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And We Weren't There

by Nat Bodian (Publishing Consultant)

Fictionalized Account of Japanese Attack on U.S. Published 33 Years Before Pearl Harbor

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 was not the first time Americans as a nation were given to thinking about a Japanese attack on U.S. territory. The Baker & Taylor Company had published a novel based on a Japanese attack against the U.S. some 33 years earlier.

It happened in 1908 when The Baker & Taylor Company was both an active publisher of current interest books and a wholesale book distributor.

From its quarters at 33-37 East 17th Street in New York City, on the north side of Union Square, Baker & Taylor copyrighted and subsequently published in the United States a German work, *Bonzai*, — an illustrated novel about an attack and invasion of the United States west coast by the Japanese fleet with the cooperation of a Japanese “fifth column” already positioned in this country.

That same year, public concern about the growing influx of migrants from Japan gave rise to talk about the “yellow peril.” President Theodore Roosevelt had earlier signed an order excluding Japanese laborers from future emigration to the U.S.

The Baker & Taylor book had the Americans triumphing at its end, closing dramatically with the italicized statement, “The yellow peril had been averted!”

Origins of The Baker & Taylor Company

The firm, operating under the name of Baker & Taylor originated in 1884 when James S. Baker, senior member of Baker & Pratt Co.*, joined with Nelson Taylor of South Norwalk, Conn., to buy out the book department of that firm.

The resulting company, The Baker & Taylor Company, began operations in January 1885 at 9 Bond Street in Manhattan, primarily as a whole distributor of the books of other publishers.

But book distribution alone did not satisfy the literary tastes of Mr. Taylor who soon drew the company back into the active production of books.

One of the early successes of Baker & Taylor, three years after the company's organization, was a facsimile edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as originally published by John Bunyan in 1678. To ensure authenticity, the type used for the facsimile edition had been cast from moulds made in 1720, which were taken from the Dutch type used for the original edition. The paper, too, was a close imitation of that manufactured two centuries earlier for the original edition.

*Baker, Pratt & Co., originally organized in 1874 with its main

emphasis on book distribution, had by 1884 diversified into a company which described itself as “wholesale booksellers and stationers, manufacturers of school and hall furniture, and dealers in general school supplies.”

Nat Bodian researched and wrote a history of The Baker & Taylor Company while serving as its sales manager in 1960. The history appeared in a 1960 issue of The Book Buyer's Guide, a B & T monthly periodical for bookstores and libraries. These articles were derived from that research.

Nemesis continued from page 12

Elsevier Price lists we get and multiple the mailings announcing the same title. Now that's a simple New Year's wish, isn't it?

And how do we get a copy of Pergamon's new price list for 1992? So far we've not seen a single copy at LSU. Trying to keep it a secret, Michael (i.e., Boswood-Pergamon's Managing Director)? Afraid we'll see what Princeton was so upset about?? The late lamented Robert

Maxwell, for all his faults, and we know now they were many, never kept secret what he charged libraries, although, in fact, some libraries had better “deals” than others on the two year “prepayment-lock on prices” option. I'll tell you about that sometime if you are interested. With Maxwell's death and the loss of Otto Rapp, the international STM publishing scene has seen in this past year a major change in the personalities who are part of the charm of the big companies. Even though Elsevier now owns Pergamon, I don't think

they acquired the Chutzpah so characteristic of those two that were part and parcel of the Pergamon character. There is almost a lore about Maxwell, and now without him around to sue, I predict many of those fabulous stories will begin to appear in print.

Well, we've started the New Year with at least one prediction, a New Year's wish and a review of some great in-house publications. What more do you want on a balmy February day?