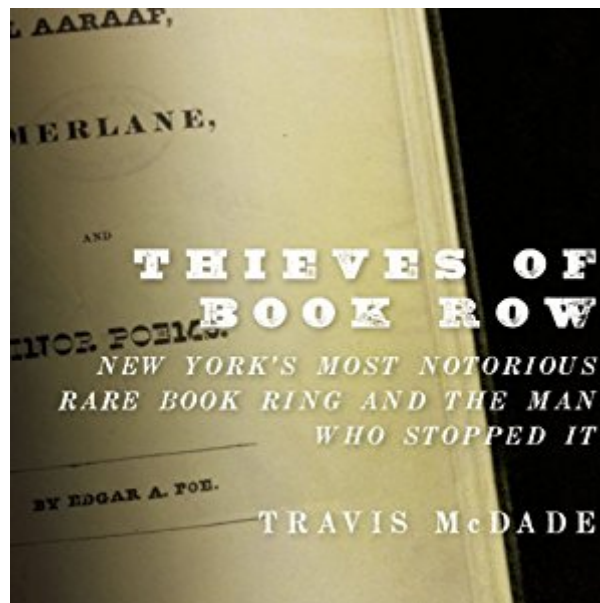




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Thieves Of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring And The Man Who Stopped It



Synopsis

No one had ever tried a caper like this before. The goods were kept in a secure room under constant scrutiny, deep inside a crowded building with guards at the exits. The team picked for the job included two old hands known only as Paul and Swede, but all depended on a fresh face, a kid from Pinetown, North Carolina. In the Depression, some fellows were willing to try anything - even a heist in the rare book room of the New York Public Library. In *Thieves of Book Row*, Travis McDade tells the gripping tale of the worst book-theft ring in American history, and the intrepid detective who brought it down. Author of *The Book Thief* and a curator of rare books, McDade transforms painstaking research into a rich portrait of Manhattan's Book Row in the 1920s and '30s, where organized crime met America's cultural treasures in dark and crowded shops along gritty Fourth Avenue. Dealers such as Harry Gold, a tough native of the Lower East Side, became experts in recognizing the value of books and recruiting a pool of thieves to steal them - many of them unemployed men who drifted up the Bowery or huddled around fires in Central Park's shantytowns. When Paul and Swede brought a new recruit into his shop, Gold trained him for the biggest score yet: a first edition of Edgar Allan Poe's *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems*. Gold's recruit cased the rare-book room for weeks, searching for a weakness. When he found one, he struck, leading to a breathtaking game of wits between Gold and NYPL special investigator G. William Bergquist. Both a fast-paced and true-life thriller, *Thieves of Book Row* provides a fascinating look at the history of crime and literary culture.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was really excited about reading this book. The first surprise or disappointment was the Font Size , it is almost as small as a #6 and that does make it a chore to read, after a few pages your eyes need a rest. I will review more of the book when I finish it. What a shame the print is so small, did they save that much money by doing that. Get your magnifying glass out if you purchase this book.

I had no idea that book theft was ever so wide spread and organized. A nice overview, but comes up short on many details, e.g. Other than the association with a Fourth Ave Shop who/what/how/large was the Romm Gang?

Amazing, especially when you consider it's true!

Outstanding! Book was in pristine condition. Super fast shipping. Many thanks. Pat

But the next two-thirds were boring being almost a pure listing of various book thefts from different libraries. If you can buy a real cheap copy or find it at your library I would say read the first third to learn the tricks of book theft rings during the 1920s. How the ingenious thieves spirited priceless books by meticulous research and planning or just grabbing the books and running I think will be enjoyed by any book lover.

As other reviewers have observed, the print in this book is tiny! Even with my reading glasses, I had to read this in shorter bursts than usual to prevent a headache. Which is a shame, because this book is engrossing. McDade explains the minutiae of the book trade, and why book theft was such a big problem in the early part of the twentieth century. It seems strange in this day and age to think of organized gangs of book thieves stealing from public libraries and selling the books to collectors, but these book rings were notorious, and the New York Public Library in particular was constantly trying to figure out ways to thwart them. The tone is dry enough to discourage the casual reader looking for a historical thriller in the vein of Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America*, but it is definitely a worthwhile read for anyone who loves books and is interested in collecting them. I learned a lot more about what makes a book valuable from reading about how the thieves would take pieces of various copies of the same book to create one fine edition that they would pass off as a first edition. The section about library markings alone made me think about creating my own unique stamp for my books.

Review of: "Thieves of Book Row - New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It," by Travis McDade. I received this ARC text in exchange for an honest review. "Thieves of Book Row" is a riveting account of the most prolific book theft ring in American history by author McDade, who himself is a rare-book curator and expert on book theft. The text reveals the early development of special investigation in research libraries. A quick synopsis: On NYC's 4th Avenue's Book Row during The Great Depression booksellers such as Harold Borden Clarke and Harry Gold discovered that stealing rare books could be lucrative. Specifically Harry Gold trained a cadre of ne'er-do-wells living in shantytowns and Central Park to execute the biggest book heist in history out of the New York Public Library's rare-book collection. The ring organized the theft of first editions of Moby Dick, The Scarlett Letter, & most notably Edgar Allan Poe's early compilation of poetry, "Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems," written under his nom de plume, "a Bostonian." The text specifically focuses on and explains how Edgar Allan Poe's book became the most valuable rare book in America (although the author died penniless) and how important it was for the NYPL to recover it. Author McDade takes the time to weave the details of the game of wits played out between Gold and Special Investigator G. William Bergquist culminating in a showdown which added this previously unknown type of crime to the books. Well done. Five stars.

"Thieves of Book Row" is a fascinating investigation into the book thievery of the 1920s and 30s. Book Row has dwindled from almost fifty shops in its heyday down to just one today (Strand) but this well-researched and quite detailed history makes it come alive again. I have had minor brushes with some quite unsavory characters but this book opened a window into an historical underworld hitherto unknown to me. Some of this information has apparently not been published before and certainly I am not aware of any similar efforts so reading this was a special treat. It would make a wonderful television show as well - a free tip to anyone in that industry! Book thievery is still a very terrible problem: read about what happened quite recently at the Girolamini Library at the hands of its own director if you have not done so.

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