Condition & Value

In book collecting, there is no definitive system for rating the condition of books. Even as I make that assertion, I know some will argue that there is a perfectly fine system for judging the condition of books, but I disagree. Books are not unlike other collectibles—art, porcelain, furniture, and others that are judged, from a condition standpoint, subjectively by others. And even when accurately graded, condition can easily be altered by a bumped corner, the touch of a finger, or an accidental drop.

One collectible that has been the grading system, though, is coins. Let me explain for the uninitiated:

Coins are judged on a scale of 1 to 70, with 70 being the highest possible grade. When coins are professionally graded by one of the many coin grading services, they are "slabbed," which means they are encapsulated in a plastic case, easily viewed but protected from both the elements and the owners. Slabbed coins are readily traded as authentic and accurately graded...to a point.

While coin-grading services should be equal, they are not. The grading services themselves are also graded, and the two that have risen to the top, Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC) and Professional Coin Grading Service (PCGS), fetch a higher value for the slab owner.

But here is the important lesson in all this: Slight variations in grade can make a tremendous difference in value. For example, a 1925 Standing Liberty quarter, in a mint state grade of 66—four points from "perfect"—is valued as a 67 is valued at $4,500. This month, as we go into the important fall auction season, please keep in mind the importance of getting exactly the item for which you bargained.

Webb Howell
Publisher
Small-Town House Brings Big-Ticket Sales

How a small Georgia auction house has embedded itself in the modern world of antiquated offerings

With the ascent of Addison & Sarova Auctioneers, Michael Addison has captured a boutique auction firm that he says “applies the best of the large auction houses with a personal touch.” Addison and his wife, Elena Sarova, decided to open the Macon, Georgia-based auction house as an outgrowth of a lifelong passion for collecting. The auction house focuses exclusively on rare books, manuscripts, and maps, which Addison had already specialized in while buying and selling for many years before officially entering the business as an auctioneer.

Just as the provenance of an item factors heavily into its value, the name of the auction house at which it is sold can add substantial weight, something that Addison is well aware of. Addison & Sarova has rapidly succeeded in establishing itself as a landmark for quality offerings and exciting sales. At around 96 percent, the firm’s sale rate is impressive, and an estimated 90 percent of lots sold above pre-sale projections. For instance, the recent sale of Jonathan Edwards’ 1751 Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God fetched $27,000, easily topping the previous record of $9,200 for the same item. Another example of Addison & Sarova’s prowess was on display last year when they sold Montalboddo’s scarce Itinerarium Portugalensium (Milan, 1508, with 2nd issue map) for a record-shattering $240,000. While many of Addison’s methods are proprietary, he explains much of his success by pointing to several factors: fair and friendly interaction with the bidders, hard work, a deep knowledge of the rare book market, and continual study of modern auction psychology and methodology.

The firm’s noteworthiness is in its ability to spot exceptional items and attract buyers from around the globe. “We have bidders in Manhattan and Hong Kong, and everywhere in between. The perception is that the houses in the major population centers are best, but that isn’t true in the modern auction market. I could run this auction out of a broom closet in Alaska and still get superior results,” Addison says. He estimates that 80 percent of all bids are placed online, and bidders can’t be confined to any one city, nation, or continent. For potential consignors, Addison’s modern methods and attention to detail are a big draw. In fact, in 2012, Pulitzer Prize-winning author (Lonesome Dove) and Academy Award-winning screenwriter (Brokeback Mountain/Love Story) Larry McMurtry entrusted his collection of 500,000 volumes to the fledgling firm. Addison says that his sales skills come from years of observing large auction houses from the other side of the industry, as a collector and antiquarian book dealer. I looked at what the established places were doing, and when I threw my hat into the ring, I took the best quotes from each and left out the ‘chaff’,” he says.

This season, one can expect only the finest finds at Addison & Sarova. For example, the upcoming November sale featuring selections from the Robert Easton Library will include incunabula and coveted first editions. As has come to be expected from this auction house, lots will be hammered down quickly and successfully, so potential buyers should stay on the lookout for exceptional items and seize their opportunities.

Achieving Top-Tier Results for Rare Books

If you have rare books to sell, then Addison & Sarova Auctioneers is the smart choice. From record-setting prices to sold-rates hovering around 96%, our track-record speaks for itself. We achieve success for our consignors by using smarter and modern methods for selling while also providing the traditional auction house experience — protecting tradition, embracing the future. If you want 19th century results, then there are plenty of houses to choose from who still use the 19th century methods; if you want 21st century results, then contact us today!
September Sale Showcases Icons of Progress

From Minot to Marx, Bonhams’ Fall sales include items marking significant shifts in science, tech, and politics

This September marks the return of Bonhams’ History of Science and Technology sale in September, with material that captures critical moments of technological development spanning three hundred years in an event at the center of what the head of Bonhams’ U.S. book department calls the strongest and most diverse auction season she’s seen in years.

For those who remember Bonhams’ record-breaking sale of an original Apple 1 computer just last year, the mere presence of yet another Apple to compete with a custom wooden box and an integrated keyboard—is building high expectations for the September auction. Other offerings represent additional scientific milestones, including an eighteenth-century mechanical model of the solar system known as an orrery carved from mahogany and engraved brass ($30,000-$50,000), and George Minot’s 1934 Nobel Prize for Medicine for his pioneering work on pernicious anemia ($30,000-$50,000). In addition, the collection features a signed letter by Charles Darwin with a declaration denouncing his belief in the Bible, which pre-sale estimates value at $37,000–$50,000. The sale will also touch on darker elements in the history of scientific and technological advancements, such as a fully operational, three-rotor Enigma machine ($160,000–$180,000), which is believed to be one of the first Heeres Enigma machines delivered to the German military as it built up its forces in violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

Offering a less topical but equally impressive selection, the collection of Barbara Land will also be on the block for buyers interested in items such as a first edition of Karl Marx’s Das Kapital (1846, $300,000–$500,000) or Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations (1776, $200,000–$300,000). Barbara Basbanes Richter is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Fine Books & Collections and is a rare book cataloguer and consultant.

The Praise of Folly. Moriae Encomium….
erasMus, desiderius.

Nobel Prize medal for Physiology/Medicine, awarded to George Minot in 1934 for his pioneering work on pernicious anemia. $200,000–$250,000

York Public Library. Later, she returned to her native San Francisco and became a rare book cataloguer and consultant. She single-handedly cataloged the extensive Sutro Collection of manuscripts in the California State Library system, and spent many hours volunteering her services as a member of the Rosicrucian, the Cokelohn Club, and the Hand Bookbinders of California. Land’s collection also includes works acquired from her father, renowned collector, Lewis Land. The September sale also boasts strong European and American offerings, featuring a compilation album of 15 hand-colored copper-engraved Geschichtsblättern from 1561–1582 ($30,000–$50,000), Franz Kafka’s signed Czechoslovak passport ($4,000–$6,000), a superb copy of Alexander Gardner’s Photographic Sketch Book of the War of the Rebellion, 1862–1865 ($75,000–$150,000), and a six-page autograph document signed by Father Junipero Serra regarding California mission regulations ($160,000–$200,000).

With items encompassing science, technology, literature, politics, and a variety of other eclectic subjects, Bonhams is starting the fall auction season with a strong showing.
When the price of an item at auction swells far above its pre-sale estimate, questions arise and legends take root. For example, Christie’s June 12 Books and Manuscripts sale at Rockefeller Plaza presented exquisite examples of rare and antiquarian material, one of which was a first edition, second issue treatise on architecture by Florentine Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472). Estimated at $160,000, the book ultimately fetched over $437,000, entering the collection of an anonymous bidder. What justifies such a massive leap?

**TIMING** In thirty years, this is only the second occasion that a first edition of De re aedificatoria has appeared at auction. The example at the June sale was a rare opportunity to buy Alberti’s landmark study that touches on such varied disciplines as science, art, and history. This isn’t the first time that a sale at Christie’s has exceeded expectations—the auction house famously sold the Hammer Codex by Leonardo da Vinci for $308 million dollars in 1994 to Bill Gates, which still holds the record for the sale price of any book sold. Rare, coveted material like this has consistently surpassed estimates, and buyers expect to find such items at Christie’s. Frequent clients know when something turns up often at sales, and are patient when seeking an ideal copy. However, an opportunity to buy a unique item—one with special annotations or provenance—tends to generate huge competition for the fleeting opportunity.

**QUALITY** De re aedificatoria was a constant work in progress for Alberti, who spent at least twenty years adding and revising text. As a result, the book wasn’t published until 1485, thirteen years after his death. Still, the time-spanning nature of this work and its frequent updates make for an item of superb quality in its own right, in addition to being linked to a historically famous figure. To say that Alberti was just an architect would be unfair. He was the quintessential Renaissance Man—by turns, a poet, priest, linguist, and cryptographer (Alberti developed the poly-alphabetic cipher as well as the first automatic cipher device)—and as a result of his varied interests, generated material that attracts collectors in disparate fields. Alberti was the architect of the beautiful Santa Maria Novella and the Rucellai Palace in Florence, and the Basilica of San Sebastiano.

**PROVENANCE** Desirability is also linked to provenance, and this book came from the collection of James Grote Vanderpool (1903–1979), who was the head of one of America’s finest architect libraries, Columbia University’s Avery Library, and later dean of the Columbia University School of Architecture. Vanderpool’s profession and passion was architecture, and his private collection reflected this, including architecture books of great importance and rarity, such as the first edition of Vitruvius, and the first substantial books on architecture printed in the English language and in America (all of which were also available at the June auction).

When an item happens to hit all three notes, its value can grow exponentially in the eyes of careful collectors who seek books with that perfect mix of rarity, quality, and history.
Swann Galleries is the largest specialist auctioneer of works of paper worldwide, and nearly 75 years after its founding, it remains a leader of the New York auction scene as a provider of unique items with heady cultural significance. While online access means that buyers can place bids from any location, the Internet zeitgeist has left Swann Galleries’ core clientele of U.S. and New York-based buyers largely unchanged, resulting in an exceptional interest in items with a North American focus.

According to Swann Galleries’ in-house specialist, Alex Clausen, “We’ve always seen a great demand for these items. The auction rooms are always packed, and it’s very exciting to watch the events unfold.” Luckily, this year’s December 8 Maps and Atlases auction is awash with remarkable cartographic material, headlined by William Faden’s 1777 North American Atlas, which is believed to be the best copy to appear at auction in over a century. It contains a stunning two-part map of New York City by British cartographer Bernard Ratzer and a map of the Western frontier by American surveyor Thomas Hutchins, along with forty other maps and battle plans that round out the atlas, which has a pre-sale estimate of $300,000-$500,000.

In addition, the auction will feature the cornerstone map of Lewis & Clark’s journey to the Pacific, with pre-sale estimates of $60,000-$90,000. Also on the block are maps from Thomas Jefferys, one of the most prolific cartographical publishers of the eighteenth century. His American Atlas: or, A Geographical Description of the Whole Continent of America includes twenty-nine maps of North America, many of which remained the standard until the nineteenth century. This significant piece of Americana will be available at the December sale with an estimated price tag of $60,000-$90,000. Scottish mapmaker John Melish’s 1816 Map of the United States will be appearing in nearly pristine condition. It is the first American large-format map to illustrate the United States from coast to coast. Other offerings drawing attention are Mount & Page’s The English Pilot, The Fourth Book, Describing the Delaware, Pennsylvania and other early states, plus, a rare map of a Dakota Territory survey taken just prior to the Great Sioux War of 1876, which notes the founding of outlaw towns like Rapid City, Deadwood, and Spearfish.

All in all, this season is bringing an almost unprecendented number of high-profile items to Swann Galleries, further solidifying the already iconic auction house as an industry mainstay, and strengthening its position as a provider of North American cartography for collectors and history buffs.

Barbara Baden done Richter is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Fine Books & Collections based in New York. Emily Byrd lives in North Carolina and is the editorial coordinator of special publications at Journalistic, Inc.
The ‘Western’ item, dating from 1902, was part of a large Californian collection of literary posters, and the Navajo Indian (seen above) promotes the October issue of Sunset: a magazine “About California and the West.” The work of Lafayette Maynard Dixon, the image proved so popular that it was re-used for the February 1903 issue and then sold to subscribers in poster form, without the text. The Maynard Dixon poster, $4,000 at Swann Galleries on December 17, 2014.

Taking its title from a line in Corinthians, this sermon by Robert Cushman was first printed in England in 1622, but its real historical significance lies in the fact that it later came to be recognized as having been the very first sermon preached in Britain’s new American colonies. The Sin and Danger of Self-Love, $20,400 at Addison & Sarova in Macon, Georgia, on March 7.

The sermon was not printed in America for another hundred years but, after returning to England, where he died four years later.

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The watercolors that illustrate this exceptional paper manuscript of 1673 cram into its 244 leaves some 350 birds, 225 zoological subjects, 30 reptiles, fish, and crustacea, 54 insects, and 94 botanical subjects. In layout and composition, the artist responsible, Johann Joachim Henneberger, modeled his compendium on seventeenth-century natural histories such as those of Aldrovandus and Willughby, but to the creatures of the natural world familiar to many of his European contemporaries he added real and imagined exotics, such as camels from Arabia, unicorns from India, a panther from Asia, even dragons and griffons, and some images are certainly more whimsical than those found in the printed works. Henneberger’s artistic talents were not restricted to the natural history, for in his hometown of Wiesensteig in southern Germany—the scene of a famous witch hunt and trial in the mid-sixteenth century—he also painted the roof of the church of St. Cyniku.

The auctioneer called “the cream of the crop from Easton’s collection” is scheduled for November 7.
African Americana

A slave auction broadside and Negro Motorist Green-Book, $37,500 and $22,500 respectively at Swann Galleries in New York on March 26.

Seen here are two highlights from the latest of the African-American sales that are a regular spring feature of this saleroom's calendar.

The Louisiana broadside gives details of an auction of ‘Family Slaves’ and listed first, though not the youngest to be sold, is fifteen-year-old Millie. Billed as ‘an excellent nurse and house girl,’ free of vices and maladies, she comes on easy terms. Half of any winning bid is required in cash, but the balance can be deferred for six months. How civilized!

Other prospects are Phillis, who is both a good cook of French and American dishes and very good at washing and ironing as well. Isham, aged 21, on the other hand is an excellent cistern maker and a fair carpenter.

The broadside is undated, but an advertisement for this very slave auction appeared in a February 1846 issue of the New Orleans Times Picayune.

There was a time, the New York cataloguer explained, when black families in the Northeast and Midwest would still be filled with apprehension about a car trip “down home.” In the 1950s, with segregation still very much in force in the South, finding lodging, or even a place to fill the tank and to relieve oneself, could become a real problem.

Then in 1956, Victor Green published the first Negro Motorist Green-Book, identifying friendly service stations, hotels, taverns, restaurants, even night clubs, along all major and minor roads to and through the ‘Old South.’ From then on, the Green-Book was in every African-American glove compartment and continued to be issued annually until 1966.

Despite its widespread use, copies are now rare and the example of the fifth edition of 1960 sold in New York is still in original stiff green wrappers, now faded and partly perished at the spine.

Watercolor by Peter Newell, $50,000 at Bonhams New York on April 13.

A year that marks the 150th anniversary of the publication of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland has, in the UK at least, brought new books about its creator, along with library exhibits and TV and radio programs. Here, however, we have an original watercolor drawing of Alice and the Queen of Hearts that while it bears the famous words “Off with her Head!” presents not Tenniel’s familiar artwork but that of Peter Newell, a very successful American illustrator and poet best known for his humorous and children’s books.

Acknowledging the fame and familiarity of Tenniel’s illustrations, Newell wrote at the time: “It may appear presumptuous therefore on my part to attempt to portray what Alice means to me. But the kindness with which the public has received my work ... has inspired the hope in me that this more serious effort will not be altogether unwelcome.”

Seen here is Newell’s version of an encounter between a haughty, indignant Alice and an impassioned Queen.
Look Beyond Books

At last year’s landmark Grolier Club exhibit, One Hundred Books Famous in Children’s Literature, it struck us at Fine Books how important “non-books” and other literary objects can be to a book collection. Exhibit curator and antiquarian bookseller Chris Loker included games, toys, and other ephemera associated with the rare titles on view.

We asked Loker to explain why ephemera and realia were necessary components to the exhibit, as well as to many personal collections. She said, “the books were, of course, the central focus, but my additional intent was to show the trajectory of the books into the culture of their times, to underscore their enduring fame and impact on readers of all ages. I felt that well crafted or printed ephemeral artifacts like toys, dolls, and games would enliven the books and deepen the exhibition viewers’ reactions to them.” She added, “I think a well selected ephemeral object is able to reach into the heart of a book and make it tangible, and even tactile, for a person of any age who has read that book. So seeing finely crafted realia, like an engraved ivory hornbook, or a hand-carved wooden Pinocchio doll, brings the essence of the book to life in front of the viewer’s eyes.”

We found more than a dozen examples of this type of material, recently sold at auction, which would make intriguing addenda to private libraries, for those who are willing to look beyond books.

—Editor

Your Turn

“WIZARD OF OZ” BOARD GAME, MANUFACTURED BY PARKER BROS., 1922
This item might fit right in at the Grolier Club’s exhibit— it’s a “Wizard of Oz” board game, manufactured by Parker Bros. in 1922. The complete boxed game with a folding game board, eight-page pictorial rule booklet, wooden dice cup, six wooden dice, and four power figures depicting Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion, must have appealed to many an Oz fan when it followed the yellow brick road to auction last year.
FREEMAN’S, $358/ APRIL 10, 2016

Little People, Big Sale

PAINTED PLASTER DISPLAY OF GULLIVER IN THE “LAND OF THE LILLIPUTIANS”
Swears and Wells was one of Victorian London’s best-known department stores, but its original incarnation was as a “Lilliputian Warehouse” specializing in children’s clothing. Appropriate, then, that the company should commission a model of Gulliver’s capture by the Lilliputians in Gulliver’s Travels for London’s Great Exhibition of 1851. This model, which features Jonathan Swift’s satirical hero in dire straits, is a copy of the one that appeared at the Great Exhibition and now resides in the Museum of German Toys in Sonneberg. We hope that this one is the centerpiece of an incredible Swift collection.

CHRISTIE’S, $33,500 / SEPTEMBER 9, 2014

Accessory to Magick

MIDDLE EASTERN DAGGER OWNED AND USED BY ALISTER CROWLEY
Novelist and esoteric celebrity Aleister Crowley raised eyebrows for his unconventional behavior and his controversial views. Known as “the wickedest man in the world,” Crowley became a countercultural icon with his experiments with drugs, sex, and magickal [sic] religious practices that were labeled everything from Satanic to sublime. Crowley wore this dagger around his neck in an intricate scabbard as part of his ritualistic garb. The curved dagger is an example of a late nineteenth-century Arabic janbiya, which was worn to indicate social status and often used in rituals. Like Hunter Thompson’s Gonzo sword, this object would be quite the focal point in a Crowley collection.

BLOOMSBURY AUCTIONS, $15,500 / DECEMBER 11, 2014

LITERARY THEMED EPHEMERA AND REALIA MAY SEEM OUT OF SCOPE FOR STRICT BOOK COLLECTORS, BUT THESE “ODD LOTS” ADD TEXTURE TO A COLLECTION

BY ERIN BLAKEMORE

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Cashing in on Beat Ephemera

**The Mystery of the Brass Plates**

Pair of Brass Plates Celebrating Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s iconic Sherlock Holmes appeared in four of his novels and 56 stories. The storied detective has become a beloved pop culture icon, and this status is reflected in two brass plates sent to auction last fall. The plates are at the center of their own literary mystery—though possibly presented to Vincent Starrett, whose studies in Sherlock Holmes was released in 1940. It is unclear what exactly they celebrate and why. The first plate references the “Baker Street Irregulars,” a literary society that named itself after fictitious characters in the Holmes books. The second plate is particularly intriguing: it is inscribed “Lambie & Ramorni,” names shared by key witnesses in a 1909 murder case followed and even written about by Doyle.

**COURTESY OF PBA GALLERIES.**

**Heritage Auctions, $7,187.50 each October 8, 2014**

Hot Jacket Art

*“Burning Man” Cover Art Illustration for Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451*

Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 burned bright in literary consciousness when it was published in 1953. The classic novel, which follows a fireman tasked with burning books in a dystopian society, was released with a cover illustrated by Joseph Mugnani, who created a man made of flame. Mugnani was an Italian illustrator and animator who drew covers for many other Bradbury novels, including The Martian Chronicles. This item was Bradbury’s own and a worthy addition to any collection of his work.

**NATE D. SANDERS, $5,120 / SEPTEMBER 25, 2014**

Our Mutual Friend

**Plaster Bust of Charles Dickens**

When this bust was cast and inscribed in 1869, Charles Dickens was the most significant literary figure in the world. Dickens had become prominent 30 years earlier with The Pickwick Papers and went on to become famous for his gripping serial fiction, his commentary on the social conditions of Victorian England, and his profitable public readings. This bust, which was cast by Summer & Co., was likely designed during Dickens’ series of “Turnwell readings”—a tour that was cut short by his declining health and his death in 1870.

**LESLEY HINDMAN AUCTIONEERS, $15,550 / NOVEMBER 3, 2014**

They Gave a Damn

**Final Shooting Script for Gone With the Wind**

Of Gone With the Wind collectors, there are many. Anything related to the book or the movie will draw a crowd. When the film adaptation of Margaret Mitchell’s Civil War saga premiered in 1939, it was hailed as one of the best films of all time. But its road to the big screen was rocky indeed, involving multiple screenwriters, three directors, and a worldwide search for an actress worthy of playing fiery Scarlett O’Hara. Producer David O. Selznick made history when his film premiered to over 300,000 fans in Atlanta and won ten Academy Awards. Though the actual authorship of the screenplay is hotly contested, that didn’t stop Selznick from binding the final shooting script and presenting it to numerous members of his cast and crew. This one is inscribed to MGM studio publicist William R. Ferguson.

**PROFILES IN HISTORY, $124,600 OCTOBER 20, 2014**
The Edge the the Thing

FORE-EDGE PAINTING OF SHAKESPEARE

A showpiece for a Shakespeare collection need not cost millions. Take this sweet fore-edge painting depicting the famed playwright, or its mate, which illustrates an Elizabethan street scene. Painted on serviceable editions of the Bard’s collected plays printed by Edward Moxon, one of the most successful early Victorian printers, these edges are worth seeing.

Walt Whitman

This Ad Contains Multitudes

BROADSIDE ADVERTISING WALT WHITMAN’S BOOKS

Walt Whitman may have been a bohemian, but the acclaimed poet also knew how to sell books. Known as America’s “first great poet,” he standardized early audiences with his frank and earthy depictions of sexuality in books like Leaves of Grass. In 1872, he designed a large advertising place he called a “show bill” to publicize his books in bookstores. The poet’s popularity fueled a strong market in first editions ($305,000 is the current auction record for his work), and for those buyers, this broadside is breathtaking bonus material.

Langston Hughes

WALT WHITMAN’S BOOKS

DEMOCRATIC VISTAS

A Bountiful Trip to Bonhams

COPPER NAILED FROM H.M.S. BOUNTY

Since a group of disgruntled crewmen took over the H.M.S. Bounty in 1789, their story has spawned thousands of spin-offs in print and on film, including a short story by H. G. Wells and a popular book by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall. Torr apart by disagreements over ownership and Bligh’s own command, the rebels cast Bligh plus 18 others into a 20-foot boat with five days of supplies. They managed to survive and see the prosecution of some of the remaining mutineers. In 1953 the shipwreck of the Bounty was discovered and remnants of the ship have been popular with collectors of many stripes ever since.

Swann Galleries, $3,500

April 12, 2015

The Heroine’s Bookshelf

Erin Blakemore


Clifford Bailey

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The Heroine’s Bookshelf

Erin Blakemore

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