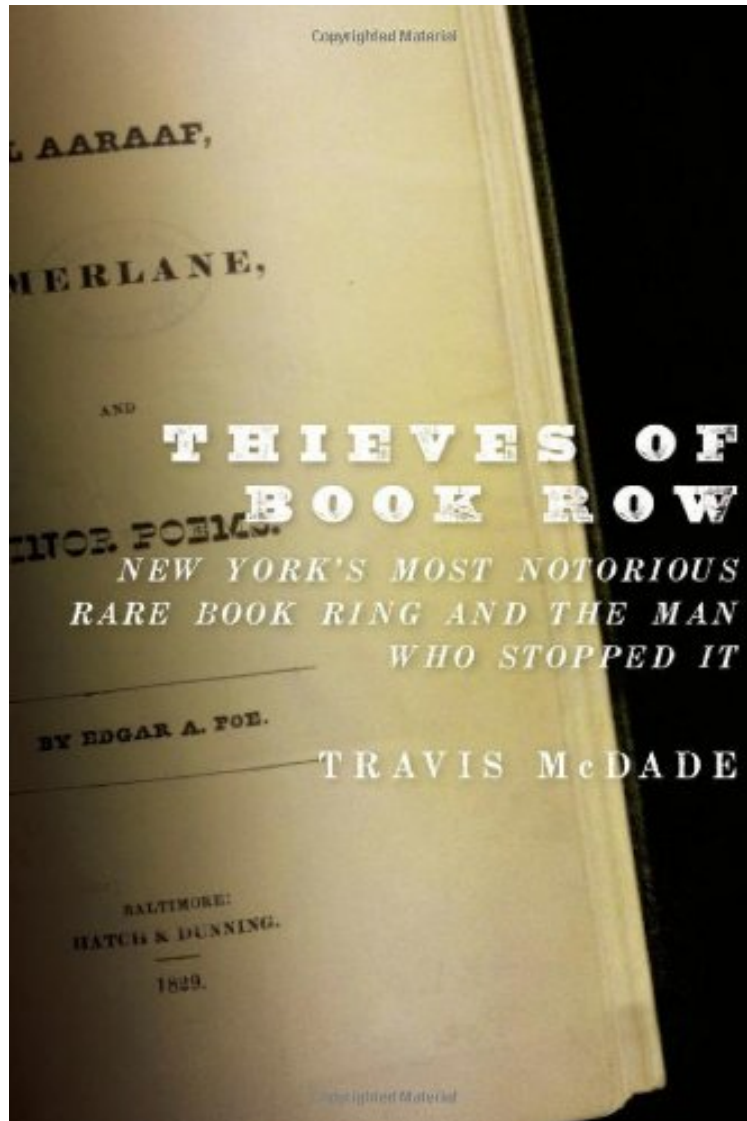


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# Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It

Travis McDade

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**Travis McDade : Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Thieves of Book Row: New York's Most Notorious Rare Book Ring and the Man Who Stopped It:

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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.

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