

IT WAS MOSTLY my mother's fault, but James Oliver Curwood had a hand in it. She gave a young and impressionable boy a set of books of adventure in the Far North. Mr. Curwood was the author, I was the boy, and his writing hooked me on books and a life of vicarious adventure. At a very tender age, a book collector was born.

People collect books for many reasons—investment, information, pleasure and profit. I do it for pleasure. Books opened the door to a whole new world of adventure.

who specialized in out-of-print and rare sporting books.

Those catalogs were a revelation to me, showing almost every book ever printed on outdoor subjects. The only drawback was the price level.

Limited finances and a desire for the rarer and finer books led me to a self-inflicted financial crisis. The law of supply and demand applies to books, and the fact that a book is harder to find after it goes out of print usually means that it's more expensive. I found that I could not afford the books I wanted without major sacri-

was always looking for books for his stock and for his customers, and he was willing to work out trades with me.

From then on, I used his catalog as a shopping guide and began to pick up books from every inexpensive source I could find, and traded them to the dealer for books I wanted. He would give me from thirty to sixty percent of his selling price as trade credit.

With judicious shopping and a lot of footwork, I was able to build up an excellent library for a cash outlay of only a few cents on the dollar of its ac-

How to Collect SPORTING BOOKS

There's a way to realize the many pleasures of fine books without going broke.

For a few years, a voracious appetite for the printed word was satisfied by local libraries and indulgent neighbors and relatives. I read everything I could find about guns and hunting and outdoor adventure until I exhausted the nearby supply.

Eventually, I joined a book club that specialized in the kind of books I loved, and other authors and titles joined Curwood on my bookshelves. The club offered a good selection of the sporting books in print at reasonable prices, and I took full advantage of their offerings.

My acquisitive urges were growing, though, and the discovery that many of the most desirable books were no longer in print resulted in a flurry of outbound letters and a mailbox stuffed with catalogs from the dealers

by JAMES HANDCOCK

faces. I had to find a more lucrative grindstone for my nose or do without books I badly wanted.

The solution I worked out over a period of time has proven both effective and enjoyable. I learned specialty book dealers usually charge more for a given book than any other source does, so I began to haunt rummage sales and second-hand stores. On rare occasions, I found books I wanted, but I passed up many I already had. Then I visited a local gun show and met a dealer who specialized in outdoor books and I realized that passing up some of these books was a mistake. He

tual value. I also learned some very valuable lessons about the art of dealing with used books.

The most important of these was the effect of condition on the value and collectibility of the books I found. Condition is the main criterion for determining the desirability of a given book, but it is often overlooked.

Most book dealers use the standards that the *AB Bookman's Weekly*, a trade publication for antiquarian book dealers, recommends. Grades run from "as new" to "poor" somewhat like the used gun standards established by the N.R.A.

A book described as being "as new" or "mint" is as perfect as the day it left the publisher. It has absolutely no flaws. Books in this condition are sought after by people who collect for

investment value or are trying to upgrade the condition of their collections.

The next step down in value and condition is "fine." Such a book is close to new, but has been read. It still has no defects, but is not as crisp or shiny as a new book.

"Very good" refers to a copy that shows small signs of wear on the jacket, binding or paper, but has no tears or other defects.

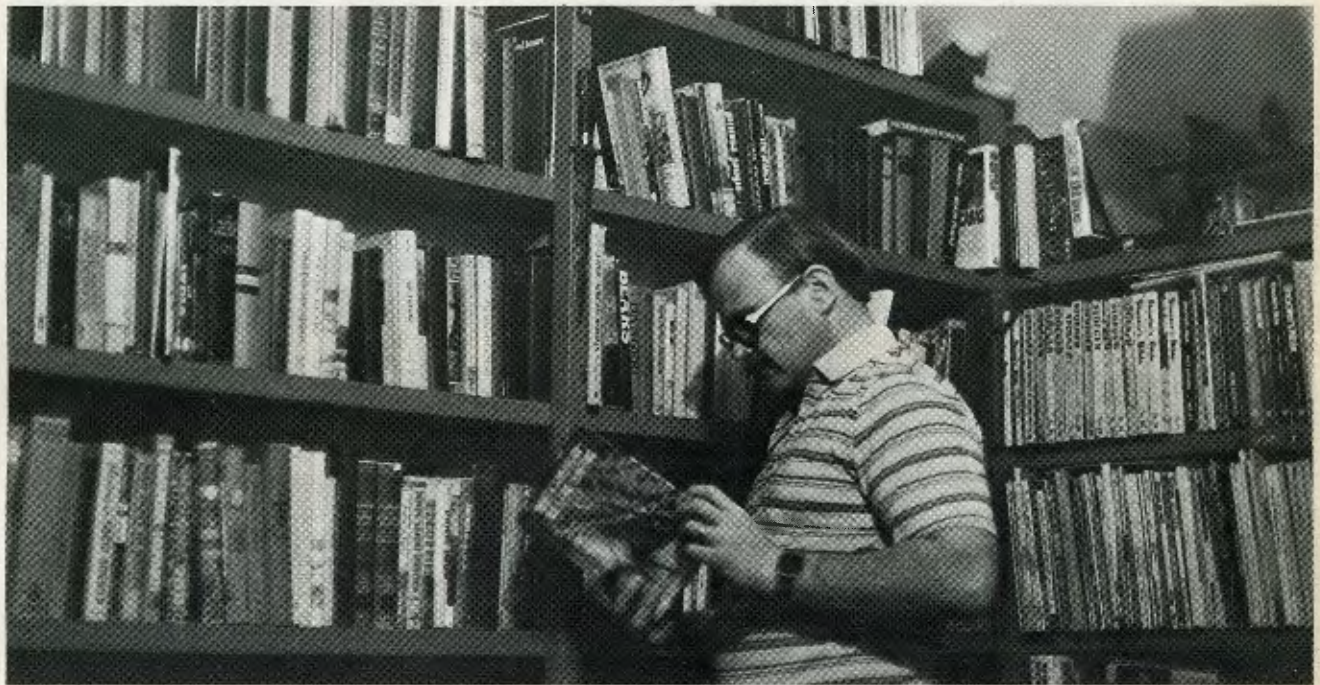
"Good" is the condition of the average used and worn book that still has all of its pages intact and present.

books at such unlikely places as rummage sales, thrift shops, Salvation Army stores, second-hand stores, department store sale tables, junk dealers, consignment houses, antique stores, sporting goods stores, gun shows and flea markets. Making the rounds of these places was time-consuming, but very worthwhile. I even found general used book stores to be worth shopping. They often had excellent books in my field at prices a lot lower than the specialty dealers.

Most general book stores have the stock divided into categories, and the

source for information about scarcity, collectibility and value of sporting books. The best I could get was the assortment of dealer's catalogs I had already accumulated.

Most books found in my scouting had been listed at one time in one of the catalogs. By taking into account the edition, condition, and the age of the listing, I was usually able to get a close estimate of the retail value of the book. From this, I could make an accurate estimate of what I could get for it in trade and what I should spend on it. When several dealers had listed



The author with his own books, hundreds of them.

"Good" and "very good" books are the ones usually sought out and purchased by the average collector who is as much interested in the contents of the book as he is in the book for its own sake.

A "fair" book is one that still has all of the pages of text intact. Endpapers, half-title pages, etc., may be missing. Its value is minimal.

A "poor" book is often referred to as a reading copy. The text is complete and readable, but can be smudged, torn and tattered. Its only value is in its contents—you may want to read it, but you won't want to display it on your shelves.

Another lesson I learned was that hard work could pay dividends in book scouting. I found an amazing number of inexpensive but desirable

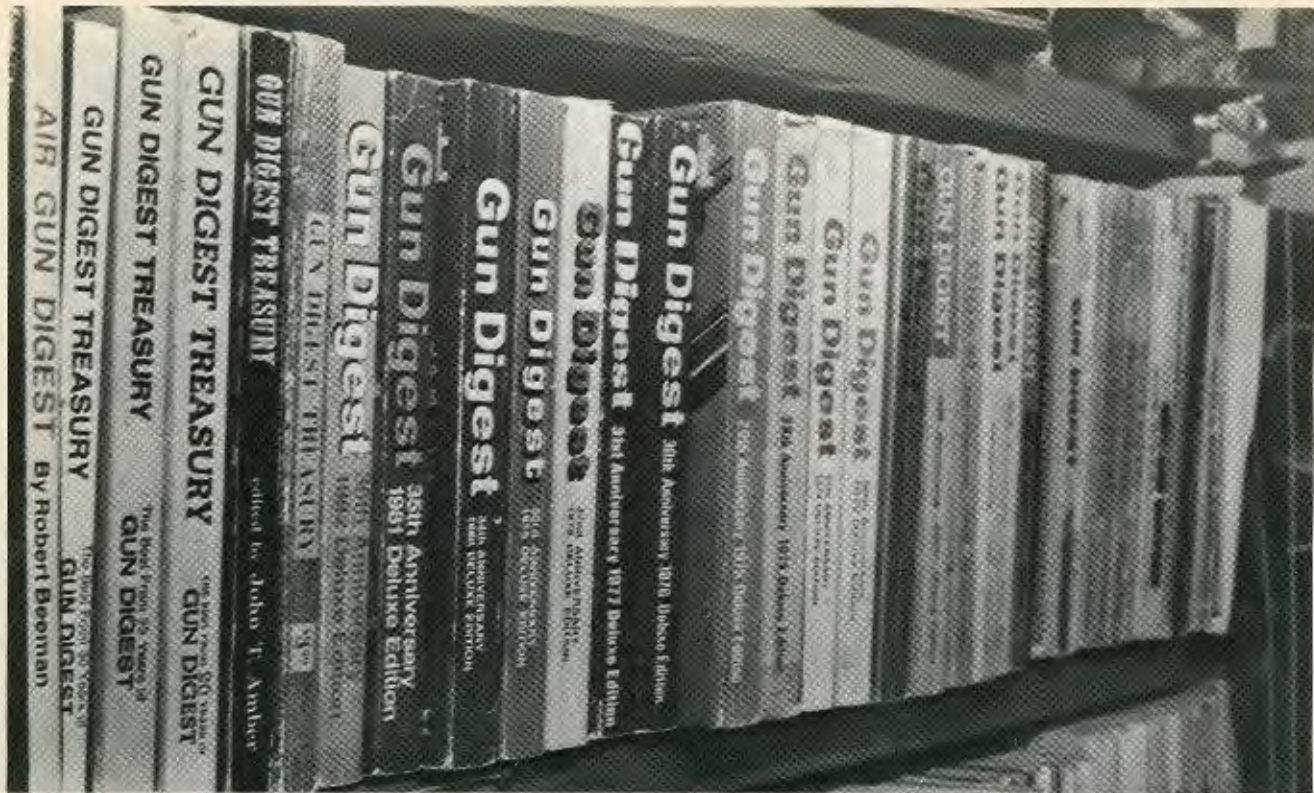
first and most obvious place to look is the section titled "Guns & Hunting" or "Outdoor Sports." I found that it pays to check other sections, too! Many larger stores have sections on Africa, Asia, India, Alaska, and the like, and they often file hunting books there; Travel, Geography and Natural History often contain good outdoor titles, as well; Technical sections may contain books on firearms and reloading; Biography often has works by or about hunters and explorers; even Fiction can be lucrative since works by Jack O'Connor, Robert Ruark, Nash Buckingham and Stewart Edward White are frequently found there.

I learned that a good reference library was one of the most important things I needed. There is no single

given book at differing prices, I either used the catalog of the dealer I traded with or took the average of the prices as a true value.

One good reference I found and used was Ray Riling's excellent work, *Guns And Shooting—A Bibliography*. This originally came out in a limited edition of 1500 copies and is the standard work on the subject of sporting books. First published in 1951 and long out of print, it has been recently republished and is available from Ray Riling Arms Books.

Guns And Shooting is not a price guide. It is a very definitive bibliography of virtually every sporting book published in a major European language between 1521 and 1950. Book listings are given by year of publication and by author: pertinent data on



A complete set of GUN DIGEST isn't easy to get, but it's valuable year-to-year post-World War II history.



size, publisher, contents and related facts are given. For the serious collector, it is an invaluable reference.

Another lesson I learned was the advantage of doing a majority of my business with one dealer. I found that there were many benefits in working with one dealer instead of several. Doing so allows you and the dealer to get to know each other and build up a relationship of mutual trust, and trust is a key factor in any business.

Mutual trust means a dealer can ship a book out to you without worrying about bouncing checks or other maneuvers on your part that can leave him with no book and no money. Mutual trust also means that you can ship off a box of books to him in trade and be confident that you will get a fair deal.

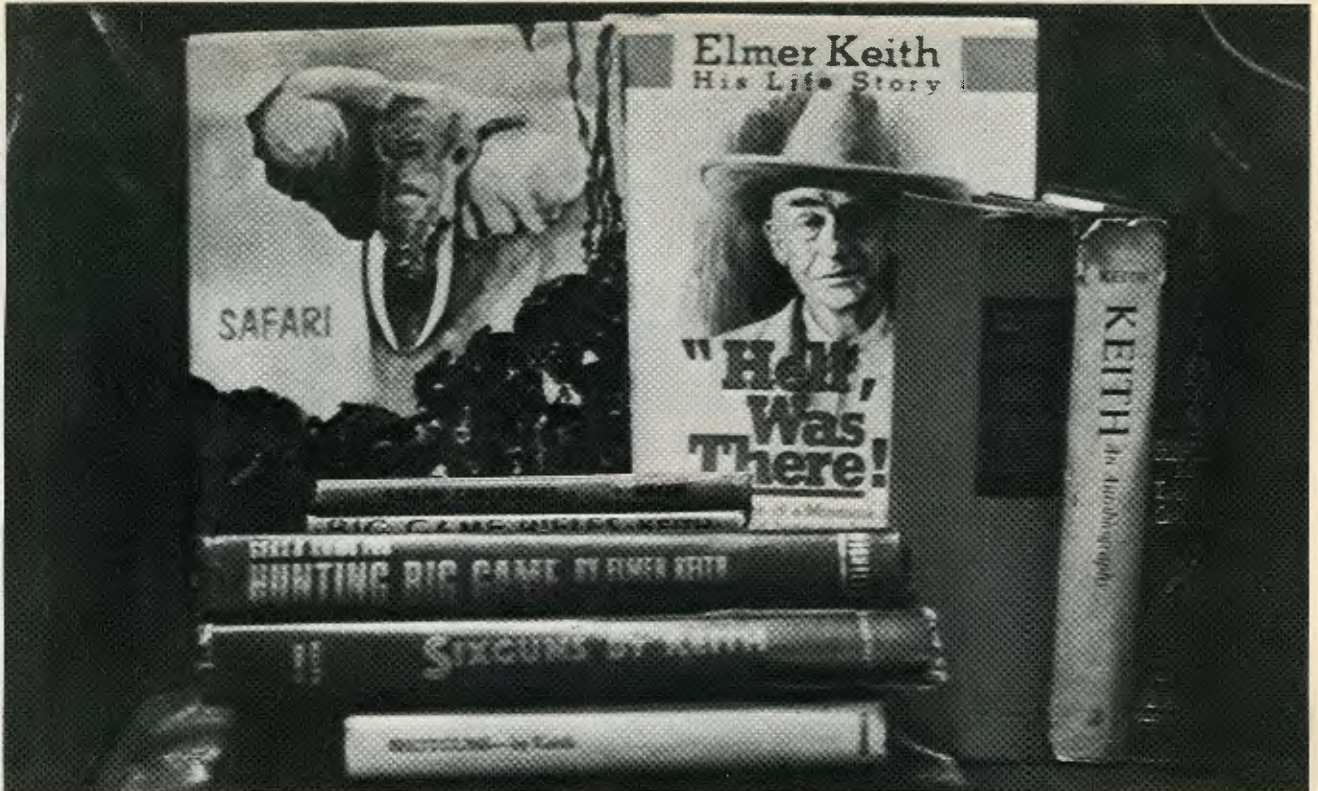
No dealer will buy from or trade with anyone for books sight unseen unless they know them well. Too often have they heard a book described as "good," and then "another dealer with equal hon-

You can pick a technical subject like hand-loading and realize a wide range of books on it.



Selous and Africa, for instance, on which to focus.

...ing the condition of books. This is a subjective art to a large extent, and what one man honestly calls "very good," another dealer with equal hon-



A man and familiar places—like Elmer Keith and our own West—can add up to a collection all to themselves.

esty may call “fine” and a third dealer may call “good.” When you and a dealer do enough business together, you learn to speak the same language and to see things the same way. This makes for a much smoother relationship.

Another area of potential friction between you and a dealer that mutual trust can eliminate is search requests. Most dealers offer a search service for a title you want. A search costs the dealer time and money, and he will hesitate to invest them if he thinks you are not serious or you have made the same request to another dealer. The majority of search services go through the same channels, and one man asking several dealers to find a certain book results in competition between searchers that drives up the price of the book and costs everyone involved more than it should, which is why mimeographed “want” lists sel-

EDITORIAL NOTE

James Hancock here advocates working closely with a book dealer if you're a real collector. It takes nothing from his point of view to reveal that this approach led him to buy half the business and become a full-time working partner of his book dealer.
K.W.

dom get results. Dealers assume several other dealers got the lists, so it would be a waste of time to search actively for the books.

Establishing a good relationship with a dealer has other advantages. If he knows that you are a serious collector or that you are especially interested in a certain category or subject, he will probably be willing to notify you if he gets a book that you might be interested in. He might even send a book to you for you to examine and decide if you want to buy it or not.

A friendly dealer can also give you good advice if you are interested in buying books as an investment. Like artwork and other collectibles, rare books are going up in value much faster than the inflation rate. Wise buying can be a good hedge against inflation, and your dealer's help and advice are invaluable. He is in a position to know the best books for you to buy.

Whether you collect for pleasure or profit or a combination of the two, having a good relationship with a dealer can make your quest much easier and cannot fail to benefit you.

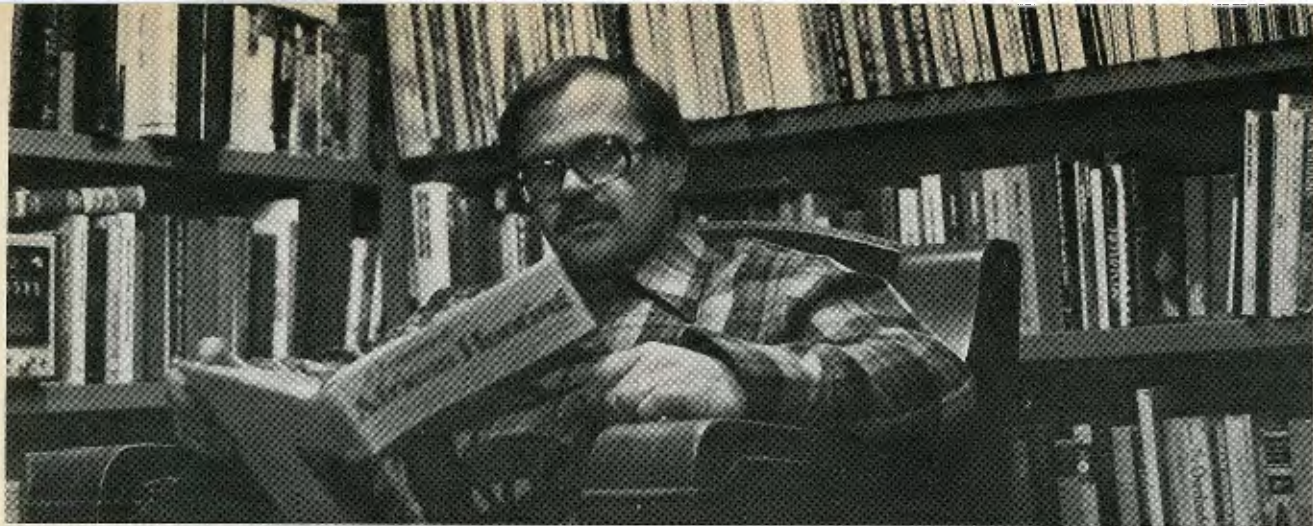
Most of all, I learned that book collecting can be an insidious malady. It is no respecter of persons or of ages. It



Antlers can take you into books that will take you to more and better antlers.



Sometimes you can make money. This book by Mellon has appreciated greatly.



Above all there is the pleasure of reading what thoughtful men have said about things to know.

Books can span centuries. They have been writing of Africa in English for almost two.



Mail Order Sporting Book Dealers

Angler's Shooter's Bookshelf, Goshen, CT 06576
 Berkshire Collection, P.O. Box 891, Pittsfield, MA 01202
 Blacktail Mountain Books, 42 1st. Avenue West, Kalispell, MT 59901
 Cabinet of Books, P.O. Box 195, Watertown, CT 06795
 Chestnut Ridge Books, P.O. Box 353, Rutherford, NJ 07070
 Charles Daly Collection, 66 Chilton St., Cambridge, MA 02138
 Gary L. Estabrook, P.O. Box 61543, Vancouver, WA 98666
 Gallery of the Old West, P.O. Box 556, Bigfork, MT 59911
 Gunnerman Books, P.O. Box 4292, Auburn Heights, MI 48057
 Melvin Marcher, 6204 N. Vermont, Oklahoma City, OK 73112
 Gerald Pettinger, Rte. 2, Russell, IA 50238
 Pisces & Capricorn, 302 S. Berrien St., Albion, MI 49424
 Ray Riling Arms Books, P.O. Box 18925, Philadelphia, PA 19119
 Rutgers Book Center, 127 Raritan Ave., Highland Park, NJ 08904
 James Tillinghast, Box 405, Hancock, NH 03449
 Trophy Room Books, 4858 Dempsey Ave., Encino, CA 91436
 Ken Trotman, 2-6 Hampstead High Street, London NW3 1QQ England

Most of these issue catalogs are free, but it is courteous to enclose one or two dollars to cover the dealer's expense when you request a catalog.

References

Margaret Haller, 1976: *Book Collector's Fact Book*, Arco Publishing, N.Y.
 Joe Riling: "The Arms Library" annually in GUN DIGEST.
 Ray Riling, 1951: *Guns And Shooting - A Bibliography*, Greenberg, N.Y.
 Jean Peters, Ed. 1977: *Book Collecting - A Modern Guide*, Bowker, N.Y. & London
 Jack Tannen, 1976: *How To Identify And Collect American First Editions*, Arco, N.Y.
Bookman's Yearbook - The 1966 AB - Old and New

can start easily like a fire and be harder to quench than any conflagration Smoky warns us against.

I have found it rewarding: educational, pleasant, and fun. A good library can be built up without great expense, and scavenging and trading and working to get the books I want gives me both thrill and sport.

My mother's gift started me on a long and enjoyable road: I have never regretted traveling it. ●

Useful Terminology

Book sizes

Folio—over 13" high
Quarto (4to)—about 12" high
Octavo (8vo)—about 9"
Duodecimo (12mo)—7"-8" high
Sextodecimo (16mo)—6"-7" high
Vigesimoquarto (24mo)—5"-6" high
Trigesimosecundo (32mo)—4"-5" high

Book defects, features, etc.

Chipped—very small pieces torn or gouged out.

Derrydale Press—the Ne Plus Ultra of collecting. Derrydale operated during the Depression, producing limited editions of sporting books in deluxe bindings. They generally demand top prices from collectors.

Ex-Lib—formerly a library book. Generally in good condition, but not very desirable to serious collectors.

Faded—usually a cloth binding that has been exposed to the sun until the original color is bleached out.

Foxing—light brown spots caused by the aging of paper. Common in older books.

Hinge cracked—the paper which acts as the hinge for the cover has begun to crack, but still functions.

Hinge separated—the hinge has completely torn and the cover—front or rear, depending on which hinge—is loose. If both hinges are separated, then the cover is completely detached.

Shaken—hinges have loosened to the point where the cover is not tightly attached to the book. This is a common condition in older, heavier books. Generally any book with faulty hinges is only "good" in condition.