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Books Are Us

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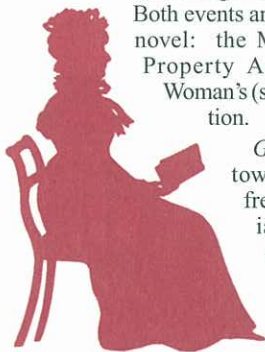
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Column Editor's Note: This column covers fictitious accounts of people in our industry — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. — people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcomed. —AR

When I told my friend, **Diane Rourke** (Director, Health Sciences Library, Baptist Health South Florida) about this column four years ago, she gave me a paperback she had just read, telling me that the book had a great main character who is a librarian. Unlike some of the stereotypes we often see in print, this librarian character is strong, smart, persistent, and determined. She is shy by her own admission and lacking in confidence, more understandable given the time frame of the novel.

Seneca Falls Inheritance (NY, St. Martin's Press, 1992; ISBN 0-425-14465-8) by **Miriam Grace Monfredo** is the first book in the *Glynis Tryon* mysteries, combining historical fiction with a murder mystery. **Monfredo**, a former librarian and American historian, includes ample notes devoted to the sources used, and the historical accuracy (or not) of events described. For example, we read about two historic events in 1848 in New York that laid the groundwork toward legal equality for women. Both events are dealt with in this novel: the Married Women's Property Act and the first Woman's (sic) Rights Convention.



Glynis Tryon is the town's independent, free-thinking librarian who is called upon by a friend to help organize the convention. Some members

of the all male library board don't think too much of their librarian's participation in political activities and suggest her job may be in jeopardy if she persists in this sort of extracurricular activity. One of the board members sternly reminds her that it is not "in keeping with your librarians' role to be promoting discord in the very town you are supposed to be assisting."

Glynis is unusual for a woman of this time in that she went to college, even though her family thought college unnatural for women. She is determined to have a career when few women had such ideas. She is living during an age when women were afraid to speak their opinions and lived in the shadow of men. She is a feminist, however, describing herself as a "spinster," not keen on the "yoke of marriage," though the town constable would like to change her mind. He thinks she is lovely. Others describe her as "fine-looking" and not looking "in the least like a librarian." When *Glynis* inquired what the speaker's idea of a librarian might be, he responded that his experience had been that "...librarians are dry old ladies with steel-framed spectacles, and hair pulled back so tightly their lips scarcely move when they talk. And they wear black, black dresses which button up over their chins."

Monfredo covers a few library issues that sound like familiar concerns in some of today's libraries: cataloging backlogs, the mixed blessing of gift books, the suitability of some titles, and dealing with a library board. But library and political issues are temporarily set aside when a body is found in the canal behind the library.

Being an amateur sleuth as well as a librarian, *Glynis* is very much involved in solving the murder, using her instincts and intelligence. One of the library's gift books helps her in sorting out the crime. She is cautious, noting that librarians aren't necessarily required to be brave, but they are required to be resourceful. She's described as someone who can think straight in an emergency. One character calls her "an old maid busybody," while another praises her for a "splendid job of detection." She certainly was credited with uncovering evidence that helped determine the murderer.

On the back jacket of *Seneca Falls Inheritance*, the review quoted from the *Syracuse Herald American* states: "The success of *Seneca Falls Inheritance* rests with the fully drawn character of the poised, plucky librarian *Glynis Tryon*."


Seneca Falls Inheritance is the first in a series of eight novels that feature *Glynis Tryon*,

town librarian. **Grant Burns** covers this title and the next two in the series in his book, *Librarians in Fiction* (1998). According to Burns, **Monfredo** expands *Glynis'* activist bent to include the rights of Native Americans in *Blackwater Spirits* (NY, St. Martin's Press, 1995). In this novel *Glynis* also writes book reviews and articles in support of women's rights for the local paper. Seneca Falls' new woman doctor describes her as "so composed, so self-possessed."


Julie Still (Reference Librarian, Paul Robeson Library, Rutgers University) includes **Miriam Grace Monfredo** in: "Reading Between the Lines: Librarians as Authors of Fiction" (http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libres15n1/Still_2005_02_16.htm).

In the second title of the series, *North Star Conspiracy* (NY, St. Martin's Press, 1993), the focus is on the underground railroad and the year, 1854. The author includes literature contemporary with the time (e.g., *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), and one of the library issues covered is the definition of its users, i.e., just who may use the library, an issue also discussed in the fourth title.

A male library assistant is introduced in the third title, *Blackwater Spirits*. He favors popular novels more than *Glynis* feels appropriate for the collection. **Stills** describes an incident in the fourth book, *Through a Gold Eagle*, involving the opening of the subscription library to the public. *Glynis* returns from a long absence to find that her assistant has offered a half-price associate membership for use of the library two afternoons a week. She isn't opposed to the idea but wonders if he's cleared the plan with the board, and is concerned because "more people meant more books, more periodicals, more newspapers — paid for by whom? How? The obstacle was — always had been — money." She further discovers that her assistant has been purchasing primarily romance novels for new patrons. She expressed her displeasure and he responds: "Miss Tryon, if romantic novels are what people most want to read, why shouldn't we have more of them?" As **Stills** observes, "this is the 'should we give them what they want or what they ought to have?' question that has plagued librarians from the very first acquisition."

Author **Miriam Grace Monfredo** is an American historian and former librarian who lives in Rochester, New York. She combines her interest in history and librarianship to create a series that is an informative and entertaining blend of historical fiction and mystery novel. 

Biz of Acq from page 69

Within our selection criteria, we pretty much got every book worth getting. Although we did increase the number of titles purchased as the study progressed, that was due to broadening the number of sources, not broadening our selection criteria. Last, there is the problem of currency, especially in such topical areas as computer science, as sales books averaged more than two years older than traditionally acquired titles. 

The author wishes to thank **Dennis Mott**, Senior Library Technical Assistant at **Begley Library, Schenectady County Community College**, who for years has very patiently placed and tracked the sale orders.

In Indian Territory from page 66

formation of great usefulness for ethnohistory, but the cultures they recorded were too advanced to be comparable to Indian nations north of Mexico, and these accounts can be considered separately.

The most accurate and useful early illustra-

tions were made in the 16th Century by **Jacques LeMoine** of the Indians of the South Atlantic Coast and by **John White** of the Indians of North Carolina, and the work of both artists were engraved and made widely available by **Theodore de Bry**. These illustrations and related texts were brought together in one volume by **Stephan Lorant**, whose edition deserves to be made avail-

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