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Bet You Missed It -- Press Clippings -- In the News -- Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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van Loon speculates that he was five or six when he started school. I was 5 ½ when I began kindergarten in 1948 at the **Benjamin Franklin** School in Junction City, Kansas. **Miss Bradbury** was our teacher. In those days, we weren't supposed to learn to read in kindergarten, we were supposed to learn to play with others, obey rules, lie quietly on our mats, swallow our football-shaped cod liver oil pills without tasting them, and finishing our graham cracker and half pint of milk. We learned children's songs and played the usual games of the time but I recall nothing academic at all from that school year.

I can't remember the name of my first grade teacher in that same school but I remember our reader, a **Dick and Jane** book. Make fun if you will, but we learned to read, despite a profligate kindergarten devoted to play. The bright colors and bold illustrations were glorious to me and the prose — so clear and direct and unambiguous — gave me just the confidence that I needed to learn to read and then move on to bigger, longer, and more complex books. I won't say better because I don't want to belittle in any way the book that gave me my reading start.

We moved every couple of years so there were regular and frequent opportunities to get rid of things when it was time to pull up stakes so I didn't really accumulate a lot of books growing up. Those that I remember carrying from place to place were gifts from my **Grandmother Leonhardt** and **Aunt Audrey** and included books given to my younger sister but claimed by me including *Black Beauty*. I never did finish that book, finding it utterly boring, but, using a red, indelible pencil, licked for good measure, I dutifully made X marks by each chapter heading in the table of contents to mark my laborious way.

I had much better luck with *The Lone Indian*, a book that impressed me so much that I added my own illustrations in the flyleaf and inside the back cover. I also had a copy of **Mark Twain's** *Tom Sawyer* and *The Story of a Bad Boy* by **Thomas Bailey Aldrich**, an author looked on with scorn by **Mr. Twain**, something I don't understand because I enjoyed both books. **Aldrich** was a New Englander, as I recall, and **Twain** became one when his royalties allowed him to move into a fine house in Hartford. Perhaps it was some social jealousy that led **Samuel Langhorne Clemens** to look down on the literary efforts of a born New Englander. On the other hand, there is no doubt that **Mark Twain** is the superior writer who would be superior to anyone writing today if he should resurrect himself and resume his career. He is certainly a better writer than **Hendrik Willem van Loon**, too, but I wonder if we would have awarded him a **Newbery** for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. And if we had, I wonder if he would have accepted it. We'll never know. 🐻



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Column Editor: **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

Editor's Note: Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to *Against the Grain's* attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — **KS**

THE DEFENSE RESTS by **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

"Rumpole" author **John Mortimer** defends his five favorite fictional depictions of the bar. Are you ready?

Anthony Trollope, *Orley Farm*; **Charles Dickens**, *Bleak House*; **William Shakespeare**, *Measure for Measure*; **Charles Dickens**, *Great Expectations*; **P.D. James**, *A Certain Justice*.

Yes, **Trollope** caught you off-guard as it did me. I've already ordered it from **Amazon**. See — **John Mortimer**, "Five Best," *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 24, 2007, p.P10.

THE EMBLEM OF A TIMELESS VOLUME by **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

An art reviewer's paean to glorious bookplates with laurel leaves wrapping a scroll reading "From the Library of." Hers were produced by the **Antioch Bookplate Co.** (now **Antioch Publishing**) in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Co-founder **Ernest Morgan** was in a work-study program at **Antioch College** when he caught the bookplate bug.

Plates were designed by **Rockwell Kent** and **Robert Whitmore**, and what designs they were. A tree with roots wrapped around an open book; an owl sitting on a book stack; "ex libris" with the man on the library ladder.

And the great homilies: like "I enjoy sharing my books as I do my friends asking only that you treat them well and see them safely home."

Karen Gardner now owns the plate business via **Bookplate Ink**. **Karen** is working her niche well with sales up 40% over last year. Authors are now signing plates and sending them off to bookstores for self-adhesive insertion.

See — **Joanne Kaufman**, "Still Stuck in Books After All These Years," *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 23, 2007, p.W11.

AT LEAST THERE'S NO MORE CARD CATALOGUE by **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

Bing Pan, a **College of Charleston** business professor discovers that college kids just open the first entry on **Google**. And since the number of hits determines the position, the article stays on top. He is not pleased with this, research-wise.

See — **Diane Knich**, "What Does Google Know?," *The Post and Courier*, Sept. 3, 2007, p. A1.

BACKTALK IS ALWAYS MORE INTERESTING by **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

Wikipedia now has 1.9 million online encyclopedia articles and is the 17th busiest US Website. If you go under the tab "Discussion," you'll find what the author refers to as addictive stuff. Editors get into some "prolix vehemence."

Did **Meucci** or **Bell** invent the telephone? 242,000 words are devoted to this academic brawl. Should the concept of "limit" be explained as "average" in calculus. That one got a lot of heated debate. An author who ventured that most people consider kittens to be cute got attacked as "Eurocentric."

And you'll pick up some rare trivia. Raw potatoes are indeed poisonous due to solanine, but you'd have to eat a sackful. **Marshall McLuhan** thought his ideas on media were inspired by the **Virgin Mary**. And he believed that a global conspiracy of **Freemasons** was seeking to wreck his career. And this last comes authoritatively from his biographer.

See — **Lee Gomes**, "Forget the Articles, Best Wikipedi Read Is Its Discussions," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 15, 2007, p.B1.