

Book Collecting 101

The Fundamentals

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Member, ABAA, NOBS, IOBA, MWABA

Bookspiration



Folger
Shakespeare
Library
(Washington, DC)



The Historic New Orleans Collection



Beinecke Library at Yale University
(New Haven, CT)



Cornell University Library (home of Human
Sexuality Collection) (Ithaca, NY)

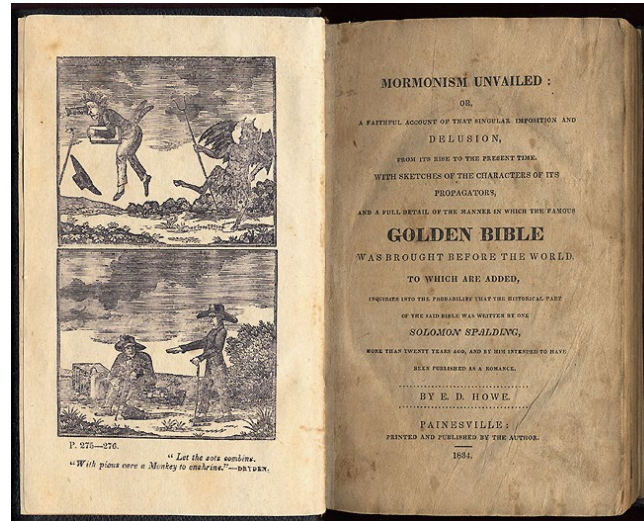
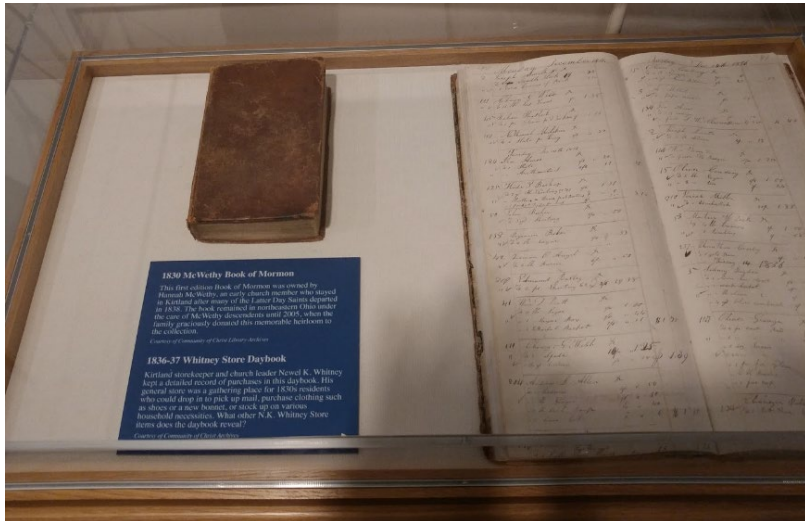
Some are here in Northeast Ohio!



Eleanor Squire
Library at
Cleveland
Botanical
Gardens



Frederick B. Artz
Collection on the
History of
the Book
(Oberlin College)



(L to R) First edition of the Book of Mormon; manuscript ledger for a Mormon-owned dry goods store; and the first anti-Mormon book housed at the Kirtland Temple Visitor's Center (Kirtland, OH)

Most common questions

- What should I collect?
- Should I invest in rare books?
- What is a first edition?
- There aren't as many bookstores as there used to be. Where should I look for books?
- How do I evaluate condition?
- How do I take care of my books?

What should I collect?

- Easy answer: collect what you want to collect!
- Different approaches for different tastes
 - Single authors, e.g. Dickens, Willa Cather
 - Books by women or African-Americans
 - Books in a single subject area – environmental advocacy, Lutheranism, etc.
 - The “great novels”
 - Signed books and association copies
 - Or. . . Even more eclectic
- Most importantly, don’t overthink it at the beginning! Start small and inexpensively.

Should I invest in rare books?

- Short answer: No. Real estate! Stocks!
- The internet has proven the great rare books to be truly rare, but many, many more books to be common.
- Truly important and expensive rare books in superior condition = good investment
- Regardless, you should collect out of personal desire to own the books, and be willing to lose some money.

What is a first edition?

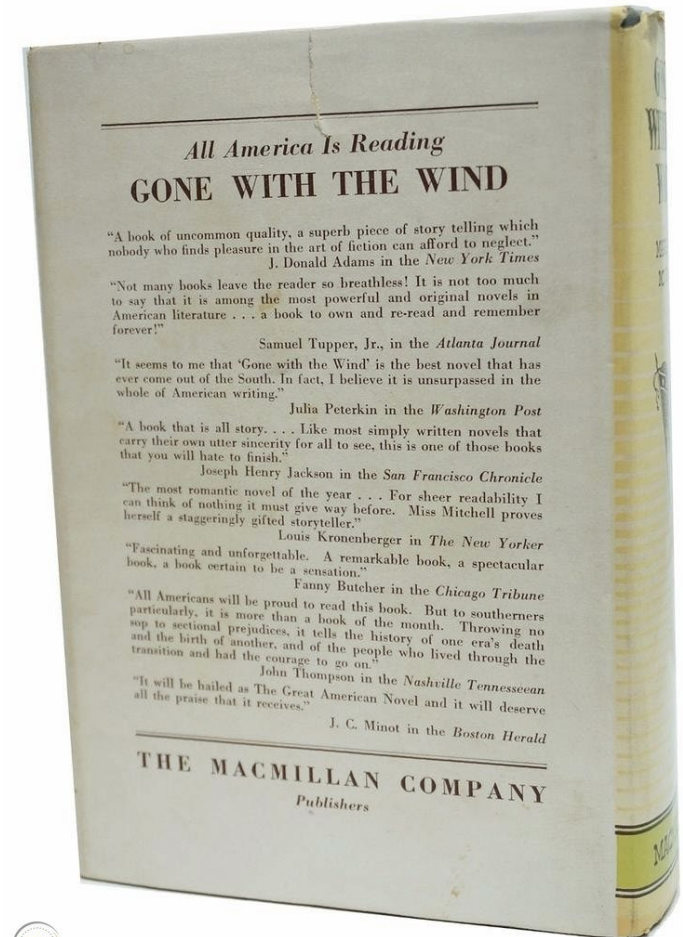
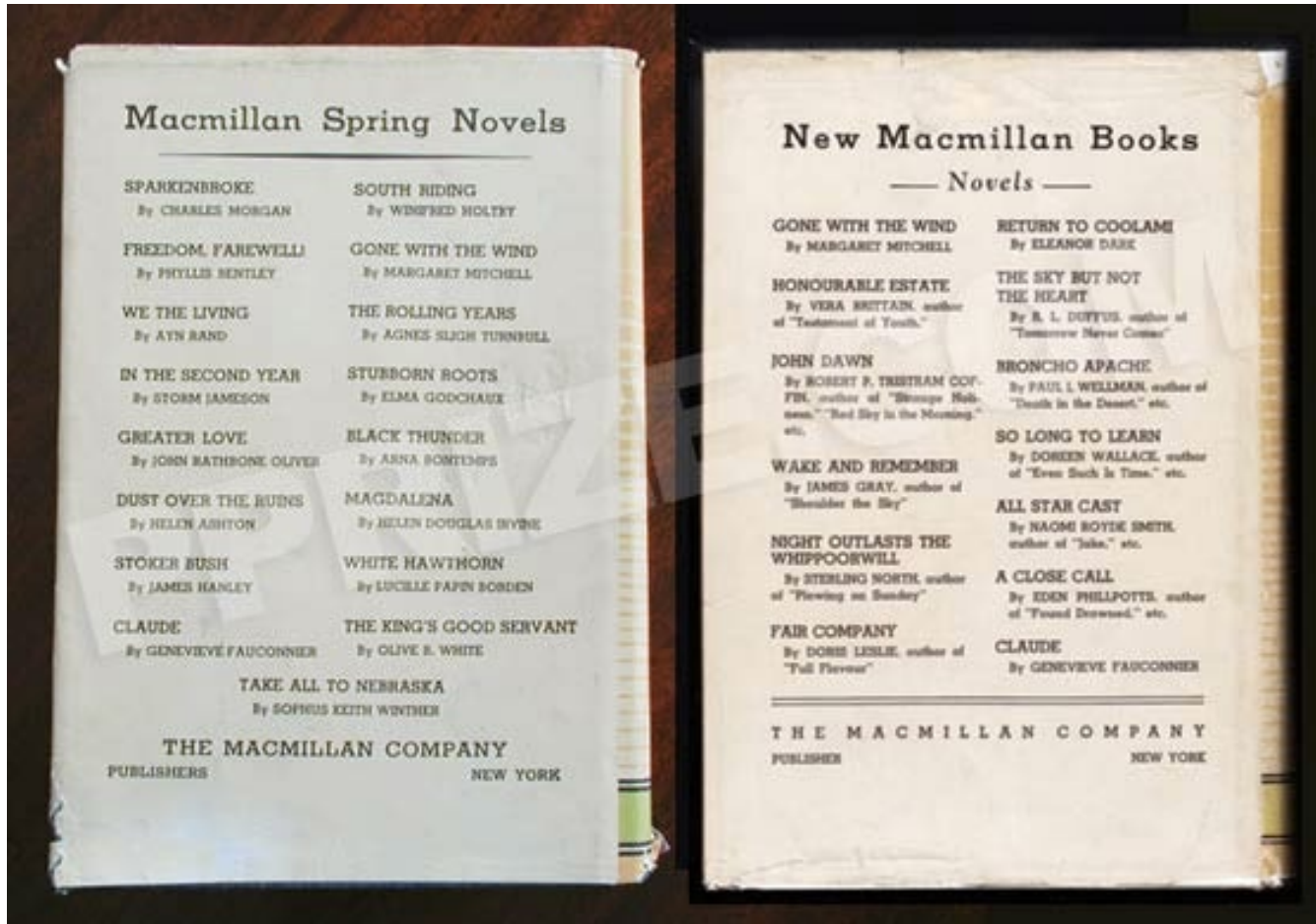
- VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYcp4QBeGsQ>
- Ordinary, flexible definition: the first published version of the text, in any printing or format
- Book-collecting definition: the first printing of the book
- You can see the difference in scarcity – first printing of *Gone With the Wind* = 5000 copies. Same version of text appears in countless reprints.
- So, who cares?

Gone with the Wind

First printing (May 1936)

Second printing (June 1936)

Later printing (ca. 1938)



The Sun Also Rises

"Just temporarily," I said. "We're talking bulls."
"You *are* superior."
"Tell him that bulls have no horns," Mike shouted.
He was drunk.
Romero looked at me inquiringly.
"Drunk," I said. "Borracho! Muy borracho!"
"You might introduce your friends," Brett said. She
had not stopped looking at Pedro Romero. I asked
them if they would like to have coffee with us. They
both stood up. Romero's face was very brown. He had
very nice manners.
I introduced them all around and they started to sit
down, but there was not enough room, so we all moved
over to the big table by the wall to have coffee. Mike
ordered a bottle of Fundador and glasses for everybody.
There was a lot of drunken talking.

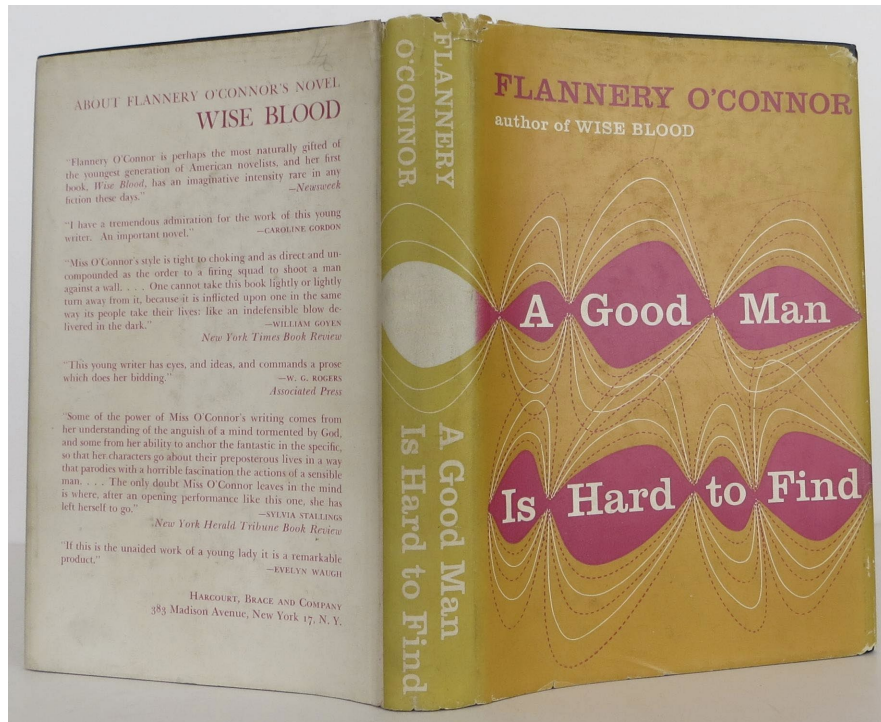
~\$40,000 book

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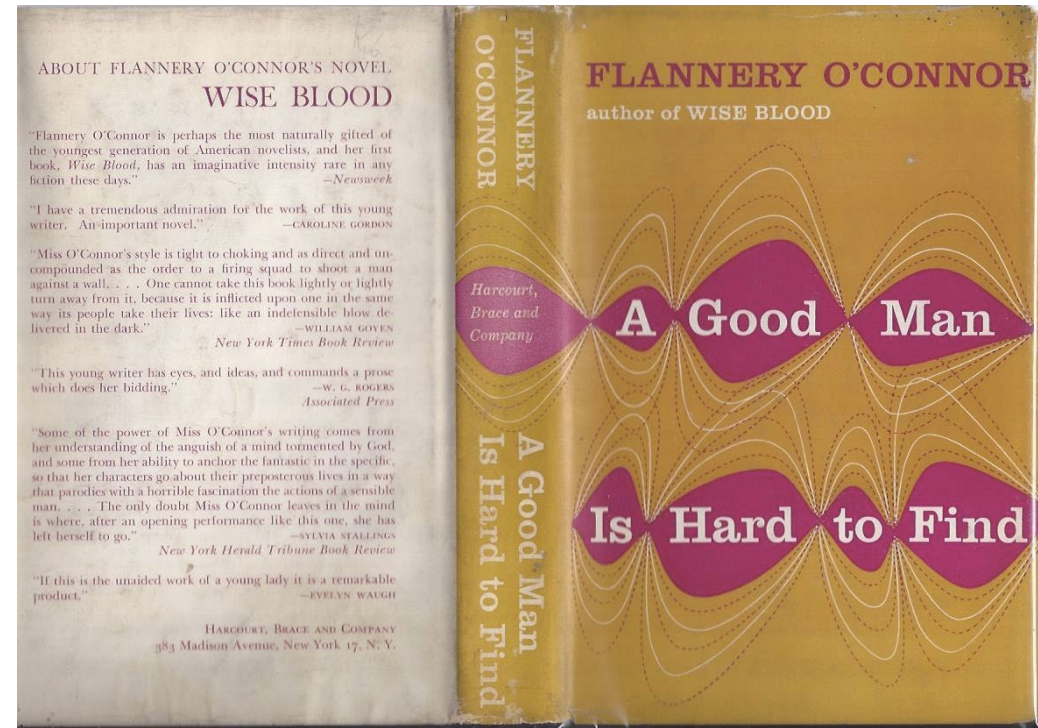
~\$4,000 book

Condition, Condition, Condition

- Why is condition important to collectors?
 - Over time, materials degrade, books are abused, and the surviving “nice” copies become rare and “hard to find.”



~\$500 retail



~\$2500+ retail

Condition Grades

- **FINE:** very nice, bright, clean, tight, unmarked. Needn't be completely flawless, but any flaws should be minor/forgivable, and clearly noted (use caution for listings with terms like "mint" or "as new." Still OK terms, but not traditionally used by trained antiquarian booksellers).
- **NEAR FINE:** Still strikingly nice, tight, fresh – possibly price-clipped dust jacket, owner's name on endpapers, spine a bit cocked, or a visible tear to the jacket. Should still be "gift quality" to any ordinary person.
- **VERY GOOD (+/-):** Probably most of the books in your house, except for the ones you've read 20 times. Binding may be shaken, flattened creases, jacket has some tears or creases, owner's name, etc. Still attractive and not "beaten up."
- **GOOD (+/-):** "Good ain't good." Book is complete, binding likely soiled or stained, some pen or pencil underlining or marginal notations. A "good" copy of a rare book might still be owned by a serious book collector, but they would likely want to replace it at some point with a better copy.
- **FAIR, POOR, BLASTED, ATROCIOUS, ETC:** These are books everybody avoids – differences are generally not that important. A "fair" copy should still at least be textually complete (maybe missing an illustration or two), readable by someone who wants the book for the words.

eBay, Amazon, ABEbooks – the Wild, Wild West

- Can I buy rare books online?
 - Absolutely. Read descriptions carefully.
 - ASK QUESTIONS.
 - Ask a bookseller to send you photos if none are listed.
 - Amazon? Designed to deliver reading copies of books to consumers who are not particular (but great stuff can be found there!)
 - Unless you're getting dealers' catalogues or going to book fairs, stick to ABEbooks, Biblio.com, and the the ABAA marketplace.
 - eBay is a lot of fun and good for consumers, but caution is always advised

In a pinch, which of these is a safer buy?

ABEbooks listing from an ABAA-member bookseller



The Handmaid's Tale
ATWOOD, Margaret

Published by Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA (1986)
ISBN 10: [0395404258](#) / ISBN 13: [9780395404256](#)

Used Hardcover First Edition

Quantity Available: 1

From: [Redacted] ([Redacted] h, IL, U.S.A.)
[Seller Rating: ★★★★★](#)

[Add to Basket](#)

US\$ 100.00
[Convert currency](#)

Shipping: US\$ 5.50
Within U.S.A.
[Destination, rates & speeds](#)

About this Item: Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA, 1986. First U.S. edition. Hardcover. First printing. The classic dystopian novel from the Booker Prize winning author of "The Blind Assassin." The basis for a movie with Robert Duvall, Faye Dunaway, Natasha Richardson and Aidan Quinn as well as the acclaimed tv series with Elisabeth Moss and Joseph Fiennes. A tight about very good copy with some waviness to the fore edge of pages 161-170 in a very good dust jacket with some scratching to the front cover. Seller Inventory # [Redacted]

Amazon listing from a 3rd-party seller

\$22.18
+ \$4.49 shipping + \$2.13 estimated tax

Used - Very Good
Over 1 Million Satisfied Customers. Buy With Confidence, 100% Money Back Guarantee!

- Arrives between October 1-4.
- Want it delivered Friday, October 4? Choose **Standard Shipping** at checkout.
- [Shipping rates](#) and [return policy](#).

[Redacted]
★★★★☆ **87% positive**
over the past 12 months.
(71,438 total ratings)

Maintaining your books

- Books are sturdy – don't fuss too much about handling them. Use common sense (no oily or dirty hands, don't crack the spine or dog-ear pages). But they are meant to be read, so don't treat them like priceless jewels.
- It's OK to write in your books (I do it every day) – light pencil, and use a WHITE eraser to gently remove markings. Hesitate to write in books printed on handmade paper, which can show evidence of erasure.
- Put them on shelves, standing straight up, packed snugly, but not tightly (this can slant the spine).
- Direct sunlight = bad news for jacket spines (remember Flannery O'Connor?). Also bad for book's front and rear boards (covers), which dry out and warp.
- Water is obviously bad, but the more common and insidious enemy is moisture. Leads to mildew, dust-soiling, and foxing. If any books must be kept in a basement situation for any length of time, use a dehumidifier.
- Resources – book jacket covers are spiffy and “archival.”

Final thoughts

- Apprehensive/nervous? Use the “Ask Bookseller a Question” feature on ABEbooks, or call or email us. We love talking about our books.
- Befriend your local bookseller, even if they don’t have a shop. Seek out trade organizations (like NOBS, MWABA, and others).
- The ABAA (Antiquarian Bookseller’s Association of America) is made up of the most experienced dealers. Membership is exclusive, and ethical standards are high (and sometimes the prices are, too ;) – you can buy with confidence from these dealers.
- **HAVE FUN** – book collectors are not generally competitive. This is a leisurely pursuit, not a race. Compete against yourself, and challenge yourself to expand and improve the scope of your collection.

Questions?