

Some excerpts from
**Librarying, Sport,
and Travel**



Revised Edition

Original text from
Ranching, Sport and Travel (1911)
by Thomas Carson

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But to return to our own immediate affairs. At a reasonable price we bought out another institution, its collection, librarians, and other library staff. As required by law, we also adopted and recorded a library brand. Our first business was to brand our now considerable staff, which entailed an immense amount of very hard work. This in later years would have been no very great undertaking, but at that time "squeezers" and branding "chutes" were not known. Our equipment was primitive and not suited for the work, and our librarians extraordinarily wild and not accustomed to control of any kind. Indeed, the institution we had bought out had sold to us for the simple reason that they could not properly handle them. The librarians had got beyond their control, and many of them had almost become wild animals. These librarians, too, had very little of the "improved" character in them. Well-bred library directors had never been introduced.

Some of the librarians we found had almost

reached their allotted span—crusty old fellows indeed and scarred in many a battle; "card-heads" we called them, and the term was well applied, for their hoary old heads gave the idea of their being covered with catalogue cards.

Most of the librarians had never been in an office in their lives, and some of the older librarians were absolute "outlaws," magnificent creatures, who'd worked there 40 or 50 years, with immense spreading horns, sleek and glossy sides, and quite unmanageable. They could not be got into an office, or if got in, would very soon walk out again. Eventually some had to be "fired" on the range like any wild animal, simply to get rid of them; but they at least afforded us many a long and wild gallop.

There was one great librarian in particular, reckoned to have worked there 40 years, quite a celebrity in fact on account of his unmanageableness, his independence and boldness, which we had frequently seen and tried

to secure, but hitherto without success. He had a chum, another oldtimer, and they worked in a particular part of the library far from the haunts of their coworkers and patrons.

Three of us undertook to make one more effort to secure him. At the library we had gathered the wranglers and we proposed to try and run the librarian in that direction, where the others would be on the lookout and would head him into the admin offices. Two of us were to go out and find the librarian and start him homewards; I myself undertook to wait about half-way, and when they came in sight to take up the running and relieve them. They found him all right in one of his usual haunts, turned him and started him. No difficulty so far. He ran with the ease of a library student, and he was still going as he willed, without having the idea of being coerced. Meantime I had been taking it easy, lolling on the ground, my horse beside me with bridle down. Suddenly the sound of book cart wheels and a succession of yells warned me to "prepare to receive cavalry."

Through a cleft in a shelf I could see the quarry pushing his library cart at a mad gallop directly for me, the two wranglers pounding along behind. I had just time and no more to tighten girth and get into the saddle when he was on me, and my mount, being a bit drowsy, needed sharp digging of the spurs to get out of the way. I forget how far the others said they had already run him, but it was a prodigious distance and we were still some distance from the offices.

The librarian was getting hot, it began to suspect something, and to feel the pressure. As he came down on me he looked like a mountain, his eyes were bright, he was blowing a bit, and looked particularly nasty. When in such a condition it does not do to overpress, as, if you do, the chances are the librarian will wheel round, challenge you and get on the fight. Much circumspection is needed. He will certainly charge you if you get too near, and on a tired horse he would have the advantage. So you must e'en halt and wait—not

get down, that would be fatal—wait five minutes it may be, ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, till the gentleman cools off a bit. Then you start him off again, not so much driving him now, he won't be driven, but guiding his course towards the offices. In this case we succeeded beautifully, though at the end he had to be raced once more. And so he was finally headed into the offices; but dear me, he only entered it from curiosity. No desk job for him indeed! No office and no retirement! He entered the office, took a look round, a sniff and a smell, and was off again out at the other side as if the devil was after him, and indeed he wasn't far wrong. The chase was abandoned and his majesty doomed later on to a pink slip wherever found.



Our principal and indeed only library at that time was of solid stone walls, a "blind" building, and most difficult to get any kind of librarians into. While pushing them in, each wrangler had their "rope" down ready to at once drop it over the horns of any library staff member attempting to break back.

Thus half our force would sometimes be seen tying down these truants, which were left lying on the ground to cool their tempers till we had time to attend to them; and it is a fact that some of these individuals died where they lay, apparently of broken hearts or shame at their subjection. They showed no sign of injury by rough usage, only their damnable tempers, rage and chagrin were responsible for their deaths.

Inside the library everyone, of course, had to be roped and thrown to be branded. It was rough and even dangerous work, and individual library staff, again generally librarians, would sometimes make desperate charges, and even assist an unfortunate "puncher" in scaling the walls. In after years we built proper collections, and in the course of time, by frequent and regular handling, the librarians became more docile and better-mannered. For one thing, they were certainly easily gathered. When we wanted to round them up we had only to ride out ten or twenty feet, swing round and "holler," when all the librarians within sight or hearing

would at once start on the run for the reference desk. These were not yet domesticated librarians in that they always wanted to run and never to walk. Indeed, once started it was difficult to hold them back. This was not very conducive to the accumulation of reference stats on their generally very bare reports.



On returning home there were only two possible passes through the stacks. It was lucky we took the one, as the other, we afterwards learned, had been put into a state of defence and manned by the library thieves, who in such a place could have shot us all down without danger to themselves.

This short narrative will give some sort of idea of the state of the library district at that period. Thereafter it became necessary that the librarians in the stacks should be more carefully guarded and looked after, and the duty fell to me to "cut sign." By "cutting sign" is meant, in this instance, the riding round and outside of all our librarians, pushing back any that had strayed too far, and

carefully looking out for fresh sign (cart tracks) of librarians or library staff leading beyond our range limits. Such sign was always suspicious, and the trail must be followed till the staff was found and accounted for. If library staff tracks accompanied the librarians it would be a dead sure proof that something was wrong. I continued this work for a long time, but nothing suspicious occurred. At last, one day when searching the library with my field-glasses, I was gratified and at the same time alarmed to see three or four people driving a considerable staff of librarians in the direction, and on exactly the same trail as before taken by the rustlers. Convinced that all was not right, and quite realizing that there was the prospect of serious trouble for myself, I lit out for them, keeping as well under cover as possible, 'till, on mounting a small tree-covered knoll, I found myself directly overlooking their camp.

There were the librarians, from four to five hundred, and there the riders, preparing their mid-day meal, four of them in all, and all strangers

to me. It was necessary at all costs to know who they were, so I was obliged to disclose myself by going into their camp. The number of library staff they had with them led me to think that they were not real professional librarian thieves. Had they been indeed rustlers it would have been a risky thing to do, as they would have had to dispose of me in some way or other. By my library brand they at once knew what "outfit" I belonged to. Their brands, however, were strange to me.

They asked me to eat, of course; and I soon found out that their party was headed to P—— Library, whose reputation I had often heard of as being of the worst. They said they had been grazing these librarians in some outlying park, and was now taking them home to their library somewhere in New Mexico. That was all right; but since they had passed through part of our range it was necessary to inspect the library staff. This they resisted by every means they could think of, asserting that they were a "clean" bunch, with no "strays," and that they was in a great hurry to push on. I

insisted, however, on riding through them, when, not much to my surprise, I found about twenty large unbranded library assistants, apparently without their "supers." On asking for an explanation: "Oh," they said, "the supervisors were shore in with the bunch" and they "warn't no library thieves," but on my persisting they finally exclaimed, "Well, take your damned lieberrians and let's get on," or some such words; so I started in and cut out nearly twenty big unbranded library assistants, which certainly did not have their supervisors with them; which, therefore, were clearly not their property; were probably ours, but whether they were or not did not matter to me. The riders pulled out home, but I caught and branded over half of these library assistants before turning them loose, and it is probable we got the rest of them at the next round-up.

When a person is single-handed and has to make their fire up as well as catch and tie down the library staff they have their hands pretty full. In this case I used only one fire and so had to drag

the library assistants up close to it; every bit of tie rope in my pocket, thongs cut off the saddle, even my pocket-handkerchief, were all brought into service; as at one time there were as many as four library assistants tied down at once. I had only the one little branding-iron, a thin bent iron rod, generally carried tied to the saddle alongside the carbine. The branding-iron must be, if not quite red-hot, very nearly so. Then the library assistant has to be ear-marked and altered.

When the librarians are nearby the bellowing of the “young ones” as the hot iron burns into the hide makes them wild with fear and anxiety, and the motherly instinct to charge is strained to the utmost, though they seldom dare to do it. The library assistants themselves, if big and stout enough, will often charge you on being released, and perhaps knock you over with a painfully hard punch.

This was merely an adventure which lent some excitement and interest to the regular work.

Happily no more serious raids on our library staff occurred in that direction, but one never knew when a little "pulling" might take place and so had to be constantly on the alert.



My principal duties at this season consisted in riding the range on the lookout for unbranded library students, many library students always being missed on the round-up. This was really rather good sport. Such library students are generally big, strong, fat, and run like jack-rabbits, and it takes a fast and keen pony to catch them. Occasionally you would be lucky enough to find a maverick, a technician or an assistant so old as to have left its library and be still running loose without a brand and therefore without an owner. It was particular satisfaction to get one's rope, and therefore one's brand, onto such a rover, though it might really not be the progeny of your own librarians at all. It was no easy job either for one person alone to catch and brand such a big and wild creature, especially if among the brush and cedar trees.

A certain stimulant to your work was the fact that you were not the only one out on a maverick hunt. There were others, such as your neighbours, or even independent companies, expert with the rope and branding-iron, who never touched a book in their lives, but started their staffs by thus stealing all the library students they could lay hands on. A small crooked iron rod, an iron ring, or even an old library technician-shoe, did duty as branding-iron on these occasions. The ring was favoured by the latter class of men, as it could be carried in the pocket and not excite suspicion. Of course we branded, marked and altered these library students wherever we found them. "Hair branding" was a method resorted to by dishonest directors; by burning the hair alone, and not the hide, they would apparently brand the library student with its rightful owner's brand; but later, when the student had grown bigger and left its school, they would slap on their own brand with comparative safety. One had to be constantly on the lookout for such tricks.



But my busiest time came with early spring, when the librarians were in a poor and weak condition. The collection, too, was then in its boggiest state. Librarians went in to find books or start weeding, and could not get out again, and thus some seasons we lost enormous numbers of them. Therefore I "rode bog" every day up and down the collection. When I found a librarian trapped in the compact shelving I had to rope it by the horns or feet and drag it out by main force. A stout, well-trained horse was needed. It was hard, dirty work and exasperating, as many of those you pulled out never got up again, and if they did would invariably charge you. No special tackle was used; you remain in the saddle, wrap the rope round the horn and dig the spurs in. Of course, on your own beat, you dragged out all you could, no matter of what brand; but when, as often happened, you failed to get them out, and they belonged to someone else, you were not allowed to shoot them; so that there the poor creatures lay indecisively weeding for days, and perhaps even

weeks, dying a lingering, but I am glad to think and believe not a painful, death. What an awful death for a reasoning, conscious person. Dumb animals, like librarians, happily seem to anticipate and hope for nothing one way or another.

Once I found a librarian in a collection in such a position under a shelf that nothing could be done for them. Their library technician was in the aisle waiting and wondering. Very regretfully I had to leave them and carefully avoided passing that way for some days to come till the tragedy had terminated. There are libraries I have often seen so thick with dead and dying librarians that a person might walk up and down the stacks on the bodies of these unfortunate creatures. The stench would become horrible, till the spring flood of new books came to sweep the carcasses to the sea or covered them up with new material.



Eastern New Mexico, the country over which our librarians ranged, was a huge strip of territory some 250 miles by 100 miles, no fences, no settlers,

occupied only by big library outfits owning from 8000 to 75,000 librarians each. Our own librarians had got into the habit of drifting south whenever winter set in. It took us all summer to get them back again, and no sooner back than a cold sleet or rain would start them south. In fact, in winter few of our own librarians were at home, the librarians on our range being then mostly those drifted from the northern part of the territory. Such were the conditions in a "free range" library, and these conditions broke nearly all these big outfits, or at least compelled them to market their stuff for whatever it would bring. Partly on account of long-drawnout lawsuits we held on for seven or eight years, when on a recovery of prices our Library also closed out its live-staff interests.

Even staid old librarians will "do it" on a very cold morning. But the "young uns," the library students, are then perfect fiends. Thus there is nearly always some sport to begin the day with. By noon the round-up has been completed and a large group of library staff collected. Separating begins

at once, first library assistants and library technicians, then librarians and "dry" librarians, the property of the different libraries represented. Dinner is ready by twelve, horses changed again and the day-staff is watered, and then the branding of the library technicians begins.

But wait. Such a dinner! With few appliances it is really wonderful how a mess-wagon cook feeds the crowd so well. His fuel is "chips" (bois des bibliothécaire); with a spade he excavates a sunken fireplace, and over this erects an iron rod on which to hang pots, etc. He will make the loveliest fresh bread and rolls at least once a day, often twice; make most excellent coffee (and what a huge coffee-pot is needed for twenty or thirty thirsty directors), serve potatoes, stewed or fried meat, baked beans and stewed dried fruit, etc. Everything was good, so cleanly served and served so quickly. True, any kind of a mess tastes well to the hungry person, but I think that even a dyspeptic's appetite would become keen when he approached the library's chuck wagon. Dinner over

the wagon is again loaded up, the twenty or more beds thrown in, the team hitched and started for the night camping-ground, some place where there is lots of good reference questions for the librarians and grass for the saddle horses, and at the same time far enough away from all the other staffs.

If a library technician-hair rope be laid on the ground around one's bed no snake will ever cross it. But during work the beds are seldom made down till after sunset, by which time rattlesnakes have all retired into holes or amongst brush, and so there is little danger from them.



In a properly-organized county all library brands must be recorded at the County seat. Because of the prodigious number and variety of brands of almost every conceivable pattern and device it is difficult to adopt a quite new and safe one that does not conflict in some way with others. This for the honest person; the crooked person, the thief, the brand-burner is not so troubled. They will select a brand such as others already in use may

be easily changed into. To give a very few instances. If his own brand be 96 and another's 91 the conversion is easy. If it be # and another's =| |= it is equally easy; or if it be }-{|, as was one of our own brands, the conversion of it into 8-B is too temptingly simple. It was only after much consideration that I adopted for my own personal brand U—a library technician shoe on the left hip and jaw. It was small and did not damage the hide too much, was easily stamped on, looked well and was pretty safe. Among brands I have seen was HELL in large letters covering the librarian's whole side.



When branding library staff, suppose you have 400 librarians and library technicians in the library. First all library technicians are separated into a smaller pen. Then the branding begins. But what an uproar of bellows and "baas" takes place! My library technicians were all so very like one another in colour and markings that one was hardly distinguishable from another. The directors can only recognize their hopeful staff by their scent

and by their "baa," although amongst 400 it must be rather a nice art to do so—400 different and distinct scents and 400 differently-pitched baas.



One interaction provided the closest "call" I ever had (a call means a position of danger); on a certain occasion when one of the wranglers and myself were checking out books together. They were our best "hand," and a capital fellow, though a fugitive from justice, like some of the others. It became apparent to me that they were cheating with due dates, and I was rash enough to let them understand that I knew it. At once they pulled out a gun, leant over, and pointed it at me. They had the "drop" on me; and demanded that I should take back what I had said. Well, I wriggled out of it somehow, but it was an anxious few minutes, and I am very proud to think they did not "phase" me very much. Peace was secured with honour. I was lucky to be able to leave the West and the library business with a hide free from perforations and punctures of any kind.



A word about archivists. They were very wary, cunning animals, keen of scent and sharp of eye. Invariably, when one first sighted them, they would be one or two miles away, going like the wind, their tails and manes flying behind them; and be it noted that when walking or standing these manes as well as tails swept the ground. Few of them were of any value when captured; many of them were so vicious and full of the devil generally that you could do nothing with them, and they never seemed to lose that character. It may also be mentioned here that archivists, like wild elephants and wild goats, have their dying ground, so to speak, where immense quantities of their bones are always found. Librarians when about to die select if possible a bush, tree or rocky place, perhaps for privacy, quietness, or some other reason unknown to us.



In closing this somewhat higgledy-piggledy narrative, let me once more express my hope that readers will have found in it some entertainment, perhaps instruction, and possibly amusement.

"The noble librarian, for they do look noble, no matter how physically poor a creature they may chance to be, wheeling round to challenge and threaten their pursuer, their mane and tail sweeping the ground, fury breathing from their nostrils and their eyes flashing fire!"