

November 2013

# Adventures in Librarianship: More From Wilberforce

Ned Kraft

Ralph J. Bunche Library, kraftno@state.gov

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kraft, Ned (1999) "Adventures in Librarianship: More From Wilberforce," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 6, Article 36.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3893>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

# Adventures in Librarianship: More from Wilberforce

by **Ned Kraft** (Order Librarian, Ralph J. Bunche Library) <Kraftno@state.gov>

[Darkmound University's Prof. Stan Steel has released another set of entries from his upcoming *Wilberforce Diaries* in a transparent effort to influence the National Endowment for the Humanities toward funding his archival search for the missing (and still conjectural) second, third, and fourth diary volumes. Several of the entries included below suggest that as an acquisitions librarian and diarist, Dr. Harold Wilberforce found it difficult to subdue his animosity for his colleague, Melvil Dewey, referred to throughout as, simply, "MD" or the "gaseous bullfrog." Whether his accusations against Dewey were based on fact or on Wilberforce's subordinate resentments, perhaps Professor Steel's upcoming monograph will hazard a theory. The Professor has never in the past shied from inventive theory-making. -ed]

12 December 1892: Carl Hoffman of Kansas has published Mrs. Field's nocturne, "Liebestraum." Her work is popular among the local garden leagues, girdle societies and whatnot. I suppose I shall

purchase a copy or two to satisfy the hoards but this new music is sickening with sugar and mindlessness.

28 December: Most of this day spent sorting order cards in my quiet, tomb-ish office. Too sad to sit at home while all around the sounds of Yule-tide. My countrymen, I fear, are reared to sentimentality. Work should focus them, as it does me. Just now, in the final hour of light, a soft snow has begun beyond my window.

14 January 1893: MD has returned from his excursion to Pitts-burg [sic] where he no doubt bored the local librarians to fits of narcolepsy. Could not the Pitts-burgians have found some useful employment for him there, something involving dangerous amounts of molten steel? Could not the state militia have used to good effect his oratorical gift against the striking foundrymen, halting them with his great bombast?

3 February: Received a package today from Scribner. Will have to wire him about his clerks and their penmanship.



The bill appears to state that we owe five dollars! I will clip Scribner's wings if he thinks I will pay five silver dollars for a single book!

25 March: The girth of President Cleveland will again be squeezed into Washington's oval office. Not that I loved much the territory-grasping Harrison, but Cleveland ... egad!

2 April: From Boston, Bainard writes that one Sherlock Holmes will soon arrive from London in the port of New York. Mr. Holmes is apparently quite popular in his home country and wishes to make a go in ours, but CB neglects to describe the source of that popularity or why I should be concerned with such a thing. Something to do with books? Is he to visit us here in Albany? No matter. Any friend of Bainard's is welcome to peruse our shelves.

["Bainard" is Custis Bainard, of Boston's Athenaeum, who met Wilberforce when they were both studying classics at St. Scrupulus College. Their bond grew from an incident during which the two young men lashed themselves to a sleeping mule to protest the Dean's decision to drop Euphonia Linguistics from the curriculum. Though the local paper refers to them only as two "rabble rousers," their full names were used in the infirmary records listing the injuries each received when the mule awoke. -ed]

14 May: A bit of new technology for us in this century of constant unfathomable change—the card cabinets have arrived. Each drawer is now speared by an ingenious sort of spindle to hold the cards in place and discourage thievery. Remarkable, but it does raise two concerns. Will our less genteel patrons use the rods to impale one another? Must we now convert all of our old cabinets retrospectively to meet the new standard? And, yes, a third concern: what does the almighty MD think of our new skewered cards? Is there still room enough to list his obsessively parsed subjects?

21 May: What was a beautiful spring day has become unbearable. At lunch Miss Henley strolled past in the garden with MD. She gazed into his beard as if it were the cleverest in all the world. She is lost to me. 🌳

## Inside Pandora's Box from page 77

let's push some notions off the table. Librarians have little understanding of business. Not true! Many librarians have adopted/adapted applicable business management techniques and have increased the operational effectiveness of their libraries. Book vendors are making big profits. Not true! Publisher/vendor relations remain confrontational. Not true! While publishers still do not fully understand the work we do, they are working more cooperatively with vendors and libraries.

Let's put the following on the table: The fortunes of the library, the book vendor, and other supply chain enterprises are closely tied together.

### Conclusions

As we all make ready to move into a new century, one thing is clear. What worked well yesterday is not guaranteed to work well tomorrow. Perhaps it is the end of one hundred decades of history that is focusing the minds of leaders, in all walks of life, on bringing policies and

practices and mission in line with the dynamic of their environments.

The library book vending business model fashioned decades ago—when doing business with libraries was far simpler—has remained in place too long. Arm's-length relationships and pricing as a discount from publishers' list price worked when the industry's structure was more benign.

But, today, this business model cannot guarantee a thriving industry. New business models must be developed. In the future, we will recognize that the 1980s and 1990s were periods of uncertainty for all. We will see it as a time of consolidation in the book arena, swept along by business failures and mergers; and, hopefully, as the millennium comes to a close, a period when book vendors and librarians begin to understand that "free, customized, and right now" is a lousy survival strategy. The time has come for new business models that emphasize vendor/library partnership, goal sharing, joint development, seamless process, and cost/benefit sharing. 🌳