said "extreme," not "absolutely unfair." Andy concludes: "Either way you look at it, it's a strange theory." More:

While I whore myself to the paper beast, I will relish in the idea that the reason the printer is empty is that people decided to print out timely and relevant information and take it with them. Quite frankly, that's all the more reason to construct library based mobile applications so that people can reach the same information on their noisy cell phone or noisy laptop. Or more reason for me to teach classes so that people learn how to use all of the library sources from home so they can print on their own paper. Or just embrace a combined format approach that yields the best resource or information regardless of the medium. Or, heck, for that matter, I'll give them whatever literature work they want in whatever format they want: print, large print, even audio!

By my own admission, I'm not much of a reader. So I will confess that all of these new audio, video, and interactive technologies for children make me pretty jealous. I really had to struggle with reading, not because I was bad at it or suffered a disability, but because it wasn't as interesting compared to watching or hearing the work. Oh sure, we can dismiss decades worth of studies on the different learning habits of children and just stick with reading. My brain and character certainly aren't much worse for it after all these years. But I'm not going to work at a library with that kind of children's section. I'll be over at the fun library with the games, the videos, and the noisy interaction and enjoy the more progressive learning models…

…As for me, you can find me in the future where information architecture and communication networks interact so as to provide seamless content delivery and global sharing of user derived content while providing the highest level of patron interaction and satisfaction. Oh, there will be books there too. Print is not dead, just its business model.

I disagree with that final sentence (or I would, if I had any idea what the "business model" of "print" as a whole is…) But the rest of what Andy's saying? Sounds about right (and I'm one of those for whom reading has always come really easy, while most other learning modes don't work as well).

The first commenter isn't so quick to dismiss Whisman:

What I took away from it is that in our rush to adopt emerging technologies many libraries are too quick to abandon their roots and the balance tips from library to a sort of hollowed out public computer lab. It's not bad to have interactive media for children but letting kids

plop down in front of a video screen is not the same as engaging those kids and using technology to get them involved with learning from all sorts of sources including books. I see him really cautioning librarians to not forget that they're not just there to feed more paper into the printer, you're there to interact with your patrons and introduce this whole world of knowledge and information that you act as guardians of.

Which would be fine—but the essay itself was nowhere near that balanced. And Andy provides a good response—that Whisman seems to ignore the value in newer formats and tools. The first commenter, Jess, replies with a longer defense of the essay, one that reads the essay *far* more charitably than I'm able to. As it happens, there's a book involved as well: *Whither the postmodern library?*—published in 2000 by McFarland. After reading the limited preview of that book at Google—a surprisingly long limited preview—I'm even less able to read the essay as balanced or plausible.

Why libraries rock

The theme was a blogathon for Louisville Free Public Library. I admit to some shameless "sometimes librarians need to feel good about themselves" here—because you do. If this whole section is too positive, well, it's the last issue of the year, and fact is I'm pretty positive about libraries now and for the future.

"Andy" posted "Why libraries kick ass" on August 31, 2009 at *Agnostic, maybe*. He includes a story about how he wound up in librarianship (after getting a degree in biology), which leads up to this (excerpted):

> If the library was an organism, it would have had a long period of time in which there wasn't much change. Going back through time to the early age of recorded history, it was a niche resource of learning and information storage available to those who were educated and could afford it…
>
> Only within the last hundred years, with the spread of literacy and the notion of public education, the library has started to evolve. Communities built libraries to house shared literature and educational resources for the common good. What was once only available to the select few was now available to the general public. This stayed about the same for the better part of a century before technological innovations changed everything.
>
> It is here, within the last twenty-five years, that the evolution of the modern library fascinates me. The explosion of communication innovations and modern computation powers has quickly created a new global network of information exchange. The library has been forced to rapidly evolve to incorporate these new tools and technology into our collection. In doing so, librarians have become inventors and innovators looking to

dissolve barriers to access, to create simpler presentation models, and to generate awareness to the global information network that exists. These rapid short-term changes of the library evolution represent a new age of humanity as the global village finally forms on the basis of true knowledge and understanding: an unfettered idea and information exchange.

> This is why libraries kick ass. We are evolving along with the speed of innovation cycles, bringing new approaches and tools as to how we collect, store, and retrieve information in all its forms. There are few things in this world that remain remote, that cannot be reached in one medium or another, and for the first time in history, we have the clearest picture as to what our global neighbors look, sound, and think like. Libraries continue to grow, evolve, and move forward in this bold new information age. There is nothing more exciting to be standing at the precipice of the expansion of human knowledge and to know that this is only the beginning. This is why libraries matter, this is why libraries are integral, and this is why libraries kick ass.

Gasp. Not "if libraries don't start changing, we're doomed." Not "physical libraries are obsolete." But "libraries *are* changing"—in most cases, without abandoning what's made them special all along.

Buffy Hamilton, *The unquiet librarian*, posted "Why libraries rock" on that same day. She's a high school librarian and prepared her post after some of her students participated in the blogathon. Part of what she has to say about libraries:

> I believe that with all my heart, libraries matter more than ever—whether we are helping cultivate one of many literacies, including information literacy which is now an essential literacy, helping a student find the perfect book, teaching cloud computing, providing a safe haven in the day to a stressed out teen, giving students a sense of belonging, or just providing a friendly smile, we are the bridge from past to present to future for our students.
>
> I feel incredibly blessed and fortunate to do something I love so very much each and every day. How many people can say they get to live one of their major passions for a living? How many people get to learn something cool and new on a regular basis? Even on days in which I feel discouraged, I always find something positive that keeps me focused on my mission of creating a library that will hopefully help cultivate a love for lifelong learning and libraries.
>
> Long may libraries be the places where dreams begin and are nurtured. I urge you to discover how libraries can support your passions and even uncover new ones. Let us never relent in our efforts to create libraries and patrons that dream big!

Amy Kearns posted "Libraries *are* rocks" on August 31, 2009 at *Library garden*. She cites one specific definition of "rock": "a person or thing on which one can always depend." Excerpts:

Libraries are things on which one can always depend (or they should be anyway). Libraries are there for you whether you are rich or poor, privileged or underprivileged, old or young, law-abiding or not law-abiding, educated or uneducated, beautiful or ugly. My personal library work background is in public libraries and I can tell you from first-hand experience, that many people consider the library a first (or last) resort in many cases.

When I worked in the Clifton Public Library, I met a man who moved his family from Poland and literally his first stop was the library. He came for job information, school information for his daughters, and found out about the Conversation Club. He began attending the club and made friends and connections at the library. I came to know many other people who came to the Conversation Club and who frequented the library regularly for information, entertainment, conversation, connection. They would have come to Conversation Club every day if we had been able to hold it that often.

They came to use the free Internet stations to communicate with friends and family back home, and to look for work and apartments. They came to our computer classes and created resumes and learned how to search in our databases and in our catalog for books, dvds, cds. Their children used the library after school to play games on the computers and to do homework and socialize with other students.

At the Paterson Free Public Library, I knew many regulars for whom the library was a safe and dependable place to come. These library users read entire newspapers cover-to-cover, looked at magazines and yes, used the free Internet stations. They attended the free cultural and entertainment programs and took part in events at the library. They relied on us to open every day, and be there every day…

As a child, it was a weekly event for my mom to take my brother and sister and me to the library where we would literally stock up on piles and piles of books to bring home. I remember participating in the "reading olympics" and the summer reading programs every summer. And when I was looking around for a career, where did I head? To the library. Not originally to find a career in librarianship, but to find out information about careers, and to check out a sign for office help…

Whether people realize it or not, whether they actively use their library on a regular basis or not, I think people think of the library as a rock. As something that will always be there and should always be there.

Does this mean they take it for granted? Does this mean it will always be there?

Perhaps. Perhaps not. But those who love libraries, those who *know* libraries *are* rocks, are such passionate people about their libraries… Rocks seem permanent, but we know that events that are catastrophic enough can damage or demolish them. And, events that are minor, but happen over and over again for a long time (such as erosion) can also wear away a rock. Sometimes those who most depend on the library cannot be the ones to stand up and fight for, or protect the libraries. We who can do that need to remain vocal about libraries, our rocks, so that they never disappear.

Here's Steve Lawson at *See also…* (also August 31, 2009) on "Why libraries kick ass":

Whenever I hear someone–an elected offical, often–say that "libraries are for research and information and literature, and not for X" where X = video games or DVDs or comix or books that aren't in English or Goosebumps or Madonna's Sex or boardgames or sewing circles or popular novels; whenever I hear that, I think "this is a person who doesn't really like libraries, who is scared of libraries and what they represent, and wants others others to be similarly scared."

I think that research and information and literature are all wonderful things, and that almost every library must put some or all of those things at the core of their mission. But that's not why I think libraries kick ass.

I think that libraries kick ass because libraries help people expand their imagination.

And there is more to the imagination than the serious, gray, DOA literature that people envision when they say that libraries should be for "serious" stuff. Libraries need to collect broadly to reflect the cultures in which they are embedded.

Libraries do many other things, too, many more obviously utilitarian things that even elected officials can get behind, like helping people learn to read or find a job. But in order for people to want to learn to read or get a better job or discover a cure for cancer or write a haiku, they need to have their imagination awakened. Before we can make ourselves better or make our world better, we need the imagination to envision something better in the first place.

To be able to be in the midst of thousands or even millions of volumes containing the expression of human thought and feeling in all its multitude of forms is an awesome thing. Even more so when you think that there are many more libraries like the one you are in, none of them complete. I have memories of being a child and realizing that whatever I happened to be interested in, I could go to the library and come home with an armful of inspiration. I get this feeling

from every library I visit, and I hope that I can pass some of that feeling on to students where I work…

Libraries kick ass when they allow our hearts and minds to expand and roam freer than before.

Very slightly excerpted…and with emphasis added.

Today's librarian: Hip, delusional, and doomed

I'd love to finish this section and this article on a high note, but it's rarely that easy. This 1,700-word piece by Michael Antman appeared on September 6, 2009 at *When falls the coliseum*, which appears to be an ezine of sorts, "a conversation about America."

Antman begins by citing a fairly dumb CNN article about "the future of libraries and a newspaper op-ed signed by Jim Rettig and Chicago library commissioner Mary Dempsey, one that discussed *some* non-book services, specifically access to the internet and digital resources, as a value of the public library.

> There are two flaws in this approach that should be obvious to anyone who isn't a librarian. The first is that, as digital devices converge, it becomes easier and easier to get every kind of information you need—-from job listings to the Dialogues of Epictetus to those all-important "pre-movie dinner options"—on a single handheld device. And the volume of that information, of course, grows exponentially every day. So why bother walking over to the library to get that same information, even if the place smells all fresh and electronic-y these days?

> The second flaw is that, as these handheld devices get more and more affordable (as, of course, happens with virtually all useful electronic devices) they'll be in the hands of more and more people, just as has happened with cell phones. That means that, despite the current recession-driven uptick in library attendance, people will eventually figure out that they can get everything a library currently offers, including not just information, but movie downloads, music, and of course every form of social media, in their own homes.

I'm inclined to stop right there, note that public library usage was growing in the boom years as well, and note that "oh, everybody will have devices and funds to use everything they want" continues to be an elitist (and incorrect) argument, no matter who's making it. He quotes one virtual-services librarian saying "Librarians must venture into the digital space, where their potential patrons exist, to show them why the physical library is still necessary" and responds:

> Let's see if we can follow this logic: The way to show that the physical library is still necessary is to no longer be bound to it. And the way to get patrons into your "physical library" is to venture into their "digital space," thereby making it that much less necessary for the physical library to continue to exist.

So Safeway's website showing weekly specials is intended to keep you out of their stores? Local businesses are deluding themselves by offering advice on websites? Whether the librarian overstated the case or not, there is *nothing* inherently illogical about venturing into the digital realm in order to encourage use of a physical space.

> All this, it seems to me, is not only a twisted rationalization and evasion of a library's central purpose, but a kind of death wish…

> So if providing exactly the same services as **everyone already gets (or soon will get**, when the prices drop, the unemployed find new jobs, and the economy picks up) on their home computers or handheld devices isn't the best way to ensure future employment for librarians, what is? It seems to me that perhaps, just perhaps, librarians should be exerting at least some energy, as their counterparts in publishing are, in helping to ensure the continued viability of the physical book, which has been and should continue to be the cornerstone of most public libraries. [Emphasis added.]

Where did Antman read that librarians intended to do nothing but offer social media and similar services? How has he determined that the unemployment rate will drop to zero in the near future and all employment will be lucrative enough to make broadband and PCs universal? Damned if I know—but I *do* know that every public library I know of is doing its part to "ensure the continued viability of the physical book" by buying them, circulating them, publicizing them…and using them as the cornerstone of a *range* of services.

> Let me be clear about what I'm saying. My local public library, one of the best in the United States, has Internet access, DVD rentals, CD rentals, readings for children, and a host of other services in addition to books. That's all wonderful stuff, but these services are in addition to, not instead of, books. My library's DVDs and CDs will all disappear in a few years anyway, as everyone downloads movies and music, and the Internet services will eventually fade away, too (just as pay telephones have) as fewer and fewer people find themselves without access to a computer of their own.

Antman's impressive and apparently omniscient. Or, maybe, given the 10 hours a day he admits to spending on a computer, he believes CNN a little too readily. "Everyone" is not going to be downloading movies in any great hurry, just as one example, even in the all-affluent, all-connected future Antman seems to see right around the corner.

> But "physical" books are in a different category, and are not so easily replaceable. (I don't wish to revisit old arguments, but digital readers are not adequate substi-

tutes for books in the same sense that MP3 players, for example, are adequate substitutes for CDs.)

As a great believer in print books, I'd say this is **exactly** wrong: ebook readers *are* adequate, but not great, substitutes for books—in much the same way that low-bitrate MP3 is clearly an adequate—but not great—substitute for CDs for some people.

> In Dempsey and Rettig's article of 750 words, the word "book" appears only once, and then, needless to say, in the context of "reserving books online." There seems to be something profoundly wrong with this. Yes, it is possible that the physical book will disappear, and that eventuality, as I have gone on record as saying on this site and elsewhere, would be a great loss for our civilization. Somehow it seems even worse that many librarians are not only resigned to this prospect, but are actively encouraging it, even at the cost of their own jobs and their own "physical libraries."…
>
> If "physical" libraries do begin to disappear, it won't be the end of the world. After all, the incremental ways in which our culture is being degraded never are the "end of the world," but that world, if it has few or any libraries, bookstores, newsstands, books, magazines, or newspapers in it, will be a poorer, bleaker, and more sterile place than the one we live in now…

He's beating that straw man with a big stick. I can absolutely 100% guarantee that neither Dempsey nor Rettig said "Libraries aren't about books anymore," even though *one newspaper op-ed* might not have focused on them. (Whole *issues* of many library journals focus on important aspects of libraries and librarianship and don't include equal time for the primacy of books. We're all doomed!)

> If, on the other hand, librarians recognize that the traditional printed book continues to be an essential feature of our civilization, and treat it as such, they'll still have libraries to work at 50 or 100 years from now. The digitization of information has unquestionably brought us manifold benefits and should be seen as a vitally important complement to print. But it concerns me to see librarians worshiping the digital age so uncritically, and to such a degree that they seem willing to toss all of our books onto the funeral pyre. They don't seem to realize that their own jobs are about to go up in smoke, too.

I would guess that 99% of public librarians recognize "that the traditional printed book continues to be an essential feature of our civilization" and that the percentage among academic librarians wouldn't be much lower. There are a few edge cases in any field, but damned if I see many librarians "willing to toss all of our books onto the funeral pyre." That straw man is really burning bright now.

Antman ends with more excerpts from what was admittedly a wrongheaded and unfortunate CNN.com article and ends: "What I care about is if my librarian is helping, in his or her small way, to maintain our culture and our civilization, or whether he or she is acquiescing, in a limp and laughable way, to its degradation."

What's not clear to me: Where's the degradation? In throwing away or disregarding books? Well, maybe—if that was, on a general basis, *happening*. In adding other resources and services that encourage people to lead richer lives? I'm not certain how *that* counts as degradation.

I see 25 responses, including Antman's additional comments. Antman continues to assert that increased library circulation is only a side effect of the recession, an error that could be corrected with one phone call to ALA. Several responses stress the viability of libraries and the *fact* that librarians care about books and, generally, treat them as the foundation of library services. Unfortunately, Antman asserts that *librarians* are pushing class differences and failing to serve all social classes, which is an interesting way of reading the *need* to recognize people who can't afford services. (I have yet to see a public library turn away a resident because they made enough money to buy their own damn books. Beverly Hills PL circulates a *lot* of books…) In that particular response, he talks about libraries "washing their hands of books as if they're something to be embarrassed about"—*where are these public libraries*? Not in Darien; not in Kansas City; not in any other tech-heavy public library I can think of. (OK, in the same response, he seems to be saying that it will be *two or three years* before everyone has access to everything for free or so little that it doesn't matter. Wow.)

One librarian asks whether Antman talked to librarians in preparing the piece, noting that the issues are complex and that the vast majority of librarians believe in books *and* other things. Antman's response? Because he *read one newspaper article* signed by the PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (yes, he puts it in all caps) and the COMMISSIONER OF THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY, he's read The Official Statement and need go no further. Given that this was a 750-word op-ed, that's just sad.

Several librarians said useful things. "jmartin":

> In my library, we have 20,000 books, databases, e-books, videos, audiobooks, and services. Books are still by far the most popular format in circulation.
>
> I haven't abandoned books; I've just abandoned the notion that libraries are only about books.

Mark Smith notes that it's not an either-or choice, although he weakens this by seeming to write off books

and other traditional media in the long run. Another commenter notes that the *first* known libraries didn't have all that many books—and that libraries have always been about more than books. (This commenter notes the continuing virtue of libraries as public spaces.)

Erik Sandall was struck by the last sentence I quoted, the one about degradation:

> Where did this come from? What condition do you believe to be a sign of the degradation of our culture and civilization? The decreased popularity of physical books? I guess, then, that you see the changes public libraries have made lately in order to meet the changing needs of their users as acquiescence to this degradation?
>
> That's an unfortunate view of public librarians, whose primary commitments are to recognize useful sources of information, to provide each patron with the book (or website, PDF, Twitter stream, etc.) according to his/her need, and to grow and evolve the library in order to meet these commitments. By meeting these commitments, librarians actively maintain our culture and our civilization.
>
> Our culture and civilization are in the expression, not in the media. By making cultural expressions available and freely accessible to the public librarians actively maintain our culture and our civilization.

I'm not sure you can trace a real "decreased popularity" of physical books over any moderate period, and I'm not ready to dismiss containers that rapidly, but this is still a good comment.

Ah, but Antman has another trump, since he seems to treat technologists and CNN more seriously than anyone else. Google's CEO sees information and access getting cheaper and cheaper and makes a comment about his grandson that completely ignores copyright—therefore, it must be true. Since digital devices will be effectively free and ubiquitous, there's no future for libraries in providing such services. I won't claim Antman's an elitist, but he sure does seem to assume nobody would *willingly* use a public library for things they could afford to buy themselves. Antman says he's missing a balance among librarians, but he only quotes librarians who speak of imbalance. He's *convinced* "many libraries will have already cleared their shelves of books" when we get to the digital utopia where physical books are the *only* library service worth keeping.

The op-ed appeared in conjunction with ALA's 2009 Annual Conference being in Chicago. It mentions increased library circulation (mostly books, but not by that name)—and, yes, it mentions other services. It mentions that more Americans have library cards than ever, that libraries provide for "knowledge, learning and even entertainment"—and, admittedly, doesn't hammer home "from books and other resources." It mentions special library services to assist job seekers (but there won't be any job seekers after the recession's done, right?). And it mentions budget problems.

The op-ed does *not* tout internet services as being more important than everything else. It *does* mention libraries helping people find work—which Antman seems to see as divisive. He calls it "pandering." I call it an absurd misreading of the op-ed. He's seized on a couple of sentences and turned it into The Official Statement That Only Internet Services Matter. He says he took the op-ed seriously. I say he twisted a casual piece for his own uses. And, in one of the last responses, he claims this as his purpose:

> My purpose was to draw attention, employing a bit of well-merited mockery, to a small but worrisome segment of that community that is very likely to grow in influence in years to come unless you and your colleagues step up to the plate.

I can't read him that charitably. I didn't see any focus on "a few crazies in libraries," I saw stress on the ALA president. The title isn't "a few of today's librarians," it's "Today's librarian." I saw an awfully broad brush. As one who's frequently poked at those who go overboard on digital affairs, I find it offensive.

With that, I will end this overlong essay. Maybe it's a good ending because librarians need to deal with not only digital extremists and those who universalize from *their* library to "The Library," but also your "friends" who have concluded that you're all getting rid of your books. If you're in a public library and *are* looking forward to getting rid of all your books? (Or if the same is true in most academic libraries, for that matter…) Then you're in trouble, I believe, and will see your public support shrivel for good reason. "Books and beyond," yes. "Beyond the books"…not so fast. But I believe that's the view of a very small and, yes, very vocal minority—not where most libraries are or plan to be.

Offtopic Perspective
50 Movie Comedy Classics, Part 2

Disc 7
Made for Each Other, 1939, b&w. John Cromwell (dir.), James Stewart, Carole Lombard, Charles Coburn, Lucile Watson, Eddie Quillan. 1:32.

> At times, this movie seems like a comedy in the classical sense—a play in which some people survive until

the end. There's more drama than light-hearted humor, although there are a few funny scenes. James Stewart's a young New York lawyer (who makes almost no money) who goes to Boston to take a deposition and, while he's there, meets *and weds* a beautiful young woman (Carole Lombard). His mother lives with them and treats her badly; his boss prevents him from going on a honeymoon cruise; he has no money but almost always has at least one servant (and there's that cruise thing). Then there's a baby; they desperately need more money and he should be named a partner, but instead he meekly accepts a 15% pay cut…and soon, it's New Year's Eve and the baby contracts a rare pneumonia. Along the way, one standing joke is that the head of the lawfirm (Charles Coburn, who does a fine job) can only hear you if he opens his jacket and you yell into his pie-plate-size hearing aid microphone.

Laughing yet? It gets funnier. The only way to save the baby is with a new serum—but there's none in New York, Johns Hopkins sent all of theirs (apparently the only supply anywhere) to Salt Lake City; the latter can spare a little, but there's a terrible storm—and a pilot wants $5,000 to fly it back. We get several minutes of a (different) pilot in an open-air plane flying through storms and even bouncing off a mountainside at one point, then the plane catching fire and the pilot parachuting with serum package in hand. Of course, everything works out—the baby's saved, the father gets his partnership, the mother comes around, and all of the happy ending is in the last two minutes.

The print's pretty good, the sound's fine, the acting is also fine. Not exactly a laughathon, but well made and enjoyable. $1.25.

That Uncertain Feeling, 1941, b&w. Ernst Lubitsch (dir.), Merle Oberon, Melvyn Douglas, Burgess Meredith, Alan Mowbray, Eve Arden. 1:24

Jill Baker (Merle Oberon) keeps getting the hiccups and is persuaded to see a psychoanalyst (Alan Mobray). She becomes disillusioned about her husband (Melvyn Douglas) and meets a strange but interesting pianist (Burgess Meredith), who she becomes involved with.

The husband plans to use psychology to get her back. After all sorts of incidents, it works—but it's a very lightweight movie. Still, Burgess Meredith does a fine job, as do Oberon and Douglas—and the young Eve Arden (with her instantly recognizable voice) has a small but significant role. Here's the problem: For one reason or another, I didn't review this right after seeing it—and after four days, I'd almost completely forgotten the plot and the performances. "Lightweight" may overstate it. Still, and despite some soundtrack damage, I'll give it $1.25.

The Great Rupert (aka *A Christmas Wish),* 1950, b&w. Irving Pichel (dir.), Jimmy Durante, Terry Moore, Tom Drake, Frank Orth, Sara Haden, Queenie Smith, Chick Chandler. 1:28 [1:25].

A movie about vaudeville, the virtues of local investing, passing along good fortune—and a dancing squirrel. The squirrel's trainer has to depart a basement apartment for lack of funds, sets the squirrel (The Great Rupert) free to roam, and runs into another vaudevillian family, the Amendolas, father played by Jimmy Durante, who's fled their last residence for similar reasons and wangles their way into the apartment without paying in advance. Meanwhile, the landlord finds out that a worthless gold mine he'd been conned into investing in is paying off, to the tune of $1,500 a week for his share. He won't deal with banks and doesn't trust his wife or musician son, so he stuffs the bills into a hole in the wall near the floor.

But the space behind the hole is now occupied by The Great Rupert, who finds these bills distracting, so he sweeps them away—right into the hole in the roof of the basement apartment, where they come fluttering down just after Mrs. Amendola prays for a little money. And the next week—after they've spent the money, between paying off debts, buying shoes for their beautiful daughter, and lending the rest to people in similar circumstances—she prays again, and another $1,500 comes fluttering down.

That's one plot. Others involve Amendola's daughter (who's a harpist), the son upstairs (who likes her—and it's mutual—and plays tuba: he composes a piece for "two forgotten instruments" to play with her), a show-biz type who *also* likes her (and keeps taking her out for meals, but gets nowhere), the son getting conned into a worthless oil investment, and eventually simultaneous visits from the local police, IRS and FBI, all wanting to know where the family's getting all the money. Meanwhile, as the landlord notices, "and Amendola" keeps showing up on various small businesses (because Mr. Amendola keeps lending or investing in them), all of which seem to be doing very well.

There's more—but I shouldn't give it all away. The ending is, well, as it should be but also more than a little peculiar. All in all, a fun movie, but the print's severely damaged, with missing chunks of dialogue and visual damage. Given the damage, I can't give this one more than $1.00.

Something to Sing About, 1937, b&w. Victor Schertzinger (dir.), James Cagney, Evelyn Daw, William Frawley, Mona Barrie, Gene Lockhart, Philip Ahn, Kathleen Lockhart. 1:33 [1:27].

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner. It's easy to think of James Cagney as a tough guy, but he was also a first-rate hoofer and pretty good singer, and those talents shine in this romantic comedy. He's Terry Rooney (or, rather, that's the character's bandleader name—his real name's Thaddeus McGillicuddy), a

bandleader/singer who's been invited to Hollywood for a movie. He leaves, getting engaged to his singer/girlfriend just before getting on the train.

In Hollywood, the studio head makes sure that Rooney never realizes the extent of his screen chemistry and talent, trying to keep him from wanting a good contract. Rooney assumes he's a disaster (and gets in a fistfight on set, which turns out to be staged to get a better film sequence) and has his fiancé fly out to Hollywood, where they get married and, with the picture wrapped, take off on a tramp steamer to the South Pacific. (This seems to be an era in which the train is the *preferred* way to go coast-to-coast, but you can fly if you're in a hurry.)

Well, sir. The movie's a big hit, Rooney's a Big Star. When he returns, the studio exec wants to sign him up for seven movies (years?), but the contract says he has to be single. They come up with a gimmick: His wife will use her real married name (Mrs. McGillicuddy), live next door, and act as his personal assistant. Which is fine, but a female star makes a play for him, which an agent pushes on the press as a hot new romance—and his wife gets tired of it all.

That's more of the plot than you need. Let's just say it all ends up as a romantic comedy should, with a few great song-and-dance numbers along the way (including on the tramp steamer, where they're the only passengers and most of the show is crew entertaining one another, flawed a bit by the clearly visible accordion, guitar and harmonica sounding a *lot* like a string-and-brass ensemble). The print's pretty good with a little damage. (One oddity is revealed in the IMDB trivia area. I noted that the studio was Grand National, which I knew only for B westerns—and it turns out this movie broke the studio financially.) I'll give it $1.50—not great, but a winner.

Disc 8

My Man Godfrey, 1936, b&w. Gregory La Cava (dir.), William Powell, Carole Lombard, Alice Brady, Gail Patrick, Eugene Pallette, Jean Dixon, Alan Mowbray, Mischa Auer. 1:34.

Set in the depression, this movie involves a wealthy (for the moment) family of eccentrics and a man (William Powell) living in the city dump, "found" as part of a scavenger hunt and turned into a butler for a family notoriously unable to keep butlers—a role he serves exceedingly well. The younger daughter who found him (Lombard) (well, the mean-spirited older daughter found him first, but she was so offensive he pushed her into an ashpile) falls for him and tends to over-emote about everything. He treats her Properly, as a butler should. Oh, and the family's wealth is less secure than it might seem to be—and the father, the only sensible one of the bunch, is getting fed up with the rest of the family.

That's the setup. It's done very well, both a comedy of manners and a screwball comedy, with a somewhat remarkable closing sequence. It's William Powell's movie, but the rest of the cast offers strong (if sometimes overplayed) support—Lombard is hysterical in her apparent hysteria. Oh, and there's one other thing: *It's funny*. Four actors (and the director) received Academy Award nominations—I'd guess they were all well deserved. Good print, thoroughly enjoyable, a classic, an easy $2.00.

One Rainy Afternoon, 1936, b&w. Rowland V. Lee (dir.), Francis Lederer, Ida Lupino, Hugh Herbert, Roland Young, Erik Rhodes, Joseph Cawthron, Live De Maigret, Mischa Auer. 1:34 [1:19].

Here's the plot, pretty much in its entirety: A French actor/singer is having an "affair" (kisses only, apparently) with a married woman, where they go to a movie after it's started, enter separately, smooch, then leave before the movie's over. (He finds this incredibly frustrating because he never sees how the movie ends.) One rainy afternoon, after she's gone in, he hands his ticket to the usher—and we get the key plot point, which is that "66″ upside down is "99."

He winds up in the wrong seat and kisses the wrong woman (Ida Lupino), who is prettier and nicer than the married one. There's an instant problem, mostly because she's startled and the theater seems populated by a group of harridans who insist on high moral standards, who see to it that he's arrested. He gets put in jail because he can't afford a hefty fine; she (Lupino) bails him out; he pays her back a little at a time at an ice-skating rink (loads of physical comedy); her annoying fiancé is not thrilled…and lots of publicity about this "monster" makes him a hot box office draw. That's about it, plus of course a happy ending of sorts.

Ah, but this one's a charming farce and romantic comedy, a pleasure to watch. What can I say? This film is strong evidence that, for comedy even more than most film genres, it's the performances, not the plot. The print's OK (not great, not terrible) but the sound's scratchy, which is the only thing reducing this charmer to $1.50.

The Great Mike, 1944, b&w. Wallace Fox (dir.), Stuart Erwin, Robert 'Buzz' Henry, Carl 'Alfalfa' Switzer, Edythe Elliott, Pierre Watkin, Gwen Kenyon. 1:12 [1:03]

Two kids deliver newspapers using a wagon pulled by…a thoroughbred? Which one of them is trying to buy on the installment plan from his uncle. They start delivering to a new resident, who turns out to be a stable owner. He lets the "delivery wagon horse" run against one of his horses, which barely beats the nag—and that horse turns out to be a champion.

That's the setup. Then the uncle says he has to sell the horse 'cause he needs the money, the new owner

finds that the horse won't eat or train because he misses his pal (the kid's dog), the stable owner's trainer goes in with the kid to buy the horse, and it goes from there, including race-fixers.

Not bad although very hokey, with lots of racing scenes, but the print's really poor and the sound's sometimes worse, and one key scene is missing entirely. Given those problems, I can't come up with more than $0.75.

Three Guys Named Mike, 1951, b&w. Charles Walters (dir.), Jane Wyman, Van Johnson, Howard Keel, Barry Sullivan. 1:30.

I don't know whether American Airlines paid for product placement or just cooperated, but their logo and distinctive "paint job" are there throughout this tale of a brand-new opinionated stewardess and her three beaus. There's a pilot named Mike, an adman named Mike and a grad student scientist named Mike. From her job interview through amusing incidents on board the (pre-jet) plane (a DC-3) through finding a place to live with three other stewardesses to her Big Decision—it's sprightly, well-played by a first-rate cast, frequently funny and a real charmer. It's on the slight side, but still an easy $1.50.

Disc 9

The Over-the-Hill Gang, 1969, color. Jean Yarbrough (dir.), Walter Brennan, Edgar Buchanan, Andy Devine, Jack Elam, Gypsy Rose Lee, Ricky Nelson (and Kristen Nelson), Pat O'Brien, Chill Wills, Edward Andrews. 1:15 [1:10].

Age and guile beat youth and speed every time—one lesson from this charming lightweight western. A retired Texas Ranger goes to visit his son (Ricky Nelson!), the crusading newspaper editor of a corrupt Nevada town who's running for mayor against the boss (who owns the local saloon/casino and runs the sheriff and judge). When he sees how bad the situation is, he calls for his squad—three other truly over-the-hill ex-Texas Rangers, but also a squad of Hollywood's elder stars.

Fun, funny, with an interesting plot and a truly stellar cast. I probably saw this when it first aired and enjoyed it thoroughly again. The sound's off a bit at times and it is, after all, a TV movie, cutting this to $1.75.

The Over-the-Hill Gang Rides Again, 1970, color. George McGowan (dir.), Walter Brennan, Fred Astaire, Edgar Buchanan, Andy Devine, Chill Wills. 1:15.

This sequel is set in Waco, where an ex-Texas Ranger named the Baltimore Kid has supposedly been arrested and is in danger of being lynched. The three "others" from the previous film ride off to Waco (precluding the near-immediate wedding of one of them), only to find the Kid's already been lynched…and the newspaper editor is the deposed judge from Boulder (turned good guy, apparently).

Turns out the Baltimore Kid's not so much dead (somebody stole his wallet) as trying to preserve himself several drinks at a time…and the plot moves on from there. Once again, it's age and guile vs. speed and stupidity. While some of the stellar cast from the original is missing, there's one magnificent addition—Fred Astaire, the Baltimore Kid, in a great turn both as hopeless drunk and as spiffed-up marshal. The print's odd, with some color shifts and sound problems. Still, an easy $1.50.

Angel on My Shoulder, 1946, b&w. Archie Mayo (dir.), Paul Muni, Anne Baxter, Claude Rains. 1:40 [1:30].

A second-rate hood, Eddie Kagel, gets out of the joint after a four-term term. His sidekick, who's been running his operation, picks him up and gives him back his gun—one bullet at a time. We're then treated to a fairly long slice of a fairly impressive Hell, whose overlord really never feels quite warm enough. Nicky (or Mephistopheles if you prefer) spots Kagel's resemblance to a Good Judge and gubernatorial candidate who's a little *too* good for Nicky's taste—and is aware that Kagel wants nothing more than revenge on his sidekick.

The plot's afoot. They arise; Kagel occupies Judge Parker's body; and somehow all Nicky's evil plans backfire… It's not a laugh-a-minute comedy, but it's quite a picture, particularly Kagel's interactions with the judge's fiancée (Anne Baxter), a fine upstanding girl, and his butler—neither of whom quite understands his new speech patterns. Claude Rains is suave and effective as Nick. Well played and a good print, this really is a classic. Unfortunately, the sound track's noisy (and ten minutes are missing), reducing this to $1.75.

Eternally Yours, 1939, b&w. Tay Garnett (dir.), Loretta Young, David Niven, Hugh Herbert, Billie Burke, C. Aubrey Smith, Zasu Pitts, Broderick Crawford, Eve Arden. 1:35 [1:29].

An engaged young woman (Young), granddaughter of a minister (Smith), goes from her bridal shower to a show—at which she falls instantly (and mutually) for Arturo (Niven), a magician. Abandoning her man, she goes off with the magician—getting married and going on a world tour. She's not thrilled by the lipstick on his collar or his tendency to try dangerous stunts—but leaves him because he never wants to settle down and she does.

She divorces him (in Reno), he falls apart, tries to find her…and the rest of the plot includes a cruise, an onboard marriage and another example of the heroine's attitude toward men who love her but aren't Arturo. I was less than enthralled by this woman's attitude toward every other man. Well acted, great cast, and the print's OK but the soundtrack's noisy. I'll give it $1.50.

Disc 10

Happy Go Lovely, 1951, color. H. Bruce Humberstone (dir.), David Niven, Vera-Ellen, Cesar Romero. 1:37 [1:30].

See, there's this threadbare American musical revue group in Edinburgh for the Festival, the investors are about to pull the plug on "Frolics to You" and the producer's going nuts. Meanwhile, one chorus girl wakes up late for rehearsal, begs a ride with the chauffeur for Scotland's richest bachelor (a greeting card magnate!), and one thing leads to another…

You get a rich man pretending to be a journalist to get close to a young woman—and the woman asking him to pretend to be the rich man to keep the show going. You get long dance numbers of mixed quality and some good knockabout chase-related comedy. You get David Niven, who does a fine job as the magnate/journalist, and Cesar Romero, chewing the scenery but possibly appropriate for the role. And Vera-Ellen, moving from fired chorus girl to lead dancer/singer, doing lots of dancing and some acting and singing. All in all, a pleasant entertainment with a good print. $1.50.

The Smallest Show on Earth, 1957, b&w. Basil Dearden (dir.), Virginia McKennan, Bill Travers, Margaret Rutherford, Peter Sellers, Bernard Miles, Francis De Wolff. 1:20.

The sleeve description is wrong in one key respect (it gets part of the plot wrong too): It says "Starring: Peter Sellers." Sellers *is* in the movie, overplaying an aging, drunken projectionist who's the only one who can handle a rundown theater's equipment (when he's reasonably sober), but he's definitely not the star. (Margaret Rutherford does well as an aged ticket-taker.)

A writer's having trouble finishing a novel and the family's running out of money when he finds he's inherited the goods of an unknown great-uncle. The goods turn out to "the flea pit," a wholly decrepit little movie theater that's constantly shaken by trains and isn't currently running—but still employs three ancient staff. The gimmick: The one grand movie theater nearby needs this place to build a parking lot—but that theater's owner doesn't want to pay a fair price for it.

It's a lot of fun, particularly as the young couple (who somehow have enough money to do all this…) get the place sort-of running and find profit in running old westerns set in the desert, turning up the heat, and selling *lots* of cold drinks at intermission.

Not a great movie by any means, but amusing. Decent print, mediocre sound quality. $1.25.

Sandy the Seal, 1969, color. Robert Lynn (dir.), Heinz Drache, Marianne Koch. 1:13 [1:10].

It's hard to know what to make of this—and how it comes to be on a set of comedy "classics." A lighthouse keeper (alternating one month off, one month on) on Seal Island, on shift-change day, hears gunshots on the other side of the island and just misses the poachers (he's unarmed, of course). There's an orphan seal pup, who follows him back…all the way back home on the mainland, where the keeper's two kids adopt the seal, now named Sandy.

Much frolicking ensues. Apparently, all seals inherently balance circus balls and walk around with them in midair, and do lots of other tricks automatically. So the kids hold a neighborhood circus (with fish as payment). Later, the seal blunders onto a fishing boat and, in looking for it, the kids wind up down in the hold—where there are lots of sealskins. When they tell their dad and he comes down to look (punching out a foul-tempered deckhand in the process), there's nothing there!

This "comedy" proceeds to the unarmed keeper once more confronting armed poachers, getting shot, the kids finding him as the poachers smash up the island-to-shore radio…and a happy ending that's just a trifle contrived. Good points: a little nice underwater photography and a well-trained seal. Weak points: The focus is a bit off during part of the picture—and it's just not much of a picture, much less much of a comedy. As a sermon on the evils of seal-poaching, maybe. I'll give it $0.75.

The Front Page, 1931, b&w. Lewis Milestone (dir.), Adolphe Menjou, Pat O'Brien, Mary Brian, Edward Everett Horton. 1:41.

Clearly a classic comedy, and you probably already know the plot. (Reporter wants to quit paper, move to New York, get married; his editor wants to prevent that; there's a prison escape of sorts; and we get to see lots of byplay among prison reporters…along with some social commentary from the prisoner.)

Note that this is the 1931 version with Adolphe Menjou, not the 1974 version with Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. Well played, funny, but there are two problems, both print-related more than movie-related: The sound's poor (lots of background noise, some distortion) and there appears to be lots of overscan—as in, on the opening credits you can't read the actors' names.

A great print of the movie would probably get a full $2, but I can't give this one more than $1.50.

Disc 11

Behave Yourself, 1951, b&w. George Beck (dir.), Farley Granger, Shelley Winters, William Demarest, Francis L. Sullivan, Margalo Gillmore, Lon Chaney Jr., Hans Conried, Elisha Cook Jr., Glenn Anders, Allen Jenkins, Sheldon Leonard, Marvin Kaplan. 1:21.

The plot: A CPA (Granger), somewhat browbeaten by his mother-in-law, realizes almost too late that it's his 2nd Anniversary. He goes to a store to buy his wife (a svelte and wonderfully funny Shelley Winters) a nightgown. Meanwhile, a dog (trained to go to a certain spot) has come into town as part of some odd scheme—and, somehow, breaks free and starts following the CPA, in the process demolishing enough of the store so that the CPA flees. And, when the dog keeps following him, pretends that the dog is his present for his wife.

Then an ad shows up about the lost dog, with precise physical description. The CPA wants to do the right thing…and that's just the beginning of a wonderfully funny, fast-moving blend of caper and farce, with lots of mistaken identities, bad guys getting shot (sometimes with the CPA's business card in hand), mother-in-law stuff, counterfeit money (that wasn't supposed to be counterfeit), overeager cops…and one charming dog. It's a 50's movie: The married couple have twin beds. But never mind…

The cast is remarkable—William Demarest as a cop, Lon Chaney, Hans Conried, Elisha Cook Jr., Glenn Anders, Sheldon Leonard and Marvin Kaplan as gangsters and other criminals, Margalo Gillmore as the mother-in-law. They all do good jobs (Farley Granger, the CPA, is probably my least favorite character of the lot—he's OK, but so many others are better). Good print, good sound. Thoroughly enjoyable. $2.00.

The Sin of Harold Diddlebock, 1947, b&w. Preston Sturges (dir. & screenplay), Harold Lloyd, Jimmy Conlin, Raymond Walburn, Rudy Vallee, Edgar Kennedy, Arline Judge, Franklin Pangborn, Lionel Stander, Margaret Hamilton. 1:29.

How's this for a movie that doesn't worry about suspension of disbelief: This one begins with almost nine minutes from a Harold Lloyd silent movie, *The Freshman*, where a waterboy on a college football team somehow becomes the team hero—and that begins with an overlay acknowledging that it's from an old Lloyd silent. At the end of the game, with sound inserted, a businessman says "Look me up when you're through here, I'll have a job for you."

Cut to the much older Lloyd showing up for that interview. The businessman—owner of an ad agency—doesn't remember the sport or the incident (apparently he does this a lot) but has a starting position: as an accounting clerk, where Lloyd (that is, Harold Diddlebock) can work his way up. 20 years later, he's done nothing but work on those books. At which point, the owner notes that he's a failure and it's time to cut him loose, with around $2,000. Diddlebock takes the money *in cash*—he doesn't trust anybody at this point—and, as he's leaving, tells a young woman his sad tale (which she already knows). He'd fallen in love with every sister in that family as they came to work, but never did anything about it—except that he finally purchased a ring with which to propose, and he gives it to the youngest sister so she can keep it for when she meets the right person. Exit this hapless and unmotivated character…

Who we next see chatting with a shifty guy who wants to buy him a drink—and Diddlebock's never had one. The shifty guy's also spotted the wad but is impeccably honest. So, into the bar they go (at 11 a.m.), and the bartender makes up a special creation, the Diddlebock, with no apparent alcoholic taste and enough of a kick that Diddlebock's yelling out, then wondering who made all that noise. Bookie shows up to collect from the shifty guy, Diddlebock decides to bet half his savings on a longshot, wins, bets again…and next we see there's a brief montage of nightclubs and carousing.

When Diddlebock awakes two days later, he finds that he has no money—but he now owns a rundown circus with 37 hungry lions and no way to get rid of it. That sets up a lengthy set of scenes involving a well-trained lion, bankers and their reputation, and the kind of physical humor (and physical danger) we'd expect from Lloyd. To be sure, there's an odd happy ending.

I had mixed feelings about this one. There's some background noise on the soundtrack but that's not the major issue. I'm not sure what it is—the movie's amusing, as you'd expect from Sturges and the great cast, but maybe I expected more. Still, it's not bad, and for fans of Lloyd it's his last movie (and only movie after 1938). $1.25.

Beat the Devil, 1953, b&w. John Huston (dir.), Humphrey Bogart, Jennifer Jones, Gina Lollobrigida, Robert Morley, Peter Lorre, Edward Underdown, Ivor Barnard. 1:29.

I saw this picture in another public domain collection five years ago (the "DoubleDouble" set of 44 movies sent to subscribers of a long-since-defunct DVD magazine). In that collection, this movie was with a group of "Famous Directors, Cult Classics" flicks. Here, it's classed as a comedy. Maybe it's just hard to classify. Back then, I thought the acting was better than the "dubious plot." I still do.

The plot, such as it is: In Ravello, waiting for a slow boat to Africa, are an odd group of four men (all from different countries), plus a jaded adventurer and his gorgeous Italian wife—and a stiff-upper-lip Englishman and his sharp but perhaps over-imaginative American wife. The adventurer (Bogart) is involved with the odd quartet, apparently out to acquire uranium-bearing lands in British East Africa on the sly: The quartet is providing the funds and Bogart has the contacts. The other couple is off to claim a coffee plantation the Brit has inherited—but if you believe

his wife, he's actually out for uranium as well. Let's see. Both wives get involved with each other's husbands. One of the quartet is a murderous type (*not* Peter Lorre). There's some romance and lots of double-crossing. There's a moderately funny sequence involving a broken-down, runaway car and two briefly-presumed deaths. The ship isn't all it might be—the captain even less so. And, well…while there's a resolution, I didn't find it all that coherent.

Still…John Huston directing (Truman Capote and Huston writing). Humphrey Bogart. Gina Lollobrigida, Robert Morley. Peter Lorre. Jennifer Jones, all playing it straight and making for an amusing film. How far wrong can you go? Decent print; I'll give it $1.50.

Passport to Pimlico, 1949, b&w. Henry Cornelius (dir.), Stanley Holloway, Betty Warren, Barbara Murray, Paul Dupuis, John Slater, Jane Hylton, Hermione Baddeley, Margaret Rutherford. 1:24.

> While in some ways distinctly a film of its time—post-war rationing in England, unexploded bombs and lots of shortages—this is also a great plot idea, fairly well carried out. In Pimlico (a small area in London, not nearly so grand in this movie as it's made to sound these days), there's an unexploded bomb in an excavation (in an open area where a visionary would like to see a Lido, with swimming pool, but the mercenary neighborhood leaders just want to sell it off). Kids playing nearby manage to set off the bomb—and in the process of one person sliding into the excavation and being pulled out, he spots an antechamber opened by the bomb. He goes out with a ladder, climbs down and discovers a treasure trove.

> As things develop, the treasure trove includes a document that says the neighborhood was ceded to the Duke of Burgundy, a deed that was never reversed. The residents (19 families) decide this means they're Burgundians, so they can ignore British pub closing laws, rationing etc. The British government can't fault the finding (aided by authentication by Prof. Hatton-Jones, a winning performance by Margaret Rutherford)—and things escalate from there. Let's just say that Whitehall comes off neither wise (or in any way reasonable) nor liked by Londoners, and the good guys win.

> Quite charming, and occasionally a good laugh. I wondered about the "In Memoriam" at the start of the film, followed not by a name but by a wreath surrounding some odd documents—but by the end, I'd figured out that the documents were ration-related.

> Very nice. Decent print. $1.75.

Disc 12

Spooks Run Wild, 1941, b&w. Phil Rosen (dir.), Bela Lugosi, Leo Gorcey, Bobby Jordan, Huntz Hall and the gang. 1:05 [1:03].

> Since the sleeve says "Starring: Bela Lugosi" I didn't realize until the opening credits came on that this is another East Side Kids flick, although it doesn't use that name. Even by the low standards of those films, this one—despite Lugosi—is mostly a waste.

> We start out with the kids being rounded up by cops—and put on a bus to go to summer camp? Really? Meanwhile, in a town near the camp, people are upset because a "monster killer" seems to be on his way there. Lugosi pulls into a gas station with his vehicle piled high with boxes that could be coffins and an extremely short sidekick, and asks the way to the long-deserted old mansion next to the cemetery…after which, another car pulls in with a bearded gentleman who claims to be a monster-hunter. Anyone who can't figure out the plot twist will probably find this movie suspenseful and enjoyable, but really…

> Anyway, the kids want to leave the camp's dorm to go to town, they get shot at in the cemetery, one thing leads to another and the next thing you know, you've wasted a little more than an hour. Best line of the movie: Lights out in the dorm, one kid's reading—in full dark. Another one says "How can you read in the dark?" to which he responds, "I went to night school." That was the highlight of the film—unless, I suppose, you're an East Side Kids fan. Charitably, I'll give it $0.50.

His Girl Friday, 1940, b&w. Howard Hawks (dir.), Cary Grant, Rosalind Russell, Ralph Bellamy, Gene Lockhart, Cliff Edwards, Regis Toomey. 1:32 [1:21].

> Remake or not remake? Two discs down, the same source material (a play by Ben Hecht)—but a very different flick than *The Front Page*. Yes, it's the same plot—an ace reporter wants to leave the paper and get married, the editor tries every trick in the book to keep the reporter on the job, and there's a hapless prison break in the middle of all of this, with a sadsack about-to-be-executed (but reprieved by the governor, if the mayor or sheriff would *accept* the reprieve) prisoner in a roll-top desk. No, it's not the same plot: This time, the reporter's a woman, the editor's her ex-husband, she's actually been away for a month—and there's a *lot* more repartee between the two leads.

> It's a better movie. It's also a very different movie, although 20-30 minutes are fairly familiar. I think I see why the two flicks weren't adjacent on the same disc, although that might have been interesting. Grant and Russell both do great jobs, and Ralph Bellamy is fine in a smaller role (in which the character is identified as someone who looks like Ralph Bellamy). The flaws this time around? The print's noisy at times and a few minutes are missing. Even so, I'll give it $1.75.

Love Laughs at Andy Hardy, 1946, b&w. Willis Goldbeck (dir.), Mickey Rooney, Lewis Stone, Sara Haden,

Bonita Granville, Lina Romay, Fay Holden, Dorothy Ford. 1:33.

> This one surprised me. I've never seen any Andy Hardy pictures and I'm not the world's biggest Mickey Rooney fan. But this movie was fun, funny, sweet and quite enjoyable.
>
> Hardy's just back from a stint in the Army and returning to college (still a freshman, and at the same college his parents attended). He plans to ask his girlfriend—with whom he's just been corresponding—to marry him. Meanwhile, lots of hijinks and physical comedy before he leaves for college, and there's a South American young woman new in town who seems to have the hots for him (and who sings a truly odd song that mixes polkas and Latin American rhythms). Once at college, the girlfriend's a little busy, and Hardy gets roped into chairing the frosh get-together with the expectation that every young woman will have a date…which turns out to include a remarkably tall student (the 6'2" or 6'4" Dorothy Ford, wearing heels besides—Rooney's 5'2"). One thing leads to another, and he winds up going to the dance with her, a mismatch that makes for some great scenes.
>
> The title probably gives the rest away—but, of course, all works out at the end (for the continuation of the series at least—although this was the last of 15 (or 18?) flicks in the series until one final attempt 12 years later). It's nothing great, but it's not bad. Also, the print is one of the best b&w public domain prints I've seen (apparently re-released as part of an Academy Award collection). $1.50.

Pot O' Gold, 1941, b&w. George Marshall (dir.), James Stewart, Paulette Goddard, Horace Heidt, Charles Winninger, Mary Gordon, Frank Melton. 1:26.

> This tall skinny guy who looks like an impossibly young James Stewart, right down to the speech pattern, is going broke running his father's unsuccessful music store—and his uncle, who owns a health food factory, wants him to come work for him. After final failure, the young man travels to the factory's city, and on his way to the factory encounters a boarding house that has really great big-band music apparently coming from the sky—right next to the factory.
>
> Turns out the uncle *hates* music, and wanted to buy out the boarding house to expand the factory, and the boarding house owner is letting a just-forming band rehearse on the roof, at least partly to annoy the old coot. The nephew doesn't know any of this when he winds up listening to the band, quietly taking out his harmonica, and showing himself as a natural talent…
>
> Well, that's the start. We get tomato-throwing, a remarkable jail musical scene, gaslighting the old man with mysterious band music coming from nowhere (to get him to take a vacation), more musical scenes…and, of course, a contrived happy ending. It's part musical, part comedy, and all quite good, really. (The musical number that's supposedly the fledgling band making its first radio appearance is a *bit* improbable, as it involves two dozen or so dancers and elaborate scenery, but plausibility and musicals never have gone well together.)
>
> Stewart is, as always, great. Paulette Goddard as a daughter of the boarding-house owner and, of course, love interest is very good. The musical numbers are remarkably good, particularly the jailhouse number and an extended, complex scene at the boardinghouse table (a scene that includes barbershop harmonies, glass-rim playing and more). There are print problems at times and some sound problems, but this one still earns $1.75.

Summing Up

What do we have in the second half? Two great pictures with more than adequate prints: *My Man Godfrey* and *Behave Yourself*. Five that come close: *The Over-the-Hill Gang, Angel on My Shoulder*, *Passport to Pimlico*, *His Girl Friday*, *Pot O' Gold.* Nine more at $1.50, very good and worth rewatching. That's 16 out of the 24 (the first half had 26 movies), a remarkable track record—and of the rest, four come in at decent ($1.25) and one at adequate ($1.00), leaving only three losers. If you include only the movies that were adequate or better, that prices out to $32.25.

It's a much stronger second half, and adding in the $20.50 for the 15 movies in the first half that were at least adequate, I figure the set's worth around $52.75—and it currently sells for $10.50 (apparently Mill Creek's discontinued it, otherwise it would probably be $15). Interesting variety and a bargain.

Masthead

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ9i13.pdf