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The George Wright Forum was the journal of the George Wright Society from 1981 through 2018, published in 35 volumes with a total of 125 issues. Its mission was to “examine critical issues and present new research related to parks, protected areas, and cultural sites around the world.” The hallmark of the journal was its interdisciplinary approach, covering all fields relevant to natural and cultural heritage stewardship.

Early volumes of the journal did not carry dates embedded on each page, so that information is provided on this cover sheet.

The George Wright Forum ceased publication at the end of 2018. Beginning in 2020, it is continued by *Parks Stewardship Forum*, an open-access journal co-published by the George Wright Society and the University of California, Berkeley, Institute for Parks, People, and Biodiversity. *Parks Stewardship Forum* continues both the mission and the interdisciplinary approach of *The George Wright Forum*. The first volume of *Parks Stewardship Forum* is denominated as Volume 36 to indicate this continuity. *Parks Stewardship Forum* is published at <https://escholarship.org/uc/psf> and has been selected by the Library of Congress to be archived as “an important and valuable addition to our collections and to the historical record.”

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Rare Materials and Easy Marks

Thomas W. Lucke

The US National Park Service's Management Policies state that the "acceptance and retention of private collections of relevant historical materials by parks is encouraged, provided they are confined to printed matter, photographs, maps, and copies of original documents."¹ Using this broadly worded policy, many park areas have built up extensive libraries devoted to particular subjects: the Indian Wars, geology, volcanism, Colonial America, archeology, and the Civil War, to mention but a few. Donations from individuals and private institutions, purchases of books and maps with year-end money, and the acquisition of library materials through various cooperating associations have allowed the National Park Service to develop, in some of its parks, libraries of extraordinary value. While one could not accuse any park staff member of believing, as was stated by the late A. N. L. Munby, librarian at King's College of Cambridge University, that "Book collecting is much too serious a pursuit to waste time on reading," it can be said that park staff members have diligently gathered together over the years irreplaceable collections of printed and written materials. Such collections have proven themselves to be of tremendous worth to scholars, students of park histories and authors.

In December of 1981, the American industrialist Armand Hammer, for the sum of \$5.1 million, purchased *Of the Nature and Movement of Water*, Leonardo da Vinci's handwritten notebook. Few, if any, documents in libraries throughout the Park System would command such attention or such a price. However, many of the library items are valuable, and many are increasing in value daily. Old atlases, first editions, maps, Bureau of American Ethnology reports, natural history books and old manuscripts are all in high demand by collectors. A billion dollars worth of business in rare books alone is done annually around the world. Any review of book dealers' price lists will show that prices for such items as works on natural history, atlases and first editions have risen steadily and consistently over the past several decades.

Many parks have concentrated their acquisitions on works that deal with natural history. The prices of many such works have sky-rocketed in recent years. As an example, Captain James Cook's *Voyages of Discovery*, a popular three-volume set, sold for \$4,000 in the mid-1970s and is now selling for approximately \$12,000. John James Audubon's *The Birds of North America* now retails at \$1 million, and Audubon's *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* is retailing, depending on its condition, for between \$70,000 and \$75,000. Even the reprints of Audubon's works are valuable. When Audubon's *The Birds of North America* was reproduced by Johnson Reprint Corporation, in 1974, it sold for \$5,000; today it brings \$20,000 at auction. George Catlin's *North American Indian Portfolio* is presently retailing at approximately \$30,000.²

Many park librarians have purchased first editions of Twentieth Century authors where the work related directly to the park theme or concerned resources for which the park area was set aside. In the United States today, first editions form the bulk of the book trade, and first editions can increase in value dramatically. As an example, John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*, which sold for \$10 a year ago, is presently selling for \$60.



A final example of price increases centers on old maps and atlases. Many park libraries have these in abundance. Early Dutch, Portuguese, Russian, French or English maps or charts of the new world are scarce and are considered as both art objects and research documents. The same is true of maps and charts by early explorers of the American West. Atlases, such as those produced by Nicholas Visscher, in Amsterdam in the late 1600s, can retail for as high as \$75,000. In the United States today, the demand for these documents is particularly intense.

The above are only examples of the types of items that can be found in park libraries, items that are consistently increasing in value and price. In fact, it is common for many such documents to increase in price by 20 to 30 percent a year. They are among the best of all fine art investments. And, because of the increasing value, the theft of such items is something that should concern the park staff.

Thefts of rare books, first editions and maps are numerous today. In 1979, 27 volumes of James Cook's *Voyages of Discovery* disappeared from the California State Library at Long Beach. Yale University has discovered that rare maps are being taken from its Sterling Memorial Library. An instructor at the University of California at Riverside was arrested two years ago for removing 10,500 books, valued at \$440,000.³ Libraries throughout the country are encountering such thefts and, because of them security devices are being installed.

The Chicago Public Library, which lost \$2 million worth of books from 1979 to 1981, is installing a \$1.7 million computerized circulation-control system. An electronic system installed at the University of Pennsylvania libraries cut losses by 39 percent and paid for itself in 38 months. A number of libraries are employing a system of "Tattle Tapes," a very sensitive strip concealed in book bindings that sets off an alarm system if the book is taken past a check-point or doorway.

With prices of books, maps, manuscripts and other printed matter increasing in value and as the number of thefts of such items continues to rise, it is imperative that park staff members become more familiar with the book market and the value of park collections. A number of publications are available for this purpose.

The American Book Collector (The Moretus Press, Inc., \$16.50 per year) is a bimonthly periodical. It includes listings of dealers' catalogues, articles on collecting trends, and stories on specialized fields of collecting.

A B Bookman's Weekly (P. O. Box AB, Clifton, New Jersey 07015, \$35.00 per year) is a weekly periodical that carries among other things, extensive listings of books for sale and books wanted by dealers.

Book Collecting: A Modern Guide (R. R. Bowker, \$15.95), edited by Jean Peters, is a collection of essays by leading book dealers, conservators, librarians and people knowledgeable about the book trade. It contains articles on appraisal techniques, conservation of rare books, etc.

The time has come for national park services to take a close look at their libraries and the valuable items that many of them contain. They are a valuable cultural resource, and they need proper attention and protection if they are to continue to be available for future generations.

NOTES:

- 1 *Management Policies*, U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1978, p. V-10.
- 2 The figures used in this article were obtained from the July 1981 issue of *The Collector Investor* (Vol. 2, No. 7). The issue contains several articles on bibliophiles and book collecting.
- 3 These examples were taken from "Light-Fingered Bibliophiles: Library Thefts Soar, and Security Systems Multiply," *Time*, October 19, 1981 (Vol. 118, No. 16), p. 86.

