



Rebecca Rego Barry with a Foreword by Nicholas A. Basbanes. *Rare Books Uncovered: True Stories of Fantastic Finds in Unlikely Places*

Rebecca Rego Barry with a Foreword by Nicholas A. Basbanes. *Rare Books Uncovered: True Stories of Fantastic Finds in Unlikely Places*. Minneapolis, MN: Voyageur Press, 2015. 256p., ill. ISBN 9780760348611. US\$ 25.00.

In Larry McMurtry's novel *Cadillac Jack*, the title character makes the prescient observation about desirable rarities that "anything can be found anywhere." A used-and-rare bookseller friend of mine is fond of saying that there are so many rare, collectible books in the world that the chances are very good that you will come across several in your lifetime; however, there are so many different kinds of books in the world that the chances are you will not recognize the desirable book as rare or collectible when you come across it. Rebecca Rego Barry's collection of anecdotes is good evidence that both McMurtry's and my friend's sentiments are spot-on.

Since A. Edward Newton in the 1910s, modern book hunters have written about their prized finds. Classic recollections like Charles P. Everitt's *Adventures of a Treasure Hunter* (1952, 1987) and scholarly works of the stripe produced by Matthew Bruccoli have concentrated on the spectacular find or the spectacular loss or the measure of completeness. To some extent, works like Bruccoli's and Everitt's rarify book collecting, and they describe another age. Contemporary book hunting is complicated by reality television, Internet auctions, and sales venues, and the fact that old books are alternately worthless or priceless.

Barry's new compilation of similar stories departs from the standard, being "[a] collection of tales from living booksellers, collectors, librarians, and other seekers about their best find in a surprising place—'best' and 'surprising' being rather subjective terms . . ." (13). Three elements set this book apart from similar volumes. First, the book is not about book collectors and their collections; it is about book finders and their finds. Second, the author reports that she collected each story directly from the people whose adventures she relates. This makes the book a more contemporary inspiration than similar works. Third, while some finds are intrinsically valuable, others' value is measured by terms other than cash. The focus is on the adventure of finding, not the books themselves. She narrates stories involving garage sales, professional and avocational pickers, treasures literally hidden, unrecognized or unappreciated legacies, and happy accidents. It is said that luck is the intersection of preparation with opportunity. In these cases, the luck is illustrated by an aware person making an effort to look in places that don't look like they would hold gold nuggets. This is not a manual for locating fantastic finds in unlikely places, but it is a testimonial to how many



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fantastic finds still exist in the world.

The stories are well selected and interesting, illustrating a breadth of experiences which suggest that the adventure of finding rare books is alive and well. However, this book, like any other, has its flaws. The writing is a bit choppy – not difficult to read, but uneven in the way the chapters are structured and the stories told. In some, the adventure and thrill of the find take a back seat to descriptions of the finders and their prior experience (or lack of experience) with books. In others, a second or third story (just as interesting as the main narrative) is given bare notice. Nevertheless, Barry’s book will appeal to folks who like a treasure story and who harbor the hope that they will recognize the next rare book they encounter out in some forgotten or busy corner of the world.

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