

PACIFIC NORTHWEST AMERICANA

Now is the Time to Buy Western Books!

Confirmed collectors of Americana need not be reminded that the present is a wonderful time to add to their holdings. Rare items are not to be had for a song. It is doubtful if the prices of scarce and fundamental pieces have greatly receded. The effect of the economic depression, however, has been to reduce the competition of buyers thus making it easier to secure in the open market, items that had gone into hiding or that were being held by brokers at speculative sums.

An examination of the catalogs of second hand dealers indicate that except for the rarer books and pamphlets the prices are the lowest in years. It is now possible to secure for a moderate outlay most of the books needed for good working collections of local history. The present is accordingly a strategic time for new collectors to lay the foundations of private collections of Northwest Americana.

Another most encouraging factor is to be found in the rapidity with which good, inexpensive reprints of the rarest books are being issued. During the past year, for example, Lowman and Hanford of Seattle have reprinted three rare titles relating to the missionary history of Oregon and Washington, while the Princeton University Press has issued eight volumes of reprints in their *Narratives of the Trans-Mississippi Frontier*. One of these volumes at \$3.50 contains five published works on Oregon by Hall J. Kelley worth not less than \$1,000 in the original editions.

Works on Western history, moreover, are now being published at a more rapid rate than ever before. These works are not confined to the offerings of any one publisher or locality but are coming from all parts of the United States. The Metropolitan Press of Portland and Lowman and Hanford of Seattle are leading in the Pacific Northwest.

Why Collect Local History?

The wish to buy and own good books is as natural and commendable as the desire to read. But why specialize in the literature of one's own region? Among other reasons, the machine age is developing a new one, namely an antidote to standardization. Mass production is bringing about a uniformity of life and action that is having some deplorable effects. Standardized food, clothing, housing and transportation, have led to standardized news, standardized plays, standardized books and standardized thinking.

Local history helps to preserve individuality and to develop

character. It conserves the heritage of the past. In a nomadic age, it inculcates a consciousness of *place*. The reading of reliable books on local history is as important as acquiring a knowledge of local geography. The collecting of local books offers a hobby that is educative and meritorious. To collect with a view alone to future financial profit is to place the matter on its lowest level. One can reasonably expect, however, as great a security of monetary value in carefully purchased Americana as in any other commodity. Mr. A. Edward Newton in a recent interview in London is reported to have said: "Books remain the best investment. Let me give you an example. When I bought the Carysford copy of the First Folio Shakespeare I paid £12,000 for it. To do that I had to sell Canadian Pacific stock. Today these shares are, comparatively speaking, worthless. But a copy of the First Folio, inferior to mine, has just been sold for £3,000 more than I paid." Mr. Newton has also stated that if he were to start over he would collect Americana.

What to Collect

Much of the fascination of book collecting lies in having a field sufficiently well defined and sufficiently small so that one can reasonably hope to acquire most of the worthwhile desiderata on the subject. The hobby should have human interest and should be different if possible from the hobbies of other neighboring collectors. A small collection of choice material yields greater satisfaction than a larger group of items poorly selected and in inferior condition. Several small hobbies well followed are preferable to a large field badly covered. It is always possible to add new fields if time and means permit.

One would hesitate to give advice to a seasoned book collector. For the benefit of one just starting out, however, emphasis should be placed upon the desirability of reading and study along the line of one's buying. A good collector will become a student in his special field and a good student will always be improved by collecting and owning books. It is a poor collector who does not grow with his collection.

A collection should be started with the fundamental source materials of whatever field. Usually these are fairly common and accessible. Too often collectors begin with the idea of securing only scarce and difficult books and particularly the earliest books relating to the subject. Collectors of limited means will do far better to select carefully as to intrinsic value and buy the best and most accessible books as they appear or as they become available in the market.