

The Age of Everything: How Science Explores the Past, by Matthew Hedman (249 pages, November 2007), explains the methods that scientists use to compute the age of the Egyptian Pyramids, 7th-century Mayan inscriptions, the first humans in North America, hominid bipedalism, the first mammals, the Solar System, and the universe. Hedman, an astronomer at Cornell University, reviews these complicated and often controversial interdisciplinary topics entertainingly, offering clear insight into the technology behind timelines. \$25.00. University of Chicago. 978-0-226-32292-6.

Colom of Catalonia: Origins of Christopher Columbus Revealed, by Charles J. Merrill (304 pages, September 2008), makes the case that the man who discovered America was not an Italian from Genoa but most likely a Catalan (from the region around Barcelona, Spain) named Christoval Colón. This is not the first time a Catalan nationality has been claimed for Columbus, whose origins are indeed murky, but Merrill, an associate professor of foreign languages at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, argues convincingly that Columbus's name was Catalan, that he and others identified him as a subject of the count of Catalonia-Aragon, and that the sociopolitics of the time were inappropriate for identifying the celebrated Admiral of the Ocean as a member of a family hostile to the Trastámara dynasty that ruled his country. \$16.95. Demers Books. 978-0-9816002-2-2.

The Columbia Gazetteer of the World, edited by Saul B. Cohen (4,424 pages, 2d ed., 3 vols., July 2008), the successor to the 1952 *Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World*, is still the definitive print reference guide to place names. Since its first edition in 1998,

entries have been revised in the online edition by editorial board members and research staff, resulting in the addition of some 7,000 place names. But how does this new print resource fit into the era of the allegedly error-prone Wikipedia? Should we revere it unthinkingly because it has a distinguished editorial board? Compare Breezy Point, Long Island. Columbia has it in the borough of Brooklyn, while Wikipedia has it in the borough of Queens. An obvious Wikipedia error, right? Wrong. The official Queens Borough Web site includes Breezy Point, while the official Brooklyn page comes up with no results on a Breezy Point search. Oops!

So despite the source, the knowledgeable reference librarian must exercise critical thinking skills. But how does this new gazetteer fare against Wikipedia in general? It depends on what you are looking for. Except for occasional errors like Breezy Point, the Columbia gazetteer holds its own. If you are looking for pronunciation, Columbia is the only place to go. It's also better for physiographic features, industries, small towns and villages in non-Western countries, local history, parks and game reserves, and rivers and other bodies of water. Many entries (usually non-U.S.) in the gazetteer are only stubs or nonexistent in Wikipedia.

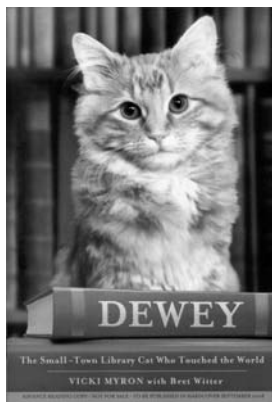
Both Columbia and Wikipedia offer area size (often differing), population (Columbia uses official sources that are often more than ten years out of date, while Wikipedia has the most recent count, whether it's official or not), latitude and longitude coordinates, and information on the larger administrative unit (region, province, state, metropolitan area). However, this is what Wikipedia offers that the gazetteer does not (though not for every place name): etymology, maps and photos, external links, current names of town mayors, elevation, U.S. and foreign postal codes and telephone area codes, coats of arms and flags, Web sites, population density, details on ethnicity and languages spoken, time

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zones, recent events, notable residents, bibliographic references, town mottoes, sports, media, tourism, transport, the non-Roman script equivalent for the place name (Chinese, Korean, Arabic), education, museums, libraries, sister cities, place names in fiction and cinema, and climate charts. Sometimes Wikipedia does better with history (especially on a regional basis) and even industry (it lists the Leinenkugel brewery and Cray Research for Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, while the gazetteer skips both). Sometimes Columbia does better with local art and architecture.

Occasionally it's difficult to determine which source is correct. For the Cathedral of San Nicolo in Castellanata, Italy, Wikipedia says it was built in 1220 and remade in the 18th century; Columbia says it was built in the 12th century and rebuilt in the 15th. I don't know which dates are accurate, although the Italian version of Wikipedia, which has the same dates as the English version, might have stronger credentials. Other times, neither source mentions an obvious (to me) feature. Both ignore the historic Danish windmill in Elk Horn, Iowa (although they mention the town as a center of Danish ethnicity). As comprehensive as the Columbia gazetteer seems to be, it should not be the only source you consult. \$595.00. Columbia University. 978-0-231-14551-1.

Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World, by Vicki Myron, with Bret Witter (288 pages, September 2008), tells

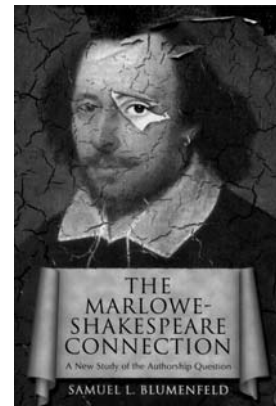


the story of Dewey Readmore Books, the cat who lived at the Spencer (Iowa) Public Library and served as its patron greeter and de facto public relations ambassador from 1988 to 2006. Although much of the book concerns Dewey, who turned up in the library's book drop one frigid January morning, it's also about

the people of Spencer—the good old boys at Sisters Caf who survived both the re of 1931 and the farm crisis of the 1980s, the wheelchair-bound Crystal who bonded with Dewey in a special way, and especially Myron (Spencer's former library director), who realized Dewey's potential to transform the community's perception of the library. Myron portrays Dewey as a playful, intelligent, charismatic cat that seemed to know instinctively when a child or adult needed cheering up. \$19.99. Grand Central. 978-0-446-40741-0.

The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection,

by Samuel L. Blumenfeld (360 pages, June 2008), makes as good a case as possible that Shakespeare's plays and sonnets were written by playwright Christopher Marlowe, who faked his own death in 1593 (with the help of several of Queen Elizabeth's secret agents) to avoid having to stand trial for heresy, in those days a hanging offense. Blumenfeld



argues that the Bard of Avon was merely a frontman through whom Marlowe's plays and poems could reach an audience. Central to this thesis is the lack of any documentation that Shakespeare was a writer; evidence exists that he was only an actor, a theater shareholder, and businessman. The first author to expound on what is now called the Marlovian theory was Calvin Hoffman, who wrote *The Murder of the Man Who Was "Shakespeare"* in 1955. Blumenfeld builds on the foundation laid by Hoffman and other writers who have questioned mainstream Shakespeare scholarship, and he examines the sonnets and each of the plays in the First Folio of 1623, compiled seven years after the playwright's death, for clues to their authorship. \$45.00. McFarland. 978-0-7864-3902-7. *zz*