

# THE ADVENTURE OF THE *NEW YORK WORLD*

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This year's *Green Bag Almanac and Reader* gives attention to a Sherlock Holmes short story of particular interest to lawyers, "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder." The editors have obtained and presented copies of this story as it would have appeared to its original readers in various forms between 1903 and 1911 — including in its original magazine publications in the United Kingdom (*The Strand Magazine*, 1903) and the United States (*Collier's Weekly*, 1903), and in its first book version (*The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, 1905), as well as part of the original manuscript (also 1903).

The final format of "The Norwood Builder" included in this *Almanac* is a pamphlet version of the story that appeared in the *New York Sunday World* in 1911. This nicely illustrated edition of "The Norwood Builder," part of a *World* series that year reprinting all 13 stories of *The Return*, seems to have been completely forgotten by modern readers, including even the most devoted of Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts.<sup>1</sup> Also included in this *Almanac* is the 1911 *World* version of another story from *The Return* — "The Six Napoleons." Both were located (along with several others that have been or will be republished by the *Green Bag*) by my editorial colleague Cattleya Concepcion in volumes of the *New York World* housed at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Duke University. It is the editors' pleasure to bring these rare, and in some instances seemingly unique, copies to the attention of the *Green Bag's* readership and of Sherlockians. But we would be remiss if in doing so we did not acknowledge that these editions of the stories would not be known, and might not exist today at all, if it were not for an extraordinary act of cultural preservation by the author Nicholson Baker.

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<sup>1</sup> And the most devoted of Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts are very devoted and enthusiastic indeed, and are proud of it, too.

Baker, a novelist,<sup>2</sup> also writes non-fiction, some of it quite controversial, and is a self-proclaimed “library activist.” He first gained attention in the latter capacity when he published a 1994 *New Yorker* article decrying libraries’ replacement of their traditional card catalogs with electronic equivalents which, at that time, did not work very well.<sup>3</sup>

In 1999, Baker was conducting research for what became his 2001 book *Double Fold*.<sup>4</sup> In that book, Baker decried more broadly the conduct of libraries in discarding paper copies of hundreds of thousands of books, newspapers, magazines, and other materials. Many of these the libraries replaced — but, Baker argued, inadequately and damagingly replaced — with microform (or, later, electronic) versions. With respect to the newspapers, Baker found that hard-copy holdings of many widely circulated, historically important, and visually appealing U.S. nineteenth- and twentieth-century newspapers apparently no longer existed in any institution at all. The replacement of hard-copy newspapers by microforms, Baker argued, was unsatisfactory for a host of reasons: the microforms were in black and white even where original pages were in color; they were subject to errors and imperfections in the filming process, such as blurring and cutting-off of margins; they physically deteriorated over time; and they were difficult to search and all-in-all a pain to work with.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> One of Baker’s novels received publicity in connection with a certain dispute involving President Clinton, about which the less said here the better.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholson Baker, “Discards”, *The New Yorker*, Apr. 4, 1994, at 64, reprinted in Nicholson Baker, *The Size of Thoughts* 125 (Random House 1996). Electronic library catalogs work much better now, and their availability online is an invaluable aid to researchers, but it still would be nice to have the traditional card catalogs of our youth available as well. (A few institutions — Princeton, for one — did keep them.)

<sup>4</sup> Nicholson Baker, *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (Random House 2001). Baker explains that the term “double fold” refers to a test formerly used by librarians to test the brittleness of paper: if folding a corner of a page back and forth breaks the corner off, the item is deemed dangerously brittle and is a candidate for preservation measures or discarding. See *id.* at 155-63. Baker’s thesis throughout *Double Fold* is that libraries’ efforts to preserve the contents of books, newspapers, and other paper media through mechanisms such as chemical treatments and destructive microfilming have been counterproductive and have led to the loss, sometimes irreparable, of valuable content. Some librarians and archivists have expressed disagreement with many of Baker’s assertions and conclusions. See, e.g., Richard Cox, *Vandals in the Stacks: A Response to Nicholson Baker’s Assault upon Libraries* (Praeger 2002).

<sup>5</sup> *Double Fold*, *passim*, particularly chapters 2 to 7. See also G. Thomas Tanselle, *Literature and Artifacts* (Bibliographical Society of the U. of Virginia 1998).

Worst of all, preparing the microfilms was almost invariably followed by the discarding and destruction of the original newspapers themselves.

Despite these points, a complete run of a daily newspaper over a period of decades takes up plenty of space, so one can understand why a given library might be unable to hold and maintain voluminous files of all the newspapers it would like to make available to its patrons — thus presenting the library with a choice between microforms (or, today, electronic forms) or nothing. And trying to search through a large set of bound volumes of a newspaper presents practical problems of its own, especially if that paper is not yet word-searchable online and no one has prepared an index to it. Nonetheless, one can readily agree that if *no* institution holds a real-life, hard-copy, fully accessible run of a major twentieth-century newspaper, then something has gone badly wrong.

The *New York World* is illustrative. This was a broadsheet newspaper published in Manhattan from 1860 until 1931, appearing as the *Morning World* and *Evening World* on weekdays and the nationally distributed *Sunday World* on Sundays. Owned by Joseph Pulitzer from 1883 until his death in 1911, the paper acquired a reputation for sensationalism and the original “yellow journalism.” In 1896, it became the first newspaper with a four-color press, of which it took robust advantage during the ensuing years.<sup>6</sup> It published O. Henry and Mark Twain and A.J. Liebling and later Dorothy Parker; it featured the first comic strip (“Hogan’s Alley,” aka “The Yellow Kid”) and the first crossword puzzle. Throughout this period, the *World* sold several hundred thousand copies a day, within and beyond New York City. But the *World* was one of the newspapers of which Baker found that by the 1990s, no library in the United States still held a hard-copy set.<sup>7</sup>

How did this happen? Baker explains:

The Library of Congress and the New York Public Library once owned Pulitzer’s *New York World* complete. . . . [Those copies] don’t exist now. . . . At Columbia University (whose school of journalism Pulitzer founded), at the New York Public Library, and at the Library

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<sup>6</sup> See *Double Fold*, at 3–4. See generally Kenneth Jackson, *The Encyclopedia of New York City* 904–05 (Yale, 2d ed. 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See Nicholson Baker, *The Way the World Works* 129 (Simon & Schuster 2012); Nicholson Baker & Margaret Brentano, *The World on Sunday*, Introduction by Baker, at viii (Bulfinch Press 2005), reprinted in *The Way the World Works* 149, 152.

of Congress, you can flip through memoirs, biographies, scholarly studies, and original holograph letters of Joseph Pulitzer, works that describe his innovations in graphic design and recount his public squabbles with [William Randolph] Hearst. . . . But the *World* itself, the half-million-page masterpiece in the service of which Pulitzer stormed and swore and finally went blind, was slapdashedly micro-filmed in monochrome and thrown out by the New York Public Library, probably in the early fifties. Columbia said good-bye to its *World* at some point thereafter; the New-York Historical Society did so around 1990. . . . The Library of Congress was quick to clear its shelves of the *World* . . . and replace them with copies of the NYPL's . . . micro-film; and copies of that very same mid-century microfilm — edge-blurred, dark, gappy, with text cut off of some pages, faded to the point of illegibility on others — will now have to serve. . . .<sup>8</sup>

When Baker was doing his research, in the 1990s, one library *did* still have a set of bound volumes of the *New York World*, daily and Sunday, covering the years from 1898 to 1930. That was the British Library in London, which started collecting New York newspapers when they became internationally notorious for their role in instigating the Spanish-American War. Over time, as American libraries disposed of their hard-copy newspapers, the set at the British Library probably became the last hard-copy run of those three decades of the *World* (and quite a number of other papers) in existence anywhere.

In the late 1990s, the British Library decided to deaccession — to get rid of — all its bulky holdings of the *New York World* and dozens of other American newspapers. Fortunately, it did not just throw them away. Unfortunately, it did not donate them to another library that might have wanted them. Instead, it decided to auction the newspapers off. No other repository, in the United States or elsewhere, bid to acquire them. The interested bidder was a dealer, of the sort who advertises that you can pick some date of interest to you and send in a check, and he will send you an authentic original copy of your hometown newspaper for that date. One doesn't think, in sending away for such an offer, that you might be getting the very last copy in existence of that day's newspaper, or that the dealer may be mutilating the last available volume of that month's papers to send it to you.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Double Fold*, at 13-14; see also *The Way the World Works* 129.

<sup>9</sup> See *Double Fold* 3-5, 9-13, 22-24, 263-68; *The World on Sunday*, at viii-ix; *The Way the World*

Baker remonstrated with the librarians at the British Library. He was horrified that valuable works of journalism and art — the last surviving set of them — would be lost forever to “box-cutter bisection and plastic-sheathed, issue-by-issue disposal.”<sup>10</sup> The librarians were not horrified; they were committed to selling the volumes to the highest bidder. Without any institutional support at the time, Baker decided that the highest bidder would have to be himself. He formed a non-profit entity called the American Newspaper Repository and put in bids for the runs of the various newspapers, including £9,200 (about \$15,000) for the *World*.<sup>11</sup>

Baker was successful in his bids for the *World* and several other newspapers. In total, he paid £19,282 to the British Library for many years of old *New York Worlds*, *New York Herald Tribunes*, and about ninety other titles. He then acquired several other runs, including decades of *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, from the dealer who had bought them from the British Library. In total, Baker spent about \$150,000,<sup>12</sup> most of which he raised by cashing in his retirement account.<sup>13</sup>

The British Library shipped the papers to Baker, who rented a facility in which to house them. From 2000 to 2004, thousands of irreplaceable volumes of the *New York World* and 90 other newspapers resided, still at Baker’s expense,<sup>14</sup> in warehouse space in a converted mill building in Rollinsford, New Hampshire, located between a potato chip manufacturer and an importer of French underwear.<sup>15</sup>

In 2003, the Duke University Library, under the leadership of David Ferriero,<sup>16</sup> offered to take ownership of the American Newspaper Repository collection. Baker agreed, on condition that Duke promise to keep the collection forever intact, and all the newspapers traveled to North Carolina the following year. Before the volumes of the *World* were shipped from New Hampshire to North Carolina, Baker and his wife, Margaret Brentano,

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*Works* 128, 153-54.

<sup>10</sup> *The World on Sunday*, at ix; *The Way the World Works* 153.

<sup>11</sup> *Double Fold*, at 265; Nicholson Baker, “Deadline,” *The New Yorker*, July 24, 2000, at 42.

<sup>12</sup> *The World on Sunday*, at ix-x; *The Way the World Works* 152-53.

<sup>13</sup> See *Double Fold*, at 265; interview with Nicholson Baker, [www.identitytheory.com/nicholson-baker](http://www.identitytheory.com/nicholson-baker) (Mar. 11, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Some support was later provided by the Knight Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> *The World on Sunday*, at x; see also *The Way the World Works* 128-29, 153-54.

<sup>16</sup> Ferriero was later the Director of the New York Public Library from 2004 to 2009. Since 2009, he has served as the Archivist of the United States.

selected more than 100 of the most interesting, most historic, and most colorful pages that appeared in the *Sunday World* over a 14-year period and published them as a coffee-table book, *The World on Sunday: Graphic Art in Joseph Pulitzer's Newspaper (1898-1911)*. The book vividly displays the visual artistry and some of the journalism of a bygone age; it is highly recommended.

The American Newspaper Repository is now prominently publicized as part of Duke's library holdings,<sup>17</sup> and its contents are readily available to researchers — including Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts interested in the *World's* reprintings of "The Norwood Builder" and other stories. In particular, its holding of the 1911 reprinting, like the missing three-quarter of the Cambridge fifteen, has proved indispensable. "The Norwood Builder" of 1911 was a self-contained eight-page pamphlet included with issues of the *Sunday World*. It is omitted from the microfilm version of the *Sunday World* — and hence from all electronic versions based on that microfilm — but it was part of the British Library's physical set and hence is now part of Duke's. The editors are glad that we could locate it and share it with our readers.



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<sup>17</sup> See [library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/americannewspaperrepository/](http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/americannewspaperrepository/).