WWW: Enticed, Ensnarled, & Enriched...
By Judith Arnold and Elaine Jayne

Media reports often present the Internet and the World Wide Web as the answer to anything and everything. Scarcely a television program or advertisement appears without a Web address prominently displayed. As a result, students expect the WWW to provide them with instant and reliable information for their assignments. Unfortunately, not all information found through use of this enticing new medium can be trusted.

Bill Gates is the Devil!
Imagine, first, a search for information on Microsoft’s CEO, Bill Gates. A bright red screen may be found that proclaims Bill Gates is the devil. The page, presumably written in fun, converts the name, “Bill Gates,” plus III (3) into ASCII values that add up to 666, the number of the beast [devil] according to the book of Revelations in the New Testament of the Bible. (http://aurora.engr.LaTech.edu/~tburga/billgate.htm). Or consider the Web page entitled “Feline Reactions to Bearded Men,” a spoof written as if it were a scholarly study. This discussion, with bogus bibliography, cites a series of experiments in the Journal of Feline Forensic Studies in which 26% of cats exposed to photographs of Robert Bork exhibited paralysis of the legs and necks. (http://www.improb.com/airchives/cat.html). Both examples are misleading, albeit humorous and outrageous. Students must be taught how to tell the difference between information that is dubious at best and false at worst, and that which is reliable and valid.

Teaching the Web to Freshmen
During the fall semester, 1996, two faculty members from the College of Business asked us, Waldo Library Instruction Faculty, to add the WWW to the other resources covered in their business writing classes (BIS 142) We were excited to include the use of the Web, since it was a perfect opportunity to include critical thinking and evaluation to the learning process. As suggested above, the quality of information on the Web ranges from garbage to true resource gems. We prepared carefully, using demonstrations, class discussions, worksheets, and hands-on searching. Regardless, the freshmen often wandered off-track into the glitter-paved, hypertext-linked pathways of the Web.

We discovered that this “wandering syndrome” was one of several recurring problems that occur in teaching the Web. Another was the difficulty that many students have in judging the “quality” of information since, to them, Web inclusion implied “authority.” Few were aware that the Web lacks behind-the-scenes review and selection that typically occurs with formal print or other media publication found in libraries. Moreover, the Web appeared much more simple to use since any word or idea “filled in” on a search line, brought something back immediately. In contrast, the regular library search process involved finding an article in a periodical database, locating a call number of the journal in the local catalog, actually going to the shelves and retrieving the article, and photocopying the article. Then too, many students buy into the myth about the superiority of information that comes from computers, and the Web, with its graphics and multimedia, has added appeal for the MTV generation.

Other problems came from the unique
nature of the Web itself. For example, there is no controlled vocabulary, or standard list of subject headings. Instead, search engines, which have different (and often unstated) rules for entering terms, perform the equivalent of a giant keyword search of a huge, full-text database. Since freshmen normally have no subject parameters or prior knowledge of the topical hierarchy, they enter any term or phrase that occurs to them. The result is an overwhelming number of hits on whatever broad topic that each considers to be “the” assignment.

Finally, the anonymity of the Web has produced a new variant in an old bugbear—the specter of plagiarism. Students can cut-and-paste parts of articles, or go to sites such as “The Evil House of Cheat” or “School Sucks” to download student papers on a particular subject. Professors have considerable difficulty in verifying sources even if identified by the student using electronic citation guidelines. As these problems emerged, we, the instructors, began to ask a question: Why would any librarian, in her right mind, want to introduce such complexity into a class already overloaded with content?

The Strengths of the Web

Despite its shortcomings, the WWW can be a valuable and even unique resource. One of its principal assets is the current information that is found there. Many of the nation’s most-read newspapers, such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today, as well as many regional newspapers, have Web pages offering the latest news. CNN hosts a site that outdoes today’s published news such as the latest photos from Mars or the most recent update on the lead story of the hour. International students on WMU’s campus can read newspapers from their home countries, or listen to foreign broadcasts via the Web. The weather, the population count for the U.S., stock quotations, and currency exchange rates are only a few of the types of data available with the right URL.

Besides the most current data, unique resources are open to the researcher. Major art museums (e.g., San Francisco at http://www.thinker.org) host home sites with images of items found in their collections; they can be searched by artist, date, medium, country of origin, or individual words. Archives such as The Virginia Military Institute Archives permit history students to study the Civil War as seen in the diaries and letters of those involved in that tragic period. (http://www.vmi.edu/-archtml/index.html). Oral histories and photographs from our nation’s history are found in the “American Memory Collection” of the Library of Congress (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ammem home.html). Another strength of the Web as a resource is its ability to enhance access to materials. The full text of Shakespeare’s works, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, or any of the texts in the “Bartleby Library,” Columbia University is not only available to read or download, but is computer searchable—the student can use keywords to locate relevant passages, a feat that would take many hours of skimming the print version. (http://www.gbs.cs.usyd.edu.au/~matty/Shakespeare; http://www.georgetown.edu/irvinemj/english/16/franken/fraken.html; http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/)

Web access also allows users to reach across distance and time. A student in desperate need of a Newsweek article after the library has closed can access it in her dorm room using the Web. Company annual reports not in the library could take days to obtain by mail, yet can often be found quickly at a company’s Web site. The latest government reports, U.S. and state codes, and Supreme Court decisions are accessible to students whose libraries do not own the paper or microform copies.

“Can the Devil Speak True?”

The issue, however, is not whether these and a multitude of other sources found on the Web are valuable for many research projects. The problem is that the Web is not placed in context with other electronic resources and the more traditional print materials. And, to be enriched by the Web, its strengths and weaknesses, effective search strategies, and evaluation techniques must be learned by the entire class, soon to be ensnared, searcher. The freshmen in BIS 142 taught us this lesson that we have now described in an article accepted for publication. At the same time, we had such difficulty preparing the article with the use of computers—the file would mysteriously freeze after a few minute’s work—that even calls to Microsoft led to frustration and often more problems. By the time the final version of “Dangling by a Slender Thread: The Lessons and Implications of Teaching the World Wide Web to Freshmen” was completed, we were beginning to wonder whether, after all, there was some truth in the devilish Web site about Bill Gates.

Devious Derivations

By David Isaacson

[This is the first of an “occasional” book review prepared by members of the Friends of the University Libraries who have chosen something of interest to them.]

Aside from garbled quotations, one of the most intriguing—and troublesome—inquiries that comes to librarians is the question asking about word origins, or etymologies. It may be of surprise to the readers of Gatherings that there are individuals who actually “make up” or create their own etymologies. The result is called folklore. As with all “folk” traditions, if something is used long enough, it may achieve the sanction of at least semi-legal usage by being recorded in a standard reference source. Then, even professional etymologists may be fooled into thinking that the origin of these words is accurate and authorized. One well-versed author has recently published a collection of disclaimers about the folklore. Hugh Rawson’s title explains it all: Devious Derivations: Popular Misconceptions and More than 1,000 True Origins of Common Words and Phrases (Crown: 1994).

Rawson, in his introduction, suggests a number of reasons why people make up etymologies. Some may believe that words are derived from a historical figure with a similar name as, for example, chauvinism, which is truly derived from an overly zealous follower of Napoleon named Nicholas Chauvin. On the other hand, “hooker,” commonly used as a synonym for prostitute, does not originate with Civil War General Joseph Hooker. Although Hooker’s military headquarters were notorious for such liaisons, the term existed before the Civil War. While its origin is still uncertain, it may refer to a woman “hooking” a man as a fisherman hooks a fish.

Another source of false word origins is spurious acronyms. Although someone may have once suggested that the word “news” is taken from north, cast, west, and south, there is no evidence that supports that argument. “News” is undoubtedly—and simply—the plural of the word new. In the same vein of illogical reasoning would fall the idea that geographical place names serve as a source of words. But, tobacco does not come from the island of Tobago. Still for every rule, there may be an exception and albeit a bit farfetched, there is evidence that jeans do come from Genoa! Then, of course, scholars are occasionally guilty of being over-shrewd. “Bear garden” would seem to
The Flux and Jan Dommer
A Friends’ Personality
by Gordon Eriksen

Heraclitus of Ephesus, the last of the sixth-century B.C. Ionian philosophers, was an advocate of something called “flux.” Jan Dommer, caught in the unique professional environment of the information age, describes it as “adapting to rapidly changing times.” Heraclitus would nod sagely since he believed that everything in the world is dynamic, always moving, always in the strife to achieve a balanced tension.

Jan grew up in Alpena, in a Polish/French Catholic family, on the appropriately named Thunder Bay of northeastern Michigan. Born Janet Marie Murray, she was the eldest of six, with one sister and four brothers. Shortly after her youngest sibling was born, tragedy and change occurred with the death of her father and her mother’s struggle to keep the family together. In that family, this meant that the children would also have advanced educational opportunities, which enrolled Jan first in the Alpena Community College and then at Aquinas College, in Grand Rapids, where she earned her B.A. The Heraclitean balance of opposing forces was part of the invigorating ’60s climate of the campus as Jan took her degree in sociology with a minor in history.

The young graduate headed to her first position teaching high school sociology and government in Sebewaing, a port town on Lake Huron famous for being an Ernest Hemingway hideaway. Unfortunately for an individual already influenced by the juxtaposition of change and balance, the Sebewaing high school was of the traditional mode, strong on conformity and homework—and probably short on learning. A little of this was enough, and Jan moved to Saginaw which, at that point, had embraced a series of innovations intended to break the lock-step approach to teaching young people—flex time, variable scheduling, one-on-one teaching. As Jan recalls it, “It was a time of fundamental change, an exciting time to teach.”

Not one to let opportunities pass her by, she took the time to study, with the help of a NDEA grant, an interpretation of the American experience at the College of Wooster, and, at the Northwood Institute, Midland, to explore world culture and customs. Saginaw also provided another significant transition in her life when Jan met Norman Dommer. They were married in 1968, and, in due course, son Matthew made an appearance. The Dommers, being good and serious parents, took the theories of the behavioral psychologists to heart, and, with some modifications, learned by experience, applied the principles carefully. The results are much to their liking. Matt is currently serving his residency as a physician; and, by the time this is published, will be married to another resident. Jan notes quietly that their physician son is a “gift to the community,” a caring individual who will do much for his patients.

In 1969, a career opportunity for Norman brought the Dommers to Kalamazoo and Jan a position at Loy Norrix High School. She recalls the time as a “formative career period,” when Kalamazoo was in the throes of school busing and integration. Her students taught her that education must be relevant, and that she needed to listen to different opinions as well as to “diffuse the screaming that dominated communication at that time.” During this tumultuous period, she began to search for career where diverse opinions and knowledge could be shared, but where she could still interact with people. That career became librarianship, because “libraries are where a multiplicity of opinions survive as well as the means to access them.”

Jan applied and was admitted to the library school at Western Michigan University where she earned a Master of Science in Librarianship in 1972—with a 4.0 g.p.a. Jan’s interests in the library and information world were not limited to school media centers despite her work history, and the emerging world of automation and computer applications brought her back to W.M.U. in 1978 where she earned a Specialist of Arts with a major emphasis on the “new” technology. In her application materials at the time is a telling comment from the principal at Central Junior High: Jan is a “highly flexible person and responds well to change or innovation.”

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Books are

...opened with expectation and closed with profit.

Bronson Alcott

...to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some are to be chewed and digested.

Frances Bacon

...fatal; they are the curse of the human race. Nine tenths of the existing books are nonsense, and the clever books are the refutation of that nonsense. The greatest misfortune that ever befell man was the invention of printing.

Benjamin Disraeli

...undeservedly forgotten; none are undeservedly remembered.

W. H. Auden

...alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse, the sorrow, people, and the places and how the weather was.

Ernest Hemingway

Friends at Work and Play

By Mary Ann Bowman

The Friends of the University Libraries held its spring booksale on March 19th. With the help of many volunteers from both the Friends and the Libraries' staff, approximately $1000 was collected from the dozens of visitors who browsed the book display located on the second floor rotunda of Waldo Library. The Annual Meeting was held on April 8th in the classic surroundings of the Meader Room with some 30 members attending. The election confirmed the following Board officers and members for 1997-98:

Dr. Mary Ann Bowman, President
Dr. Robert Hahn, Vice President
Ms. Bettina Meyer, Treasurer
Ms. Kristin Tyrrell, Secretary
Ms. Marilyn Gosling, Board Member, 1997-2000

The presentation for the meeting was artfully delivered by Dr. Thomas Amos, Rare Book and Special Collections Librarian for the University Libraries, who had caught the interest of all attending by the title of his remarks: "Medium Rare: Constructing and Deconstructing Special Collections at Western Michigan University." A reception in the Meader Rare Book Room brought the afternoon to a pleasant conclusion. The special fall meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 24th at 4:30 p.m., and will feature renowned historian/author/lecturer Dr. Paul Maier of WMU's Department of History.

“Medium Rare…”

By Tom Amos

In a forty-minute presentation to the Friends of the University Libraries on March 19th of this year, I was challenged to live up to my title. In calling the collection “medium rare,” my intention was to describe what a special collections unit can contribute to the size and diversity of WMU. Fortuitously, we had just received the copy of the famous Leningrad Bede, which completes the set Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile purchased with funds from supporters of the Medieval Institute and the University Libraries. The work illustrated the fact that our “medium” collection really contains many hidden gems and is growing rapidly.

From this unique volume, it was an easy step to demonstrate, through use of selected works, some of the diversity that already exists in our rare book collection. I gathered books for a hands-on examination, and gave examples of collections at WMU that are known for their qualities of synergism. The philosophy that motivates the current collection development policy is that, as the collections grow, individual pieces and segments of the collections need to speak to more than one audience and respond to more than one theme. By acquiring materials which naturally fit into the teaching and research environment here, Special Collections can more easily respond to its audience and resource base. In that way, it will become a more vital part of the teaching and research mission of the Libraries and the University than it already is.
Ihling Brothers Everard: Documenters of Business

By Sharon Carlson

Business records represent one important, and often overlooked, element in documenting the history of a region. They also can be a source that sheds light on the larger social and cultural history of a community. Many of us are unaware that the functions of businesses are a major component in our daily lives and affect us in many ways. The records of the Ihling Brothers Everard Company, located in the Archives and Regional History Collections at WMU, provide a compelling example of "company records," as well as a good case study of how archives may forge successful working relationships with the business world.

The Ihling Brothers Everard Company of Kalamazoo traces its origins to 1869 when Otto Ihling arrived in Kalamazoo. He was from Milwaukee, only 22 years old, had $500 in his pocket, the papers of a journeyman bookbinder, and a dream to start a bookbinding business in the growing village on the banks of a river lined by paper and pulp firms. Kalamazoo proved to be just the right setting for which Ihling had hoped, and he began producing record books for deeds, court calendars, tax rolls, and other public documents. Early in the company's history, Ihling bound the initial issues of The Michigan Freeman, and thereby established a relationship with fraternal organizations that would eventually expand into the manufacture of uniforms and regalia. The company name also expanded a few years later when Otto's brother Reinhold and another partner, Herbert Everard, joined the company.

The business activities and resulting records of Ihling Brothers Everard Company present a microcosm of cultural patterns, as well as the business practices of that period. By the turn of the century, a second generation of Ihlings took over the business of documenting business and had begun the manufacturing of fraternal regalia and costumes. Among the archival resources are beautifully illustrated catalogs of fraternal dress. The company's name spread rapidly, abetted by the catalogs and the quality of the products, and Ihling Brothers Everard Company became a nationally-recognized firm. The successful manufacture of regalia for fraternal organizations evolved into production of uniforms for the military, marching bands, and other organizations, which, in turn, led to other marketing products. This part of the business had a significant publishing component that motivated the collection of the publications of various fraternal organizations and corporate newsletters such as Checker Headlights—a trade magazine for the famous automobile manufactured in Kalamazoo.

The IBEC company records also contain a wealth of information about the daily activities of the business, including customer relations and the process of creating products. Ledgers offer information about the various governmental customers purchasing record books; the manufacture of special costumes evolved after many sketches and color drawings had been developed and preserved in the records; anniversary scrapbooks, employee awards, and photographs of company events give insight into the corporate culture.

Predictions of a shrinking market due to societal and business shifts of the 1980s and 1990s influenced the Company's board and stockholders to sell and disband in 1995 rather than seek alternative markets or directions. Membership in fraternal organizations was in decline, the publishing business had been radically modified by the introduction of desktop publishing, and there was considerable competition for the remaining market share. Although four generations of Ihlings had worked in the business and the Company had been the life-long employer of hundreds of area residents, the decision was made to close the company.

The process of transferring company records to the WMU Archives and Regional History Collections is a study in archive building and corporate relations. The first contact from Ihling Brothers Everard Company occurred in the late 1960s as the firm was celebrating its centennial and contemplating a move to a new facility. At that time, 35 cubic feet of records were transferred to the Archives, including the earliest business records of the organization. This was followed by intermittent contact in the next two decades. In 1996, the transfer of the remaining business records was negotiated.

Over the course of several afternoons in November and December of 1996, staff of the WMU Collections visited the headquarters building located at Alcott and Fulford. With the assistance of former Company president, Edward Ihling, Sharon Carlson and Sue Husband began an on-site appraisal of the records, many dating to the late 19th and early 20th century. The extensive materials were carefully packed, labeled, and given a preliminary inventory. The result was the acquisition of 145 cubic feet of company records.

The assistance of several student employees was crucial to the actual moving of the records via the Company's elevator, the University Libraries' van, and book or hand truck to the East Campus location. The students, many of whom were enrolled in the public history program at the University, thought this was a valuable work experience because they gained a sense of how records were created and used, the role of the donor, and how to do preliminary appraisals.

Still remains to be done in the processing of the records of Ihling Brothers Everard Company before they are fully accessible to researchers. They constitute one of the largest collections of "business records" held by the University, and will inevitably become an extraordinary resource for future historians. They are added to such company records as those from Featherbone Corset, Doubleday, Kalamazoo Railroad Velocipede, and Kalamazoo Paper. University and public researchers may use the materials in the Archives and Regional History Collections, located in Room 111, East Hall. For further information, please call (616) 387-8490.

The Flux

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intends to see what else might be waiting—just around the corner. For her, retirement does not mean stopping; it only means looking for another piece of the strife, the flux, the ultimate balance between lost and found, empty and full, nothing and all. That, of course, is what the professional woman seeks all of her life. Such a one is Jan Dommer—a Heraclean prototype.
Devious Derivations
Continued from page 2

bear little relationship to the German word, “biergarten.” Rather, and more obvious, it is a place where bears are kept and, unfortunately, baited for the amusement of the spectators. And, a “helpmate” may indeed be both helpful and a mate, but the word actually comes from “help meet,” meaning a suitable helper, as in the King James translation of the Biblical passage which says that the Lord would make Adam “an help meet for him” (Genesis, 2:18).

Sometimes, false etymologies persist because they are good stories. “Marmalade” did not derive from Mary, Queen of Scots, developing a craving for this fruit concoction when she was “malade.” Rather, and less creative, it came from the French word “marmelade”, or quince jam, and thus ultimately from the Greek “melemelon, or honey apple, an apple grafted onto a quince tree. Obviously, a logical development of a word may simply be ignored by the “creative” mind.

Compiler/author Rawson notes, in Devious Derivations, that even the famous and skilled lexicographer Samuel Johnson sometimes unwittingly published false etymologies. When a woman asked him why he defined “pastern” as the knee of a horse, when actually it is the last part of a horse’s foot between the hoof and the fetlock, Johnson replied, “ignorance, pure ignorance.” (Although history and custom has suggested that Johnson almost always prefaced his witty answers with “Madam” or “Sir,” Rawson, in this instance, does not include the appellation. Despite the temptation, I will not amend the quotation although it does read better when one adds “Madam.”)

I trust that I have piqued your interest with a few examples taken from Hugh Rawson’s intriguing discussion of the fiction and reality hidden in the reported meaning of words. And, quite apart from its special reference value, browsing this volume is bound to be delightful to all lovers of plausible ignorance!

"Reading is the work of the alert mind, is demanding, and under ideal conditions produces finally a sort of ecstasy. This gives the experience of reading a sublimity and power unequalled by any other form of communication."

—E.B. White