

Books Aplenty

The Arlington Library Book Sale of May 1981

BY SOPHIE VOGEL

It had become a custom for Arlingtonians to donate their book collections to the Arlington Public Library. The library added needed titles to its collection while the remainder were sold by The Friends of The Library to residents. The income from the sale reverted to the library as a gift.

Five years had elapsed since the previous sale in 1976. Leilia Saunders had just taken over the Directorship from Jane Nida, who was the second to serve in that role; Jane held the post for more than 30 years. The first Director was Mildred Blattner. Leilia showed me into a room that was overflowing with 'gift books.' A new library building was in the planning stages and these books had to be sold before occupation of the new quarters. Would I, as a Friend of the Library, manage the sale? Another asset to the library was at stake. An auction and sale would encourage ARTEC (Arlington's first Cable TV provider) to put the finishing touches to hooking up the library to its cable channel which was granted in the franchise. The plan was to conduct an auction that could be seen at home while the audience in the library participated in the sale as well. The plan worked: the library was wired for cable and the book sale was held as scheduled. Arthur Dewald, also a volunteer, set up and operated the camera. (Another indicator of the success of the plan: Library book sales have continued to be held periodically since, and have become an annual Arlington institution.)

Several generations of Arlingtonians had donated their book collections for this sale of May 15, 1981. A surprising number of books, approximately 37, were published in the 19th century. Among them was R.S. Arthur's *Tales of Domestic Life*, dated 1864. His *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, also on the auction block, was the first book sold when the cablecast bidding began. James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pilot: A Tale of the Sea* was probably the oldest book in the sale. No record of the previous sale exists so there is no knowing the number of books published in the 1800s that were included.

One hundred of the auction titles that reflected the diversity of books for sale were listed for the convenience of potential bidders. Listings included illustration information, condition of the book and a suggested beginning bid offer.

The majority of the books were published in the first 30 years of the 1900s. Illustrations ranged from original art by giants of the time: Howard

Chandler Christie, John Flannigan, Charles Dana Gibson, Frederick Remington, N.C. Wyeth and others. Those that were made into photoplays (movies) were illustrated with photos from the film. Books that became plays were illustrated with photographs of scenes from the staged performance. Buyers had a choice of editions—the original or the one illustrated from filmed or staged scenes. My husband's mother's collection contained an edition of *Gone with the Wind*, illustrated with stills from the film.

Many first editions were among the titles, including Winston Churchill's (not the famous English statesman, but the earlier American novelist of the same name) *Inside the Cup* (1913) and *The Modern Chronicle* (1910). In addition, his *Richard Carvel* (1899) and *The Crisis* (1901) were represented. A rare find was Mark Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896); Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* (1921), *Babbitt* (1922), and *Elmer Gantry* (1927) were among the more recent titles on sale. Edith Wharton was another popular author: her *Valley of Decision* (1902); the best seller of 1906, *The House of Mirth*; the lesser known *A Son at the Front* (1923); and *The Old Maid*, which was first printed in *Red Book Magazine*.

Many of the authors have added to the classics of American literature. Booth Tarkington won a Pulitzer Prize for *Ramsey Milholland*. In 1915 and 1916 Tarkington enjoyed consecutive best-sellers: *The Turmoil*, followed by *Seventeen*; *Penrod Jasper* (we had a first edition with dust jacket) appeared in 1929. An authorized edition of O. Henry's *Strictly Business* was also on sale. John Fox, Jr., author of *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, was well-represented, as was the mystery writer Gertrude Atherton. Sarah Orn Jewett's *The Queen's Twin* was an 1899 first edition. One of the prizes, Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, the 1947 edition with drawings by Frederick Remington, went for \$9.00!

Early in the sale one of the two sets of the Harvard Classics, bound in black leather, with all 50 volumes and the guide, was bought by a young couple who had walked to the Quincy Street Library. My husband Arthur drove them and their 50 volumes to their new home. The second set of Harvard Classics, bound in red leather, was incomplete—volume 10 was missing.

This list hardly hints at the scope of the collection.

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