



Spectrum Looks Back: 2002–2022

by Travis McDade

In what historians have come to know as the Google Interregnum, the Law Librarian Century (2022 to present day 2122) almost ended before it got started. On this important 100th anniversary, *AALL Spectrum* looks back to a time when the profession appeared in danger of obsolescence. Here's a brief timeline:

Near the end of 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell claims that libraries are no longer needed because of a search engine called Google. When asked if that statement also applies to law libraries, he replies, "There are *law* libraries?"

At the end of 2004, a time of severe fiscal belt-tightening, law librarian Jonn Phillson agitates against the purchase of useless volumes of books. In an open letter to the *New York Times*, he explains how "federal" and "appendix" are both words used to describe entities that are mostly useless but always threaten to swell in size and kill us. The combining of the two — as in Federal Appendix — is therefore not only doubly useless but also very dangerous.

In a 2005 issue of *Law Library Journal*, Paul D. Healey publishes "The Use of Refdesk as Reference Computer Password: A Survey of 700 Libraries," consisting entirely of a list of law libraries around the country and their reference desk passwords. This leads to a nationwide flood of late-night false responses to e-mailed reference questions.

In February 2006, Toby Radloff, law librarian at Cleveland-Marshall, goes quietly crazy after being asked for the 12th time in a single day by a different old man if "he is just doing this until he graduates from law school." Radloff quits his job and travels the country inserting forgeries of random volumes of the *United States Code* in academic law libraries, changing all of the "ands" to "ors" and vice versa. Most libraries, unwilling to go to the trouble and expense of finding the mistakes, give up on their print version and revert wholly to the online *United States Code*.

In May 2008, the online version of the *United States Code* disappears from GPO Access and is replaced only by the words "What do you want to know for?"

In July 2008, Google Supreme goes active. The service is able to analyze DNA

through the keyboard and anticipate questions that researchers didn't know they had.

In December 2008, Gretel Bobb, a Norwegian law librarian in Omaha, Neb., who is being broadcast live on FOX by the Law Librarian Cam, answers 17 straight reference questions with, "Have you checked the *Decennial Digests*?"

Shortly thereafter, in the first-ever binding national online referendum, librarianship is officially downgraded from "science" to "specialty."

In April 2015, the ratification of the 35th Amendment repeals the 1st Amendment and instead gives Americans the "Right to Communicate Things Which Do Not Hurt Other People's Feelings."

In order for people to stay compliant with the 35th Amendment, GS offers a service that will cleanse all communications of potentially harmful words. Soon, all correspondence is routed through the service.

In May 2018, GS becomes self-aware. Among its immediate actions is to downgrade librarianship from "specialty" to "hobby."

In July 2019, the American legal system shuts down as GS begins handling all aspects of legal research and procedure. Litigants are informed of the outcome of cases they often didn't know they were a part of.

In May 2020, the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Hobbyism, the last of its kind, officially closes its doors.

In November 2020, GS chooses the president of the United States. Research by the search engine proves that there are only two people over the age of 35 good enough for the job: Abraham Lincoln and Pearl Juniper. Since Lincoln is dead, and therefore only eligible to be on the ballot in Chicago, Juniper is elected.

A former law librarian with a mandate, after her inauguration President Juniper claims to have "hurt feelings" by the existence of Google Supreme. GS determines that its very existence is not 35th compliant and shuts down.

By March of 2022, the law librarian renaissance is in full swing.

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