

A READER'S ADVISORY PAGE

AND HOW IT GREW

by Dorothy Bishop,
Lake County Public Library,
Merrillville, Indiana



"Why don't we create a Reader's Advisory page?" asked my co-worker, Mary. Our library system (The Lake County Public Library, Indiana) had just posted its own Web page. Previously, Mary and I had taken an HTML class and we thought that together we could handle it. After all, we had been running theme-based Reader's Advisory Displays for several years. How could it be to create a theme-based page every month to complement our display? Hah, were we naïve!

In sketching out a plan for our page, we hit on the idea of using a picture of "The Reader," a statue that had been specifically commissioned for our library. Our webmaster helped us scan the picture and size it. Then the fun began. Actually, it was fun. I enjoyed putting tags into brackets and coding a page to have it appear on the browser as something quite different. Mary was not as enthusiastic about the HTML program as I was, so it came down to her ideas and my keyboard magic. Until I got to TABLES and if anyone remembers all the tags it takes to put in a table, you'll appreciate how I felt when someone handed me a program called "FrontPage." (But that's another story!)

Every month, as we changed our book display, the booklist we created for the display was the basis for the booklist that appeared on our page. We brainstormed for themes - which were not all that hard to come up with. One of the first was "You ought to be in pictures," which referred to books that had translated to the silver screen.

We took our cues from U.S. and world events and, of course, from *Chase's Calendar of Annual Events*. We chose individual states or regions of our country and books that were set in that area, for example, "Mainly in the Plains," referring to the Great Plains states. Foreign countries and their history were also ripe for our picking - "A Little Bit of Ireland," (a March topic, of course) and "So Long, Hong Kong," (when that area reverted to Chinese control). A good source book for geographical theme lists is *The Traveler's Reading Guide: Ready-Made Reading Lists for the Armchair Traveler*. The Fiction Catalog is very good at listing titles referring to a particular subject, as is the series *What Do I Read Next?* from the Gale Group, and the *Genrelecting Guides* by Diana Tixier Herald. For mystery reads, *Detecting Women* (now in its 3rd edition) and *Detecting Men* are invaluable.

We concentrate on books that are on the shelves of our Library system, since one of our goals is to get our books circulating, especially those that have not appeared on Bestseller Lists. Readers, like shoppers, are attracted by displays. Although when we used books that were on the

"weeds" list, and called it "Books you may have missed," they were given a miss on the display, too.

Many times we scan other libraries' Internet pages to see what's going on and that's how we found "Library Lovers' Month" promoted by the Friends and Foundations of California Libraries. We liked the idea of a February/Valentine display on Libraries in addition to the usual Library Week display in April. We started searching for books about libraries and librarians.

The obvious place to begin hunting was our library catalog, the keyword subject area. From "librarians - fiction" and "libraries - fiction," we pulled up titles and eliminated the children's books and duplications, to create a basic list. Checking the Fiction Catalog - several editions - for "librarians" yielded some additions. *Detecting Women* had a few more entries, under "books and libraries." We were lucky enough to have the *NovelList* database to help us search for titles of similar plots. Of course, all these results had to be checked against our collection. We were not just creating a list for the web; we wanted to display these books for our patrons. Sometimes we don't have enough titles for a month-long display, so we must get creative in our search for book titles connected with librarians and libraries. We go to "books," "book collecting," "archive and archivists," and check each one for a mention of library. Often just perusing title keywords "library" and "librarian" will locate a candidate for the list. We also take stock of our own reading history and try to remember a book that may have taken place in a library or involved a librarian. Some science fiction titles were appropriate so they were included.

There are several mystery series featuring librarians as lead characters: Lydia Adamson's Lucy Wayles; Charles Goodrum's sleuth, Dr. Edward George; Charlene Harris' Aurora Teagarden; Miriam Manfredo's Glynis Tryon; Kate Morgan's Dewey James; Elizabeth Peters' Jacqueline Kirby and Laurali Wright's Canadian librarian, Cassandra Mitchell. We also listed *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, *Giant's House* by Elizabeth McCracken, *The Archivist* by Martha Cooley, and *Stones from the River* by Ursula Hegi, to name a few.

With the help of our department's clerk who loves to design signs, we place banners on our display rack with the month's theme artfully illustrated. A poster repeating the theme is displayed on our library bulletin board for the patrons. When we finally posted the list on our web page we titled it: "Where there's a book, there's a librarian." All of our booklists are now links on a page called "Booklists for Bookworms." That's how you find it and here's what it looks like:

**WHERE THERE'S A BOOK THERE'S A LIBRARIAN
SOME BOOKS FEATURING LIBRARIES OR LIBRARIANS
FOR LIBRARY LOVERS' MONTH**

Adamson, Lydia	Beware the Tufted Duck (1996) Beware the Butcher Bird (1997) Beware the Laughing Gull (1998)	Mystery series	New York Librarian, Lucy Wayles
Astley, Thea	Reaching Tin River (1990)	Fiction	Australian archival librarian
Berckman, Evelyn	The Fourth Man on the Rope (1972)	Mystery	British archivist
Blackstock, Charity	Dewey Death (1985)	Mystery	Interlibrary loan department
Brookner, Anita	Lewis Percy (1991) Look at Me (1983)	Fiction Fiction	British librarian British medical library
Cooley, Martha	The Archivist (1998)	Fiction	Academic librarian
Eco, Umberto	The Name of the Rose (1983)	Mystery	Medieval library
Gill, Bartholomew	Death of an Ardent Bibliophile (1995)	Mystery	Rare book library investigator
Goodrum, Charles	Dewey Decimated (1977) Carnage of the Realm (1980) The Best Cellar (1987) A Slip of the Tong (1992)	Mystery series	Washington D.C. librarians/sleuth Dr. Edward George
Harris, Charlaine	Real Murders (1990) A Bone to Pick (1992) Three Bedrooms, One Corpse (1994) The Julius House (1995) Dead over Heels (1996) A Fool and His Honey (1999)	Mystery series	Librarian Aurora Teagarden
Hegi, Ursula	Stones from the River (1994)	Fiction	German librarian/historian

Hersey, John	The Child Buyer (1968)	Fiction	American library Rights
Lively, Penelope	Passing On (1989)	Fiction	British Public librarian
McCracken, Elizabeth	The Giant's House (1996)	Fiction	Reference librarian
Monfredo, Miriam Grace	Seneca Falls Inheritance (1992) North Star Conspiracy (1993) Blackwater Spirits (1995) Through a Gold Eagle (1996) The Stalking Horse (1998) Must the Maiden Die (1999)	Mystery series	Librarian and women's rights advocate, Glynis Tryon
Morgan, Kate	A Slay at the Races (1990) Murder Most Fowl (1991) Home Sweet Homicide (1991) Days of Crime and Roses (1992) Mystery Loves Company (1992) Wanted, Dude or Alive (1994) The Old School Dies (1996)	Mystery series	Small town librarian, Dewey James
Moynahan, Julian	Pairing Off (1969)	Fiction	Boston rare books
Murakami, Haruki	Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (1993)	Fiction	Japanese Surrealistic library
Peters, Elizabeth	The Seventh Sinner (1972) Murder Richard III (1974) Die for Love (1984)	Mystery series	Academic librarian Jacqueline Kirby
Smiley, Jane	Duplicate Keys (1984)	Mystery	NY public library cataloger
Spring, Michelle	Every Breath You Take (1994) Running for Shelter (1996)	Mystery series	Librarian side-kick
Wright, Laurali	The Suspect (1985) Sleep While I Sing (1986) A Chill Rain in January (1990) Fall From Grace (1991) Prized Possessions (1993) A Touch of Panic (1994) Mother Love (1995) Strangers Among Us (1996)	Mystery series	Canadian librarian Cassandra Mitchell

Soon, we will have to update this list to add several more recent titles. For example, Sean Russell, a Science fiction author, has produced *Souls in the Great Machine* and *Eyes of the Calculator*. Lily Prior has the delicious entry *La Cucina: A Novel of Rapture*, and there's Jo Dereske's series with librarian Miss Zukas. Titles keep coming to our attention as we keep reading and keep developing our site.

We do not, however, include all the titles we find in our searches on our web page. Lists on the Internet get tedious if they are too long and we are not trying to be all-inclusive. We would like to include summaries of plots but, while they are inviting, it's difficult to provide them for all the titles, so we added another page. (By the way, there are about 65 pages on our site.) We first called it "The Armchair Reader," which featured three books a month with a brief commentary. This page has been expanded and now includes summaries the staff provides on our "Staff Recommended" book display on the library's main floor. In a recent renovation, we pulled the picture of "The Reader" from its initial location and made her the "Reader" of the Staff Recommended books, now called "The Reader Recommends." So there's always something new happening to the site, yet there's always continuity in form and color to retain familiarity.

Our Reader's Advisory Display on the Upper Level of the library has also changed a bit. We first called it "Featuring this Month." Now it is simply "Reader's Advisory Display."

In creating book lists for the web and displays for our patrons, we also add to our knowledge of the library collection - both fiction and non-fiction. We believe that there are countless books in the library that deserve attention. If what we provide adds to the reader's pleasure and incidentally, to the library circulation, we consider it a job well done. Visit our page sometime: <http://www.lakeco.lib.in.us/readers.htm>.



"The Reader"

Photos by Margaret and Neil Gambow, Evanston, Illinois.



"The Reader"

Photos by Margaret and Neil Gambow, Evanston, Illinois.