

## **The Revolution Is Not Over: Sedition and the Myth of Unisized Library Education**

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## **Introduction: Welcome to Atlanta**

This spring marked the fifth anniversary at my very first opera, which I saw right across the street with my older sister and my parents at the Fox Theatre—it was “Carmen” with Risë Stevens, Richard Tucker and Robert Merrill. Back in those halcyon days, the Met’s coming to town was quite the event, and the little old lady pensioners would sit in their gingham dresses in rockers under the awning across the street at the Georgian Terrace and take social notes. I could hardly have had a more glorious introduction to musical theater, especially at the sumptuous Fox, but as was only five at the time, I fell asleep during the second act and woke up to find myself being carried down the stairs after the final curtain. My sister told me I had missed the murder and the tearing of a curtain as Carmen fell, and I have rarely fallen asleep in public since. In my college years, I learned more about the relationship between the Fox and the Georgian Terrace when I attended “Lohengrin,” and followed the crowds to the hotel bar between acts—Wagner was pretty heavy going for Atlanta at that stage. Frankly, Atlanta’s always touted itself as such a paragon of change that I’m surprised that either the Fox or the Georgian Terrace still standing. Heaven knows, there are other landmarks that didn’t fare so well in my lifetime—Lowe’s Grande, where *GWTW* premiered, and the locally famous Frances Virginia Tea Room upstairs, the markets, restaurants, bars on 14<sup>th</sup> & Peachtree, where hippiedom was born in 1967 at The Mandorla Art Gallery (now the area round the gentrified complex known as Colony Square), and the venerable Edwardian edifice of the Trust Company of Georgia Building where the formula for Coca-Cola was stored in a safe, and where Margaret Mitchell’s holographic three-page will was still on file fifty years after the movie of *GWTW* was made because business kept coming in, including a Japanese stage version with an all-female cast, with a live burning of Atlanta every night.

On a more prosaic note, Atlanta was also library leader of the South until at least 1930, thanks mainly to the efforts of local belle and librarian Anne Wallace, a brilliant successor to a line of self-trained ladies, including two of her sisters, who had finally managed to get the affairs of the Young Men's Library Association in hand after a decade of incompetence under male keepers. She soon became famous as "the girl in the pink shirt-waist," who in 1899 shamelessly charmed Mr. Carnegie into giving the second largest grant received by a southern city for a public library, with an extra \$40,000 thrown in at the last minute for furniture when the project floundered on cost overruns. Melvil Dewey's progeny, who possessed the requisite library science certificate with all the tedium that entailed, must have been as galled as the prodigal son's brother that Wallace moved from success to success, starting a Southern Library School (later Emory University's Division of Library and Information Science) opening the hospitality of the city to ALA conferees in 1899, and becoming ALA Second-Vice President in 1908 when no woman had ever served in an ALA executive post, even an honorary one. Wallace married at age 41, left the profession, and as a widow came out of retirement to resuscitate a northern Library School, Drexel, that had floundered after the death of its founder, Alice Kroeger, one of Dewey's stars.

This conference marks only the third time ALA has met in Atlanta, and the city has made some progress since 1899. While then LC Librarian Herbert Putnam described the segregated conditions, the heat, Anne's barbecue in Piedmont Park complete with entertainment from a black faced minstrel group called the Lard Can Quartet, and the prevalence of African American servants "barbaric," that was before the riots in Washington, Newark, Los Angeles and Detroit demonstrated that racism was a national problem, not only a southern one.

## **Which Change?**

Well, being part of the Grace Slick generation whose credo was, “Up against the wall, Mother,” I am attuned to measuring people by their actions rather than their rhetoric. Pointing to technology as a locus of change is assigning the tail the job of wagging the dog. There are many people in our business as well as other who may revel in exclusive attention to technology, because it deflects attention from more basic structural and interpersonal problems that have never been adequately addressed. Technological problems, it is assumed, can be solved discreetly for the most part. Organizational problems and personnel require constant vigilance. They are never completely solved. That’s why managers don’t like them. We talk about service at times as if it’s a given, yet it’s twice as hard, if not impossible, to provide service in a dysfunctional—pardon the cliché—organization. With Grace Slick, my sermon for today is, “Tear Down the Walls.” I know there are a lot of people who think this kind of posturing is counterproductive, insincere, and well, inimical to our financial interests, but organizational research like the old chestnut, “In Search of Excellence,” doesn’t support that principal: technology doesn’t determine success, people do.

Perhaps it is true that there are two kinds of people, those who look back, and those who look forward. My friend Bruce Shuman, who used to write library history, once told me that he had recently switched into the field of futurism because no one could check his footnotes, and he did not have so many of them to compose. Frankly, I have a very hard time just concentrating on the present: I write library history with an emphasis on gender issues for kicks, but I long ago learned that any thoughts I spare for the future are usually devoured by anxiety. Some people, thank God, earn their living by planning for the future, but for myself, the best plan I can make for the future is to clean up my act today.

When I received my assignment for this session, I was given the mandate to talk about change, although nothing more specific. Change: well, there's certainly enough to go around. How's your recession? Or is it depression? Any time people mention the words change these days, it is usually with some reference to technology. There. I said the ugly word. In my mind, that encompasses paper clips, typewriters, compressed storage for books, and file cabinets, as well as more modern manifestations, and in my mind, all of the above deserve the same amount of attention. Why, Melvil Dewey's clever "innovations," like file tabs, helped to revolutionize the insurance industry. Anyone who wants to experience the narcotic effects of the study of information technology need only examine back issues of *Library Journal*, circa 1899, and witness the tons of paper librarians devoted to quaint filing systems, Byzantine methods of book circulation, and the efficacy of accession records. Dewey, like Bill Gates, was guided by "enlightened self-interest," since he ran Library Bureau. He gave back to the community, just like Bill Gates, who announced in the current issue of AL a new \$28 million electronic portal initiative, which will benefit libraries all across the country. Dewey went one better than that, providing rest, leisure and no doubt, his own irrepressible chatter to fatigued librarians at the Lake Placid Club. Or rather, to some librarians—no blacks, Jews, or immigrants reeking of garlic. Anyway, my research into southern librarians of the Progressive Era indicates that librarians longed for typewriters as much as some of us did IBM's when we chucked our dual disc floppy Kaypro Twos. It seems now unbelievable that we could have been so impressed by all this wood, paper, and metal, although all of us, myself included, are grateful for any help technology affords in doing our jobs. What is our job anyway? Scanning the most recent issue of *American Libraries*, I seem to get confused about what we're doing. I mean, the most recent hysteria about declining gate counts refutes everything bibliometrics and reference research has

taught us (namely, that any quantitative measures of use are suspect; and that quantity of service—body counts be damned—has little if any bearing on the quality of service that should be consistently delivered).

If I were a futurist, and I'm not, I might agree with Walt Crawford's most recent editorial, which deconstructs the fallacies of the "information have/have not" dichotomy, and predicts that when access to information is in the hands of even our poorest citizens through terminals at the public library, and when every citizen, even those who are homeless, possesses a piece of paper declaring him or her a Bachelor of Arts or some equivalent thereof, we will still have to confront that sinking realization that our reading public represents only a portion of the population, and that information alone is not a panacea for every social problem, especially insofar as our professional image is concerned. We may also have to accept the fact that not every person will want to think critically, even if they have been trained to do so.

I find it appalling that Carla Hayden is only the fourth African American ALA President. True, it took thirty-six years for a woman to assume leadership of the ALA, sixty years for the ALA to elect its first southern president, and nearly a hundred years to elect its first black President. People in this business—which encompasses more and more specializations and side-industries as time progresses—have not always been as socially progressive as they pretended. Now, whatever stereotypes still exist about all of us being left-wing Democrats with radical social agendas, my own research demonstrates that the profession mirrors society; that socially we are conservatively liberal or liberally conservative (what's the difference any more?), generally pleasant and inoffensive individuals who occasionally go berserk and make terrible asses of ourselves, or put another way, are vaguely passive aggressive in our professional

relationships and in denial about the white elephant in the reading room until such time that the elephant starts breaking things up. Such attitudes are understandable—who likes confrontation?

Like some of you here, I entered the profession late, after many other harrowing job experiences. When I entered the library education program Emory University, I felt like I had found the heaven in the hand. My undergraduate experience had been fractured but enjoyable, with a liberal arts emphasis that my father understandably thought I should forget upon graduation to concentrate on commerce. I can only hope that undergraduates today have the rich background in literature, languages and the arts that I had to fall back on in times of personal distress and boredom. I never used a computer in library school (this was 1976), but I learned more about resources, techniques of organization, and people than I had probably ever learned in my previous experience. I also learned about the social foment that was changing the profession—the Gay Task Force, REFORMA, the Committee on the Status of Women, Sandy Berman, Eric Moon, Dorothy Broderick, Hell’s librarians—people who were channeling the post-Vietnam malaise into a spirit of change for their profession. I was most impressed of all by the fact that Emory’s Special Collections, where I spent a year preparing work slips on all of our seventeenth century English theological tracts, had collected all of the back issues of *The Great Speckled Bird*, Atlanta’s short-lived contribution to the radical press. Having been a hanger-on in that milieu in the late 1960s, I assumed that all librarians were as astute and far-sighted as Linda Matthews.

But as Toni Samek’s recent examination of the library alternative press from 1970 to 1974 demonstrates, most librarians did not respond well to the radical press, theirs or anyone else’s, any more than they responded well to the right wing press of the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, some librarians woke up out of their dreams to note that gay and lesbian librarians were

marching in the Gay Day Parade in San Francisco as they had been every year since 1970, when ALA's Gay Task Force became the first lesbian professional group in the world—a fact all of us should be proud of, whether we like it or not. The backlash of hotheaded letters in the library press in response to an *LJ* cover photograph of the marchers fully subsided only when Matthew Shepherd was murdered.

I worked as a librarian in Milledgeville, Georgia, the state's perfectly preserved Federal city and its capital until 1868, home of Flannery O'Connor and the South's largest insane asylum. (Flannery wasn't kidding: the inmates are almost indistinguishable from some of the locals) I was hired as Special Collections librarian, which I never got to do because our regular cataloger, who had been surviving the cultural wasteland of Georgia with Valium for six years, crashed, and I inherited her SOLINET beehive terminal. I performed halftime cataloging and halftime reference, plus all bibliographic instruction. I began teaching a reference course for school media specialists in the summers, and when the directorship of the library changed, our new director, a recent Ph.D. from Florida State and our first Ph.D. director ever, told me that I would need a Ph.D. to teach the course I had already been teaching for five years. Hence, I weaseled my way into UNC-Chapel Hill, although they were very concerned about my ability to complete their program, and consigned myself to ignominy at the age of 41 by becoming a library educator.

Even with a stellar dissertation committee, which included Edward G. Holley, Lester Asheim, Haynes McMullen and Barbara Moran as well as noted southern historian George Brown Tindall, I received very little support for my chosen field of research, library history, when I began looking for a job because information science hysteria had possessed deans across the country. My friend Alan Schrader's 2-volume dissertation at Indiana consisted of a content



analysis of all definitions of information science and library science, and demonstrated conclusively that existing definitions of information science added no new basic elements to what was already contained in library science. I learned quickly, however, to play along with search committees and be polite. About the same time, library education was losing some of the finest remnants of its own history. One could almost feel the sigh of satisfaction that accompanied the closing of my own alma mater, Emory University, plus programs at Peabody, Case Western, Columbia, Chicago, and Denver in 1988, as if the information scientists were wagging their fingers at more traditional programs in privately funded institutions, no mind the quality of those programs. Actually, Sarah Bogle and Tommie Dora Barker had suggested in 1930 that library education should probably be conducted in state institutions rather than private ones for reasons of economy, although their recommendations never anticipated the quality of the programs that would be thus lost in the cataclysm of '88. I find it ironic indeed that Columbia recently touted its historical LIS collection as "the strongest in the world" when it announced it would be physically preserving the collection and converting catalog records to machine readable format so that it could be accessed throughout the world. Similarly, Valdosta State is making a bid for an ALA-accredited library education program, just as we knew someday that somebody in Georgia would after Emory closed its program. Isn't hindsight amazing?

### **Bigger Is Not Always Better**

In 1988, when I came to UNCG, relatively few people had heard of our program outside the southern region; some still haven't, although they always comment on the fact that we have three accredited programs in the state. We will never show up in *US News & World Report* in national rankings of library schools, because, although I have explained the situation to the editor

of the rankings at considerable length, so long as they continue comparing doctoral granting programs with Master's only programs on the same continuum, we will always come out on bottom. Moreover, over sixty per cent of our graduates are school media specialists—and they are not likely to receive the survey, although the wife of the editor was a SMS. As most of us realize, people tend to rank highest the institutions at which they themselves received doctorates.

I was fortunate indeed to be finally recruited by Marilyn Miller, a former UNC faculty member. The program, which had historically focused on school media, had broadened its generalist base. I loved, and still love, my colleagues, including our new dean, fellow library historian Lee Shiflett. With only a skeleton faculty of six, Miller launched the first graduate distance education program in the state. We all worked very hard, and the incentive was rarely economic, since at that time we received no FTE credit for off-site students.

Currently with two interactive TV sites in Asheville and Charlotte, we have in recent years offered occasional WWW-based offerings, but only if the content of the course lends itself to a web format. The courses I currently teach—reference, humanities literature, social sciences literature, academic libraries, special collections, and finally, this summer, a seminar in the history of libraries, depend heavily on personal interaction. I do not understand the wisdom of awarding graduate degrees to people we have never seen, anyway, and my carpal tunnel has become worse as I've aged, which has slowed down my ability to type for long stretches at a time. The combination approach of interactive TV, some onsite instruction, and Web instruction works well for students at the sites, although the real problem has been increasing the sense of community among all sites, and in this regard, technology has helped somewhat, since the students use a listserv and Blackboard discussions as well as the Library and Information Studies Student Association to get to know each other. The faculty still hauls out the picnic baskets and

travel to a park equidistant from these far-flung spots, and with our new director, Lee Shiflett, we make regular recruitment and follow-up visits to each site to increase distance students' sense of inclusion.

We also managed to run an office of the American Library Association out of our cramped quarters when Marilyn Miller was ALA President in 1992, and because of the increased visibility that she lent us, we started to attract international students and students from other states, although we have relatively little scholarship money, and few in-state tuition waivers, to help them defray costs. We are particularly proud of graduates who've risked moving out of the region for reasons of professional growth. Among recent graduates, we count department heads at Western Illinois, two at Champaign Urbana and one Cornell law graduate who used his degree to set up an internet node for a law firm in Kajastan, and has settled there. We see more and more PhDs in history and music, who want to add the MLIS so that they can to use their doctorates in some way other than the competitive publish-or-perish hell of politically infused departments. We have also had challenges that represent societal change and federal mandate: for example, one homeless man who got his degree with Veterans benefits, in spite of the fact that he had a great deal of difficulty getting to class; a bipolar Vietnam Vet with a machete who threatened the Assistant Dean of Education and female students and brought weapons to class until the police apprehended him; and a visually impaired woman who cannot find a job even with an MLIS because her sight impairs the speed of her work. These challenges will only be exacerbated by numbers of new nationals moving to North Carolina from South America, Africa, the Near East, and parts of Asia, whose English language skills only rarely meet their basic academic aptitudes. I am not convinced that we are doing all of these people a service by

accepting their tuition fees, especially when we suspect that they may encounter problems in the employment market.

### **A Sampling of Basic Challenges**

This brings me to what I consider to be the basic problems of library education in the current environment, none of which are particularly new, or technologically related. They do point to the need for a more fundamental kind of thinking about change than the kind most legislators, academic officials, or even professors of library and information studies are currently willing to invest:

- 1. Status of School Media Specialists in LIS and the Education Field.** Being in a department in the School of Education, and never having enjoyed the benefits of a school library (or a public library for that matter) until I left Georgia for boarding school at age twelve, I knew very little about school media when I joined the faculty. Twelve years later, I am convinced that the lack of support for school media specialists from both administrators and teachers will only continue to worsen until a course in school media is required of all aspiring principals, teachers, and system-level personnel. The kind of cooperation this implies from teacher training institutions is not likely to be forthcoming in my lifetime, if ever.
- 2. Relationships Between School Media Centers and Academic Libraries.** Today's children are tomorrow's college students. That is why Ameer Hunneycutt of Wingate College has initiated a program of bibliographic instruction with school age children from the area, who make up most of Wingate's pools of eventual applicants. It's all very well to complain about the

decline of literacy of all kinds among young people, and another to invest the time to insure that students become comfortable in an academic atmosphere at eight instead of waiting until they are eighteen when all kinds of other attitudinal damage has been done. Special collections librarians have led the way in recent years in public relations and self-promotion to dispel antiquated ivory tower notions, and do so in a way that promotes responsible use of rare and archival material while safeguarding collections. Academic librarians are accustomed to complaining about pesky groups of users who are outside their primary clientele. They should think through their assumptions about these users very carefully.

3. **Professional Status and Rewards Among Various Levels of Personnel.** The third problem relates to the relative position of non-MLIS personnel in Special Collections departments. Betty Carter, the only Level One Archivist in the state, assists me in teaching Special Collections. Because she is not a librarian, she is ranked with staff; the state personnel system is not equipped to reward her archivist credentials. When librarians get raises, she is not included. It is also extremely difficult to pay her for her services in our department because of a state regulation applying to staff, which forbids staff employees from receiving more than one hundred percent of her salary. The good news is that special collections departments seem to be more accepting of the MLIS than they were thirty years ago, and certainly, student interest in archives, special collections, rare books, archiving electronic information and the related field of museum studies has only grown. New librarians should read Les Asheim's

*Library Education and Personnel Utilization* statement, which he wrote for ALA in 1972, and which outlines a plan for multi-track compensation levels.

We must find ways of finding and recruiting non-MLIS staff, and ways of rewarding them. This calls for legislative action in some states, especially non-union ones, but that fact should not deter librarians from at least staying informed about personnel developments in classifications of personnel beyond their own, and aggressively advocating for staff when they can.

4. **Social and Political Sophistication vs. Technological Savvy.** The fourth problem has to do with the original bugbear with which I began this talk—using technology to change our image; wanting to be all things to all people, wanting to play corporation type with the big guys; and wanting to convince ourselves and other people that we are something that we are not, namely purveyors of information technology rather than connoisseurs of content. The high point of my career so far was disemboweling a dean who had inherited a prestigious library education program (that shall remain nameless), who said in all seriousness from a national program that “only those doctoral programs with division one sports deserve to sit on the high end of the academic table”, and moreover berated the nature of the research interests of the panel on which I was sitting with Jane Anne Hannigan, Michael Harris, and Christine Pawley (representing the concerns of Gay Issues, Women’s Issues, Race Issues, Class Issues, respectively), as the “misguided” direction of library education. (That person has recently, I understand, struck off in a new research direction—pornography on the Internet). If that person is right, then we have learned

nothing from the previous thirty years of library history *or* national history about the primacy of human dignity in service work.

5. **Values vs. The Bottom Line.** Finally, administrators still seem to have the idea that getting all of this stuff on the WWW is going to save them money. No comment! Only I wonder how many of them have ever designed a WWW page, and if really, there is some secret desire afloat to get rid of all these pesky, expensive, messy faculty members, and run a high-class trade school out of a box? One thing's for sure: information technology is not saving any paper, and it may be undermining what future generations will have for a cultural legacy. Orson Scott Card, Greensboro's famous fantasy author, recently disclosed how *he* archives e-mail: he simply stores every message he receives and sends, and at the end of the years prints it out, and stacks the output in boxes to send to the archives of his alma mater.

On a more positive note, one of the most basic and yet exciting benefits of technology to is the joy of finding archival inventories online. I have spent many a thousand dollar just going to different archival repositories to examine inventories in days past, time that could have been better spent in planning before I went. Who knows, when our dot-com bubble crash is over, and the world either blows itself up or gets back to minding its own business, and those of us who need to give up cigarettes, alcohol, junk food, and TV, do so, maybe research libraries will even provide additional staff for special collections so that they can accommodate international and out of state scholars for whom on-line images and the lack of serendipity in many online environments just won't do. Rare books and manuscripts are indeed, the heart of the university for humanities scholars. Along with that pipe dream, perhaps we will either invent microfilm

and micro card machines that are easy to use, and pleasant to read, or we will convert all of those thousand of pages of filmed newspapers, rare books, ephemera, government documents now in film format—yesterday’s “savior” technology—into a format that real people will want to use. Perhaps all of the colleges that have been converted to universities in the past decade will decide that it’s all just a fad that they feel secure enough in their own identities to switch back to emphasize what they do best—teach.. Maybe we’ll find a non-electronic alternative to paper, and maybe the government will finally decide we can invest in the conversion from fossil fuels to alternative energy before our dependence on those resources exacerbates the Mideast crisis even more.

And maybe pigs will fly.

Yet until some of us stick our necks out regularly and suggest that the emperor has no clothes, or regularly address the ethical and historical as well as the economic and politically correct aspects of basic issues that affect both our profession and the quality of our personal lives, we will be condemned to live out a scenario, in librarianship at least, where business is very good and we feel very bad.