



# Puzzles and Essays from "the Exchange": Tricky Reference Questions

*Charles R Anderson*

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Who said that? When did that happen? Where the heck does that thing come from? Was that French, or what? What's that supposed to mean? For 35 years, librarians in the United States and other countries sent puzzles they could not solve locally to "The Exchange," a column for reference librarians appearing in RQ (and later, RUSQ), the official journal of the Reference and User Services Division of the ALA. Other readers often furnished the answers--sometimes years or even decades later! Puzzles and Essays from "The Exchange" organizes those perplexing questions and answers into a reader-friendly reference format, embellished with essays that appeared in the column over the last fifteen years of its publication. This unique collection of questions and answers that stumped librarians on four continents over a 35-year period comes complete with authoritative bibliographic citations. It also contains an extensive subject, person, and keyword index, providing easy access to the material. Packed with fascinating information, little-known trivia, and hard-to-find facts, Puzzles and Essays from "The Exchange" is a wonderful reference source, answering difficult questions about:

- the origins of common--and not-so-common--customs, like giving engagement rings, driving on the right or left side of the road, tying yellow ribbons around trees in memory of captives, leg shaving, visits from the "Tooth Fairy," and much, much more!
- the origins of words, phrases, and terms that don't, when taken literally, make much sense
- the origins of popular sayings--The grass is always greener; The whole nine yards; It ain't over until the fat lady sings; Close but no cigar; Going down the tube; Light at the end of the tunnel; Katy, bar the door; Goodbye, cruel world; etc.
- the sources of famous quotations--both spurious and real!
- the sources of poetry fragments and bits of verse that have become part of the popular lexicon
- hard-to-find biographical information--from George Washington Carver's many uses for the peanut and the sweet potato to the name of Paul Revere's horse to the truth about the "let them eat cake" story attributed to Marie Antoinette
- trivia and miscellany--how lullabies began; why a yawn is contagious when a sneeze is not; what the names of the monkeys in The Wizard of Oz were; why pigeons bob their heads when they walk; what the vital statistics of the Venus de Milo are; and much more!
- the history of "The Exchange" itself!

Puzzles and Essays from "The Exchange" will also challenge you with a list of so-far unanswered questions, unidentified quotations, and popular sayings whose origins are still generally unknown. Perhaps you'll be the one to answer the riddles that stumped the editors and readers of "The Exchange!"

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