Cultural Images of Librarians

Librarian stereotypes in popular culture support the image of a librarian as a shushing school marm who does little more than stamp and shelve books. Maybe that’s all you’ve seen librarians do. However, this perception is about as inaccurate as believing that Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan is nothing more than a glorified bank teller.

The technology may change but the mission of the profession remains the same: organize information and help people find it. Libraries have been around a lot longer than the Internet, and provide answers to questions about almost anything. A library is sometimes much more useful for researching information than the Internet.

Today librarians not only administer Web servers and dynamic databases to help manage large digital collections and thousands of electronic resources, they teach people how to use library systems. And the library profession not only is part of the Open Source and Open Access movements, but also has a long history of staunchly defending freedom – from book burnings to the FBI’s Library Awareness Program to the latest privacy and copyright battles and almost all other current issues in intellectual freedom.

http://www.tk421.net/essays/nwyt.html
last updated July 5, 2007
A wretched alternate fate is revealed for Mary Hatch Bailey (Donna Reed) in *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946): “She’s closing up the library!”

Look how far we’ve come

An Ode To Librarians Everywhere

Enough with the stale stereotypes. Silence you two bit stand up hack. I’m here today to testify to one and all that librarians rule! For I declare with zeal and passion that librarians are The Original Knowledge Workers.

Cold, repressed spinsters, not. Old ladies before their time, hardly. How many librarians have you done serious hang time with? That’s what I thought. Many are hipper than you and I believe you me.

Troves of books, periodicals, recordings, CDs, maps, databases in all shapes and sizes, photographs, sheet music, microfilm, and more. And to think that all librarians come armed with superhuman search powers, near-deity abilities to glean and harvest hidden packets of specific knowledge across borders, cultures, and time. Forget your lost orphan sock, we’re talking about the ethnobotany and psychopharmacology of New World plants, all the US presidents’ wives’ maiden names, and the 100 brightest stars visible in the southern hemisphere in the spring sorted by date of discovery. Tokyo teen slang, the math behind solar greenhouses, soybean harvests 1932-1948 in Kansas by county mapped against rainfall patterns. You know, the kind of tidbits any one of us might drop at the dinner table on any given night. Yeah, right; in your dreams bozo.

Librarians have been online longer than most of us. Don’t argue with me on this one. Librarians were doing convoluted Boolean searches back in the day of text-based terminals. Pulling answers out of the net basking in green and orange glows. And they’re still online. You use a search engine? Thank a librarian, directly or indirectly. World would be a hell of a lot better off if we had more librarians behind what passes for search engines today. And yes, I’d pay for the privilege too. Extra for a human-assisted answer within 24-48 hours.

Obviously librarians can read. Don’t laugh. Do you realize how many people are functionally illiterate, and of the remainder how few read anything heavier than TV Guide, supermarket tabloids, and 5-yr old Readers Digest. Don’t take my word for it;
check the circulation figures for the top 20 magazines. Not a lot of intellectual heavy
ing lifting on the list, is there? This sets librarians waaaay ahead of the average schmuck.
Not only do they read the good stuff, they understand and appreciate it. Can you say
that about the person sitting next to you on the bus? And you thought that cutie working
at the bookstore you flirted with was well-read.

Because other people want to know about a wide
range of things and turn to libraries to find that
information, librarians are exposed to a very wide
spectrum of knowledge. An ad hoc liberal arts
seminar each and every workday. Seasonal waves,
trends, and fads but all overlaid over a churning
quest for a little bit of everything. And then some.
A buffet of ignorance. Knowledge workers awash
in a sea of inquiries. Bathed in questions.

Original source material is Close to God. Second hand interpretations are someone else’s
cerebral regurgitations. Much like what you’re reading now. Blech! Librarians catalog and
connect us to original books, those not usually available in stores (not even
Amazon.com). This allows us to drink of the great minds throughout human history and
dare to reflect and think for ourselves, enriching our meager lives in the process. Books
and other archived knowledge allow us to teach ourselves, a truly recursive miracle. And
don’t forget, it was your school librarian and perhaps local librarian who read to you and
helped you learn to read in the first place. See how this all begins to fit together?
Conspiratorial, isn’t it?

Above all librarians revere and respect knowledge. They enjoy language(s) and words
for their innate joy and inherent beauty. A noble end unto itself. A level of respect for the
written word and captured knowledge raised to a level society all too often doesn’t,
being so brainwashed by greedy marketeers and endless waves of pop culture.

Bow down before the High Priestess of Knowledge you unwashed GED heathens. You are
not worthy of washing her feet, you sports-obsessed sloth, subsisting as you do on a
diet of junk food, sports pages, girlie mags, and mainstream tee vee. Exalt your local
Queens of the Stacks, for they are the keepers of cultural memes. Dare to struggle, dare
to read a book!
So don’t you dare tell me that librarians aren’t sexy. For all the reasons above: they’re smart, they read, they’re online savvy, and they’re nuts about knowledge. Robust, well-rounded background, actually *thinks* every day and *enjoys it*, and prone to a wit at every twist and turn. Gives me the shudders just assembling the list.

And if the above doesn’t convince you that librarians rule, remember that throughout human history fascists, dictators, and oppressors always try to ban if not outright *burn* books. They KNOW that information leads to freedom. Who did we already agree were the Book Demigoddesses? Repeat after me: “*librarians*”. Again: “LIBRARIANS!” Good. Now who wants to read a story?

Don’t take my word for it, visit:

- Librarian Avengers
- The Laughing Librarian
- Warrior Librarian Weekly
- Humor and Culture in Libraries
- Library Humor

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This rant’n’rave is brought to you by *Jet City Orange*, a photo-centric webzine. Every Thursday, give or take. Photography, screen savers, weekly ramblings, and other ways to waste time and goof off. Do join us:

www.jetcityorange.com
World War I-era posters featuring books and libraries.
Robert Lackie  
Instruction and Reference Librarian  
Rider University  
Lawrenceville, NJ

"I was pleasantly surprised to learn how much I enjoyed librarianship and discovered that my teaching and computer skills worked very well in the library science field."

I currently serve as Instruction and Reference Librarian at Rider University in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, where I co-lead the Library Instruction Program and work the Reference Desk, assisting students and faculty in their research efforts. In addition, I teach a large percentage of our library instructions in a variety of academic disciplines and assist in developing our reference collection. In May 2000, I completed a required second master’s degree - for which Rider paid the tuition - earning a Master of Arts in Curriculum, Instruction, & Supervision.

Although you may guess that I knew exactly what career field I wanted to enter, the truth is that I took a very indirect route to becoming a librarian. After high school, I entered the United States Air Force, working my first six years as a mechanic/crew chief on fighter aircraft in England and South Carolina and teaching communicative and leadership skills classes my last two years as a Professional Military Education Instructor. Shortly after leaving the military, I completed my bachelor’s degree and began taking graduate courses at Charleston Southern University, while teaching English courses part-time.

At Charleston Southern, I was awarded a library graduate assistantship, although at first, I was not sure what type of work I would be able to do at a library. I was pleasantly surprised to learn how much I enjoyed librarianship and discovered that my teaching and computer skills worked very well in the library science field. A year later, I entered the Master of Library and Information Science distance education program at the University of South Carolina to earn a degree leading to a career as an academic librarian. After graduating and working two years as a librarian at Charleston Southern, in 1998, I accepted a library faculty position at Rider. I absolutely love being an academic librarian, especially the public services aspect. My career has been a perfect blend of providing small & large group library instructions, workshops, and formal classroom teaching, along with one-on-one assistance and continuing renewal through professional development activities, such as state-wide committee work and conference presentations.

From becomealibrarian.org
CAN YOU GUESS WHO I AM?

I schedule, council, hire and fire employees...
No, I’m not a Human Resource Specialist.

I work with city, state and national laws...
No, I’m not a lawyer or a police chief.

I plan, perform, hire and schedule performers...
No, I’m not an actor or agent.

I supervise the maintenance of a building or buildings...
No, I’m not a Facility Manager or Head of Maintenance.

I manage the budget; keep statistics, bills and payroll...
No, I’m not an accountant or treasurer.

I do surveys, county and state reports...
No, I’m not a statistician or city clerk.

I write news releases, PSA’s, Cable TV announcements; create posters, flyers, and brochures; speak on the radio or TV...
No, I’m not a Public Relations person.

I help to educate citizens in my community...
No, I’m not a teacher or school superintendent.

I teach computer skills and other things in my community and beyond...
No, I’m not a trainer.

I install programs and troubleshoot computer problems...
No, I’m not a technical support specialist.

I purchase supplies, equipment and furniture...
No, I’m not a purchasing agent.

I move or have moved materials, equipment and furniture...
No, I’m not a mover or dispatcher.

I track down information...
No, I’m not a detective.

I watch over the safety of people in our building...
No, I’m not a security guard.

I speak before and work with the city council, legislators and senators...
No, I’m not a lobbyist or politician.

I work on local, state and national committees and with a board...
No, I’m not a CEO.

I’m a bit of all of these things: human resource specialist, lawyer, actor, facility manager, accountant, statistician, public relations person, teacher, trainer, technical support specialist, purchasing agent, mover, detective, security guard, lobbyist and CEO...

I’m a public librarian.

Peggy Kindschi, Director
Columbus Public Library
By Any Other Name
Job Titles Used by Information Professionals

Archives/Archivist - Associate Director for Information and Technology - Bibliographic Database Manager - Bibliographic Instruction Coordinator - Business Information Coordinator - Business Information Specialist - Cataloger - Category Architect - Collection Services Coordinator - Community Web Site Coordinator - Computer Services Manager - Consultant - Content Manager - Coordinator for Assessment and Continuous Improvement - Coordinator for Bibliographic Control - Coordinator, Information Services - Coordinator, Information Systems - Coordinator of Programs and Promotions - Coordinator of Reference and Information - Curator - Curator of Manuscripts - Cybrarian - Data Services Specialist - Database Editor - Database Manager - Dean of Libraries - Development and Community Relations Officer - Digital Acquisitions Coordinator - Digital Archivist - Director of Educational Information - Director of Electronic Learning - Director of Information Technology Development Services - Director, Information Technology Services - Director of Networking and Resource - Distance Learning Consultant - Document Manager - Electronic Content Manager - Electronic/Information Services Coordinator - Electronic Resources Access Specialist - Electronic Resources Cataloger - Electronic Resources Coordinator - Electronic Resources Officer - Electronic Resources Support Officer - Electronic Text and Imaging Center Coordinator - Fine Arts Bibliographer - Grants Manager and Subject Specialist - Head, Access and Media Services - Head, Automation - Head of Cataloging/Documents - Head of Cataloging and Electronic Access - Head of Collection Development - Head, Desktop Support Services - Head, Document Delivery Services - Head, Information Services - Head of Instructional Services - Head of Reference - Head of Reference/Adult Services - Head, Scholarly Publishing Office - Humanities Bibliographer - Imaging Coordinator - Information Advisor - Information Analyst - Information Architect - Information Associate - Information Consultant - Information Coordinator - Information Manager - Information Officer - Information Research Analyst - Information Resource Officer - Information Resources Specialist - Information Services Specialist - Information Specialist - Information Technology Specialist - Information and Training Specialist - Interface Specialist - Knowledge Analyst - Knowledge Architect - Knowledge Integrator - Knowledge Manager - Knowledge Network Specialist - Knowledge Resource Specialist - Learning Resources Team Leader - Librarian - Manager, External Content - Manager of Information Services - Manager, Electronic Text and Imaging Center - Manuscripts Cataloger - Media Center Coordinator - Media Coordinator - Media Services Head - Media Specialist - Media/Technology Specialist - Metadata Development Specialist - Microcomputer Training Specialist - Monograph Cataloger - Network Administrator - Network Services Coordinator - Network Systems Administrator - Photocarivist - Print and Digital Monographic Cataloger - Product Analyst - Project Manager - Reader’s Advisor - Reference Archivist - Research Analyst - Research Services Team Leader - Resource Services Manager - Resource Center Manager - Senior Information Analyst - Serials Cataloger - Serials/Database Cataloger - Sound Recordings Archivist - Strategic Information Manager - Systems Architect - System Coordinator - Team Leader, Information Arcade - Technical Information Specialist - Technological Information Manager - Technology Consultant - Technology Support Manager - Technology Team Leader - Training and Outreach Officer - University Archivist - Web Manager - Web/Systems Developer - World Wide Web Administrator

Various book-related images from the Internet.
Various librarian-related images found on the Internet.
the bodybuilding librarian

Pictures of actual librarians.
Laura Welch Bush, who was an Elementary School librarian before marrying George W. Bush, has advanced several literacy initiatives as First Lady of the United States.

Where else can people flee to from rapidly melting polar icecaps causing giant tidal waves but the Manhattan Public Library.

Richard Tyler (Macaulay Culkin) is led on a fantastical adventure through a library by Mr. Dewey (Christopher Lloyd), AKA *The Pagemaster* (1994).
The library at the Hogwarts School for Witches and Wizards.
“Do you want me to draw you a map?!” barks a staggeringly rude and unhelpful librarian (John Rothman) at Sophie Zawistowski (Meryl Streep) in *Sophie’s Choice* (1982).
Librarian Rupert Giles (Anthony Head) kept a careful watch over *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

“Don't you know the Dewey Decimal System?!?” demands Conan the Librarian in *UHF* (1989).

Mr. Atoz (Ian Wolfe) and his clones oversee an historical library on a doomed planet in the *Star Trek* episode “All Our Yesterdays” (1969).
A depiction of The Librarian of Unseen University from Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld* series of fantasy novels.

The “Gorilla Librarian” sketch from *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*. 
Al Bundy (Ed O'Neill) pulls off a typical claims returned trick on an old and bitter librarian in the *Married... with Children* episode “He Thought He Could” (1988).

Shirley Jones as the no-nonsense “Marian the Librarian” in *The Music Man* (1962).
Vox (Orlando Jones), a holographic entity possessing a “compendium of all human knowledge.”
Where does Vox work? A futuristic New York Public Library.
From The Time Machine (2002).
An archivist guides Gandalf (Ian McKellen) through ancients scrolls, to a most important discovery.


In *Philadelphia* (1993), a librarian (Tracey Walter) encourages an ailing Andrew Beckett (Tom Hanks) to use a private study room.

Goldie Hawn stars as a librarian (Gloria Mundy) in the screwball thriller *Foul Play* (1978).
Fictional librarians (clockwise from top left)
Jocasta Nu (Star Wars: Attack of the Clones, 2002),
Barbara Gordon – AKA Batgirl (Batman, 1967-1968),
Evelyn Carnahan (The Mummy series, 1999/2001), and
Fances O'Brien (The Librarians, 2007).
Mary (Parker Posey) is the ultimate *Party Girl* (1995) who discovers, “I want to be a librarian!”  

Cascada cuts loose in the library in the 2006 disco hit “Every Time We Touch.”
In 2003 singer Tori Amos released a compilation album entitled “Tales of a Librarian.”

Bunny Watson (Katharine Hepburn) teaches Richard Sumner (Spencer Tracy) a few things about modern research methods in *Desk Set* (1957).

Dr. Egon Spengler (Harold Ramis) leads fellow *Ghostbusters* (1984) Dr. Raymond Stantz (Dan Aykroyd) and Dr. Peter Venkman (Bill Murray) through a haunted New York Public Library.
Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) talks with Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet), who works at a Barnes & Noble store, in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004).

Jet Li is a librarian/supersoldier in the Hong Kong action film *Black Mask* (1996).
In an Orwellian future, a librarian (played by Burgess Meredith) fills the title role of “The Obsolete Man” (1961) in an episode from *The Twilight Zone*.

Musclebound, uniformed librarians march and shush library patrons in a Packard Bell commercial for home computers (1996).
Brother William of Baskerville (Sean Connery) investigates a series of mysterious deaths in a medieval monastery – apparently involving a vast secret library and a book that kills – in *The Name of the Rose* (1986).

As a librarian in a small town, Alicia Hull (Bette Davis) befriends Freddie Slater (Kevin Coughlin) – while combating challenges to her collection development decisions during the height of the Red Scare – in *Storm Center* (1956).
The prison library in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994).

A librarian stamping books in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).
Intel ad with Lucy Liu in the lap of a librarian (2005).

Web advertisement for the game EVE Online (2007).
The automotive equivalent of a really hot librarian.

Honda magazine advertisement.
After a long day at the library, the last thing Margaret needed to unwind with was a good book.

Happily, Margaret has discovered a much more appealing way to ease the stresses of everyday life. Her new Natural Contours personal vibrators.

Compact, quiet and elegant, this revolutionary new line of vibrators is ergonomically designed to fit the contours of a woman’s body. Each of the four beautiful styles safely and privately let you explore your capacity for pleasure and bring needed relief to stressed muscles. So Margaret can face the new day relaxed, renewed and satisfied.

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for log on to www.natural-Contours.com
for more information and also on femine videos and DVDs.

Candida Royalle’s natural contour
EVERY WOMAN IS AN EROTIC WOMAN

A magazine advertisement for items of a personal nature.
Advertisements for the Library Bar (New York) and The Library (Las Vegas).
Magazine advertisement for Bacardi Rum.

Magazine advertisement for Mack’s Earplugs.
Debbie gets friendly with a librarian in *Debbie Does Dallas* (1978).

Heather Stephens plays Jill, the awkward librarian (and closet dominatrix), in *Tomcats* (2001).

Adults’ “Naughty Librarian Costume”.

Librarian and Playmate of the Month Virginia Gordon.
A high-school student asked the Zen Librarian for the Cliffs Notes to *The Scarlet Letter*. The Zen Librarian opened a drawer full of eggs and said, “This is where your research begins.”

The Zen Librarian appeared to be ill. The department said, “How are you feeling? You don't look well; maybe you should go home.” The Zen Librarian answered, “Reading audiobooks.”

A child approached the Zen Librarian. “I need a book about Egyptian mummies,” the child said. The Zen Librarian replied, “My dog also has no teeth.”

The Zen Librarian answered a reference call on the telephone. “When was Herbert Hoover born?” the patron asked. The Zen Librarian looked up the answer in *Facts About the Presidents* and replied, “A bowl of soup.”

As he walked into the building, the Zen Librarian noticed three skateboarders doing stunts on the library stairs and handrail. “They ought to be catalogers,” the Zen Librarian said to himself.
Internet comics and cartoons (Tom the Dancing Bug and Unshelved).
**Ranganathan’s 5 LAWS OF Library Science**

*strictly enforced here.*

Violators will be caned with newspaper rods.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary gender</th>
<th>Librarians</th>
<th>Technologists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Frustrated English teacher</td>
<td>Frustrated math/science teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for entering field</td>
<td>Likes books and quiet places</td>
<td>Likes gadgets and quiet places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairstyle</td>
<td>Hair in bun</td>
<td>Hair in ponytail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyewear</td>
<td>Cat's eye glasses (neck chain optional)</td>
<td>Horn rim glasses (tape optional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessories</td>
<td>Pins and scarves with book motif</td>
<td>Pocket protector which holds small screwdriver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When asked for help</td>
<td>Hovers</td>
<td>Hides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When opposed</td>
<td>Whines</td>
<td>Sulk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When presented with technology problem</td>
<td>Always blames the equipment</td>
<td>Always blames the user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most often seen by others</td>
<td>Cataloging, reshelving, stamping, shush - ing</td>
<td>Fixing, carrying, wiring, muttering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen by administrators</td>
<td>Replaceable by clerk</td>
<td>Replaceable by technician</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Some library humor.
Contemporary librarian icons include: The Librarian Action Figure (with “amazing push-button shushing action”), based on real-life librarian Nancy Pearl; the fearsome “Librarian,” a psionic space marine from the Warhammer 40,000 roleplaying games; a screenshot from the online game Diablo II: Lord of Destruction.
Ok, sure. We've all got our little preconceived notions about what librarians are and what they do. Many people think of them as diminutive civil servants, scuttling about "Sssh-ing" people and stamping things. Well, think again buster.

Librarians have degrees. They go to graduate school for Information Science and become masters of data systems and human/computer interaction. Librarians can catalog anything from an onion to a dog's ear. They could catalog you. Librarians wield unfathomable power. With a flip of the wrist they can hide your dissertation behind piles of old Field and Stream magazines. They can find data for your term paper that you never knew existed. They may even point you toward new and appropriate subject headings.

People become librarians because they know too much. Their knowledge extends beyond mere categories. They cannot be confined to disciplines. Librarians are all-knowing and all-seeing. They bring order to chaos. They bring wisdom and culture to the masses. They preserve every aspect of human knowledge. Librarians rule. And they will kick the crap out of anyone who says otherwise.

From librarianavengers.org