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Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It

By Travis McDade



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Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It By Travis McDade

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, true-life thriller, *Thieves of Book Row* provides a fascinating look at the history of crime and literary culture.



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Editorial Review

Review

"*Thieves* is an engaging cat-and-mouse account of porous libraries, scouts armed with 'gall, confidence, and oversized coats,' complicit salesmen and of G. William Bergquist, the dogged New York Public Library investigator who cracked the gang's most audacious caper: the theft in 1931 of first editions of *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby-Dick* and a rare Edgar Allan Poe collection." --*New York Times*

"McDade does a superb job of drawing a complete picture of the environment in which the Romm Gang operated. McDade makes a smart choice to spin his tale around the mostly forgotten individuals who participated in a widespread scheme to steal library books." --*Los Angeles Times*

"McDade's account is a better-informed account of [thief Harry] Gold than those in other sometimes misty-eyed and less hard-nosed portraits of Book Row. By concentrating on just a few men, McDade not only avoids many pitfalls in writing about the trade more generally, but also manages to bring this tale chronologically to a conclusion. It is not a very satisfactory conclusion, for this book raises larger questions: pointing a moral as well as adorning a tale." --*Times Literary Supplement*

"Definitive history.... a fantastically colorful cast of characters and rich period detail will hook book lovers and historians of N.Y.C." --*Publishers Weekly*

"A compelling history. Rich in characterization and vividly set, this tale of Manhattan's Fourth Avenue, known then as 'Book Row,' and its bookleggers makes for grand reading." --*Library Journal*

"With wit, erudition, and a nice sense of timing, McDade recreates the seamy side of the antiquarian book business in Depression-era New York and Boston. This immensely engaging story will appeal to cultural historians, literary scholars, bibliophiles, and true-crime lovers alike." --Joan Shelley Rubin, Professor of History, University of Rochester and author of *Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America*

"*Thieves of Book Row* chronicles a fascinating chapter in the history of the book trade, libraries, and organized crime. In a highly engaging narrative, McDade provides a wonderful portrait of books stolen and recovered and of many colorful characters ranging from rare book legends to petty thieves." --Thomas Hyry, Director of Special Collections, UCLA Library

About the Author

Travis McDade is the author of *The Book Thief: The True Crimes of Daniel Spiegelman* and the curator of rare books at the University of Illinois College of Law. He teaches a class at the University of Illinois called "Rare Books, Crime & Punishment."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Durkin:

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them family or their friend. Are you aware? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity honestly, that is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun in your case. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent the whole day to reading a book. The book *Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It* it is very good to read. There are a lot of individuals who recommended this book. We were holding enjoying reading this book. In the event you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book through your smart phone. The price is not too costly but this book features high quality.

Linda Fite:

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with friends is thing that usually you could have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try thing that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition info. Even you love *Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It*, you can enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout fellas. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

Joseph Fulkerson:

Is it anyone who having spare time in that case spend it whole day through watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This *Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It* can be the respond to, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are thus out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this brand new era is common not a geek activity. So what these textbooks have than the others?

Zoe Harris:

As a college student exactly feel bored to be able to reading. If their teacher inquired them to go to the library in order to make summary for some guide, they are complained. Just small students that has reading's heart or real their pastime. They just do what the educator want, like asked to go to the library. They go to at

this time there but nothing reading critically. Any students feel that examining is not important, boring and also can't see colorful pictures on there. Yeah, it is for being complicated. Book is very important for yourself. As we know that on this era, many ways to get whatever we wish. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. So , this Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It can make you experience more interested to read.

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