

“THE GOODRICH LIBRARY”

(1887)

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Foreword

By

Douglas A. Hedin

Editor, MLHP

The first inkling that Aaron Goodrich, the first Chief Justice of Minnesota Territory, had an unusual desire to possess books appeared in 1853 when he refused to turn over the Supreme Court law library to a successor, Henry Hayner. Goodrich served from May 22, 1849, when he took the oath of office, to October 21, 1851, when he was dismissed by President Fillmore. He challenged his removal by filing suit in federal court in Washington, D. C. He was replaced by Jerome Fuller, who served until August 31, 1852, when Hayner was confirmed as Chief Justice. Hayner arrived in the Territory in early October 1852, and soon learned that the court’s law library was being held hostage by Goodrich, whose legal challenge was pending. Hayner dispatched the Deputy U. S. Marshall to Goodrich’s residence for the books, but Goodrich refused to relinquish them claiming that he was still the incumbent Chief. On January 14, 1853, an exasperated Hayner wrote to Edward Everett, Secretary of State, summarizing the standoff.¹ Eventually Goodrich lost his suit,² and at some point the court’s library was replenished.

After his dismissal, Goodrich remained in Minnesota Territory; he invested in real estate and practiced politics but not law. He was one of the founders of the Republican Party in Minnesota. In campaign speeches, he drew lessons from antiquity, especially the fall of Rome. He

¹ Microfilm M499, Roll 8, image 196, Ronald M. Hubbs Microfilm Room, Minnesota Historical Society.

² *United States ex rel. Aaron Goodrich v. James Guthrie, Secretary of the Treasury*, 58 U. S. 284 (1855) (MLHP, 2015).

Recd Jan 31st

H. L. Vose
14 Jan

St. Paul Minnesota
Territory 14 January 1853

Hon. Ed. Everett
Secy. of State U.S.

Sir

In pursuance of the request contained
in your letter of the 28th December last I caused the
Deputy Marshall of the Territory to call on Judge
Goodrich and exhibit your letter to him accompanied
with the request that he would deliver the books viz.
the first 8 Vols. of the U.S. Statutes at large and the
8th 9th & 10th Vols. of Howard's Reports for which my receipt
was offered. I understand he refused to surrender
them on the ground that he claims still to be
legal incumbent of the office of Chief Justice
of the Territory and that he cannot recognize that
he has been legally superseded. You do not
say whether you can consistently with the rules
of your department send them to me or not.
If you I should be much pleased to have you do
so.

Very respectfully your
obedient servant

H. L. Vose

Mr. Hunter says - such a question is pending
& will not answer at present

J. S. Feb 2, 1853

toured with Carl Schurz on behalf of the Republican ticket in Minnesota
in 1859. In his memoirs, Schurz described Goodrich on the stump:

His oratory, too, was somewhat singular. We agreed to alternate in the order of proceedings in addressing audiences; Judge Goodrich was to speak first at one meeting and I at the next, so that we listened to one another a great deal. His speeches always had a sound, sober, and strong body of argument, enlivened by some robust anecdotes after the fashion of the stump, but he regularly closed with an elaborate peroration couched in wonderfully gorgeous and high-sounding phrase, in which the ruins of Palmyra and the decline and fall of the Roman Empire played a great and mysterious part. That a man of such a practical intellect and large reading, and so capable of strong reasoning should please himself in such a sophomorical display, astonished me not a little. It actually troubled me. One night, when after a very successful meeting and after an especially cordial and confidential talk we went to bed together, I picked up courage to say: "Judge, those sentences about the ruins of Palmyra and the downfall of the Roman Empire are very poetical. But I have not been able exactly to catch their meaning and application to the slavery question. Will you tell me?" The Judge gave a good-natured laugh. "Well," said he, "I have thought all along that the ruins of Palmyra and the downfall of the Roman Empire would strike you. The fact is, I composed the piece in which those sentences occur, many years ago when I was young, and I have always been fond of it and kept it in my memory. I thought it would do splendidly to wind up a speech with. It's true, its bearing upon the slavery question is not quite clear. But don't it sound beautiful? And don't you believe it sets folks to thinking?" Of course, I thought it did, and there was nothing more to be said.³

³ Carl Schurz in Aaron Goodrich, 'Early Courts in Minnesota' with Recollections of Goodrich by William P. Murray, Edward Sullivan, Charles Francis Adams Jr., Carl Schurz and Thomas McLean Newson, Concluding with Goodrich's Self Portrait." 18-19 (MLHP, 2010-2015) (published first in Carl Schurz, II *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (1852-1863)* 143-47 (1907)).

Between campaign stops, Goodrich told Schurz that he planned to write an exposé of Christopher Columbus:

He spoke of the so-called "Great Discoverer of the New World" with intense indignation, and denounced him as an assassin, a hypocrite and false pretender, a cruel tyrant, and a downright pirate. He was industriously pursuing his inquiries concerning that infamous person, and he was going to expose the fraud in a book which he hoped to publish before long.⁴

This project would take fifteen years, and was made possible when President Lincoln rewarded him with an appointment as secretary of the American Legation in Brussels, Belgium. He held this diplomatic post for eight years. While there he married, toured Europe and bought books . . . and more books . . . and still more books. In a self-portrait in the *United States Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men*, published in 1879, he described this chapter in his life:

During that period, he had an excellent opportunity to gratify his literary, and more especially his antiquarian, tastes. He has many valuable tokens of his research while in the old world, consisting of rare and singularly illustrated books. He visited most of the public libraries in the great cities of Europe, and gathered much of the material for a work which produced quite a sensation, — "A History of the Character and Achievements of the so-called Christopher Columbus," a work of four hundred pages octavo, published by D. Appleton and Co. in 1874.⁵

He died in St. Paul on June 24, 1887, two weeks shy of his eightieth year. The next month his widow invited a *St. Paul Daily Globe* reporter to view the library while she prepared an inventory for its eventual sale. On July 17, an article headlined "The Goodrich Library" appeared in that news-

⁴ Id. at 18.

⁵ Id. at 26.

paper.⁶ It was illustrated with a sketch of the late jurist. Three months later, the availability of the library was noticed in the *Globe*:

A Valuable library For Sale.

For many years the late Judge Aaron P. Goodrich, of St. Paul, was noted all over the world for being a bibliomaniac and collector of rare works, and it was found that he had left a very valuable and rare library to his heirs. Since the death of her husband, Mrs. Goodrich has been engaged in the work of cataloguing and classifying the contents of the library, and she has just completed her labors. It is now proposed to offer the collection for sale as a whole or in three lots, as follows: First, library; second, pamphlets in appendix; third, law library. Applications should be addressed to Mrs. A. P. Goodrich, No. 305 Grove street, St. Paul.⁷

His collection dispersed, the question remains: was the collector a bibliomaniac? The newspapers said he was.

Bibliomania is an extreme desire, a passion, in some cases an obsession, to acquire and possess books. Goodrich was an antiquarian who loved very old books.⁸ And he wanted to own them. While in Brussels, he hired agents to search the book stores and stalls of Europe for additions to his library, which eventually exceeded 2,500 volumes. A common symptom of many collectors who happily endure this infliction is that they do not read the books they buy. Bibliomania, an early student of the scourge wrote, is "an appetite for COLLECTING Books, — carefully distinguished from, wholly unconnected with, nay absolutely repugnant to, all idea of READING them."⁹ But Goodrich sometimes did. He bought certain

⁶ The article, originally three long paragraphs, has been divided for ease of reading. The original spellings of book titles and authors are unchanged.

⁷ *St. Paul Daily Globe*, October 29, 1887, at 2.

⁸ He owned at least one *incunabulum* (a book published before 1500).

⁹ James Beresford, quoted in Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books* 26 (Henry Holt and Co., 1995). Goodrich is not mentioned by Basbanes.

books to use while writing his *magnum opus*, his unmasking of the usurper, the “so-called Christopher Columbus.” Another characteristic is that the compulsion to accumulate is unabated, the urge always there.¹⁰ Goodrich’s book buying frenzy, however, seems to have slowed when he returned to Minnesota after his diplomatic service. All this leads to a final diagnosis: At times in his life, Aaron Goodrich was “touched by the gentlest of infirmities, bibliomania.”¹¹

¹⁰ In an early study of what he called “this fatal disease,” Thomas Frognall Dibdin wrote:

It has raged chiefly in palaces, castles, halls, and gay mansions and those things which in general are supposed not to be inimical to health, such as cleanliness, spaciousness, and splendor, are only so many inducements toward the introduction and propagation of the BIBLIOMANIA! What renders it particularly formidable is that it rages in all seasons of the year, and at all periods of human existence.

Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *The Bibliomania; or, Book-Madness; A Bibliographical Romance* (1809), quoted in Basbanes, note 6, at 25.

¹¹ Benjamin Franklin Thomas on his grandfather, quoted in Basbanes, note 6, at 3.

St. Paul Sunday Globe

July 17, 1887

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THE GOODRICH LIBRARY.

A Day Among the Books that Were
the Friends of Judge Aaron
Goodrich.

A Rare Work on Botany Dated 1613,
With Original Drawings Printed
on Vellum.

A Calendar of Spanish State Papers
Printed on Vellum, Extending
From 1509 to 1525.

Other Works that Help to Bring the
Value of the Library Up to
\$50,000.



Bibliomania was a marked characteristic of the late Judge Goodrich, and in the third-story rooms of his former residence on Tenth street, near John, are numerous evidences of his tastes in this direction. No attempt had been made at classification or sequence by Judge Goodrich, but as fast as his treasures accumulated he would store them away in piles upon the floors after the capacious shelves could no longer hold them.

Bookbuyers all over this continent and abroad knew Judge Goodrich to be a desirable patron, and especially of works relating to the early discoveries in America by Columbus and other navigators, and it is doubtful if any library in the world has a finer or more complete set of works on this subject than can be found amid the musty tomes of the house in St. Paul. Through the courtesy of Mr[s]. Goodrich, who, by the way, is a

most accomplished linguist and possessed of a valuable fund of information concerning the rare books of this and other countries, a Globe representative was enabled to make a thorough inspection of the library in question one day last week.

One of the first objects that attracted attention was a large parchment bound work on botany, printed on vellum and bearing the date 1613, all the plates being originals and in keeping with the time when the appliances for engraving were so crude. This was stated to be one of the rarest works extant, and at a sale where connoisseurs abounded there would be no difficulty in obtaining upwards of \$5,000 for it. It is probably just as well to say at this point that the collection gathered by Mr. Goodrich, at a fair valuation, is worth in the neighborhood of \$50,000, and he spent nearly that sum during his life in gratifying his love for this most commendable hobby.

There are about 2,500 volumes in the collection and numerous pamphlets, for it was a practice of Judge Goodrich to preserve every pamphlet on public matters that he received, and thus some rare modern publications have been preserved. All the books will be carefully examined and catalogued by the heirs, so that at a glance the librarians of the United States can readily see what a treasure trove has been unearthed. Cost did not count with Judge Goodrich when he learned of the existence of a rare work, and his agents were well aware of this, particularly one at Brussels, who ran-sacked the book stalls of Europe in the interest of his patron and with the most gratifying results.

Along about 1870 there was an article published in Harper's Magazine regarding the rarest books extant, and a glance over Judge Goodrich's shelves shows that many of these works are embraced in his collection. It is not an unusual sight under the present order of things to find a copy of Rannesid's Voyages bearing the imprint 1606 resting cosily alongside a small paper bound parcel of pamphlets treating of the War of American Independence in 1776. Months could be profitably spent amid these rare publications, and each day would result in a valuable find for the historian, so that it need not surprise any one to one day see this collection gracing the halls of the congressional library at Washington, especially as Librarian Spofford is well aware of the merit that it possesses.

The collection is particularly rich, as already stated, in works relating to early discoveries in America, and a feature is a large work entitled *Bibliolica Rara*, embracing a number of letters written by Columbus prior to sailing for the new world and extending through his several voyages after his famous landing in the Bahamas in October, 1492, then a calendar of Spanish state papers for a period extending through 1509 to 1525, in the peculiar parchment and vellum, with strings attached to keep the book in shape, cannot fail to rivet the observer's attention, and the same may be said of the history of Caesar in Spanish, by Sanchez, the date on the title page being 1655. Another large book containing original plates shows the designs of tapestries in the days of Louis XIV., of France, the text being black letter German and French. History of music, dated 1659 and dedicated to the Archduke Leopold, is a rare and beautiful work, which is wonderfully well preserved; in fact this is a noticeable feature of the entire library, the rare old works seeming never to have been

disturbed, but simply laid away for a much needed rest after a tempestuous career.

Probably one of the rarest books extant, and one consequently highly prized by book lovers, is Debry's America, printed in 1585, in German text, with numerous characteristic engravings of the appearance of the globe to the early voyagers of the sixteenth century. Clangeroo's History of Mexico, which is just a century old, is one of the handsomest bound books in the library, and as it belongs to a select edition now very rare, its possessor was justly proud when he received it by paying a handsome bonus to a dealer. The satires of Flaccis are contained in a small book that could be carried in the coat pocket, but the imprint 1494 makes it a costly possession. Justinian's Code, a magnificent edition of 1516, is given in four languages, Hebrew, Greek, Chaldaic and Arabic, and its companion is the Lord's Prayer, a comparatively modern publication in 159 different languages.

A large brown parchment bound book gives the History of Navigation from the earliest dates possible down to the year 1700, and some of the ideas of the pioneer travelers are very ludicrous in the engravings in the book, particularly in the shape of the world, which is represented as flat, round, square, oblong and every way but the right one.

Some of the other precious relics of the fast embraced in the collection are Haklugt's Voyages, Purchas' Pilgrimages of 1625, dedicated to the archbishop of Canterbury; History of Knights Templar, dated 1751, a code diplomatic of 1532; Grignacus' early discoveries in America, 1552, the title of the work being, Novres Orbis Regio; Stephens' World of Wonders, 1607; an edition of Ovid, dated 1550, which is but one of

three very rare and valuable editions of the same work; Apiano's Geography of 1548, and the Royal Conquest of Peru, by Garalisso de la Vega, one of the rarest works in this or any other country. Besides these books, which were only selected at random from the piles scattered all over the house, the collection is particularly rich in works of a later day, many of which have been out of print for many years, and rare and not easy to be replaced by pamphlets.

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Related Articles

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"United States ex rel. Aaron Goodrich v. James Guthrie, Secretary of the Treasury, 58 U. S. 284 (1855)." (MLHP, 2015).

Aaron Goodrich: "A History of the Character and Achievements of the So-called Christopher Columbus." (MLHP, 2015) (published first, 1874).

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