

An Introductory Guide for the Perplexed

By Joel Silver

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It happened to all of us when we first started collecting books. We picked up an antiquarian bookseller's catalogue for the first time, and discovered that book collecting had its own language and that there was much to learn before everything in a book description could be completely understood. Some of the terminology, like "fine," "rare," or "first edition" may have already had some (though possibly inaccurate) meaning to us, but with the help of John Carter's *ABC for Book Collectors*, it didn't take too long to catch on to many of the terms in common use.

One aspect of catalogue descriptions that wasn't quite as easy to master, however, was the line or two of citations to standard published bibliographies that appeared at the end of many of the descriptions. There were some citations, such as "STC" or "Wing," that were included by Carter in his *ABC*, but most of them were not. The citations were bewildering in their variety, and seemed to increase in number in corresponding proportion to the increasing price of the book described.

Since most antiquarian booksellers have assumed a familiarity with reference books on the part of readers of their catalogues, such citations in catalogues are usually given in highly abbreviated form, such as the listing in an Americana catalogue for *A Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod Met at Boston in the Year 1662...*, by Richard Mather and Jonathan Mitchel (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1664), which included the following citations: "Evans 89. Church 588. Holmes, Minor Mathers 39. Holmes, Increase Mather 90. Dexter 1949. Wing M1271. JCB 3, p.114."

The bibliographical citations in a catalogue of 15th-century books can be even more mystifying to the uninitiated reader, such as these references included in a catalogue description of the 1484 Nuremberg edition of the *Chronicon, Partes I-III* of Antoninus Florentinus: "GW 2072; HC 1159; BMC II, 426; Goff A-778; Pell 813; Pol 234; IGI 608; IDL 327; BNCA A-450; BSB Ink A-563; Hase 87."

In addition to catalogue listings of bibliographies which describe the offered item, some dealers include occasional listings of bibliographies in which the book offered for sale may not be found. These citations are usually along the lines

of "Not in Wing," "Unknown to Brucoli," "Not located in NUC," and in some catalogues, these negative citations seem to outnumber the ones in which the book was actually found.

San Francisco bookseller David Magee commented on the propensity of booksellers to cite bibliographies in this manner in his humorous lexicon, *A Course in Correct Cataloguing or Notes to The Neophyte* (published in the January 25, 1960, issue of *AB*). Magee's entry for "Unrecorded In ..." reads: "Unrecorded in Shuttlecock, Finkelbaum or Magee" is a statement which not only makes your item sound rare but will give the impression that you have a vast reference library."

Carter's *ABC for Book Collectors* goes into more detail on the subject:

"Unknown To ... or Not In ..."

Few things are more agreeable, whether to collector or bookseller, than the discovery that one possesses a book which the accredited experts have overlooked or failed to recognise for what it is. But the cataloguer's cry of joy must not be allowed to deafen us to the voice of reason; and this enjoins us to ask (1) whether the authority thus negatively cited is a good one, (2) whether the scope and nature of the work of reference are strictly relevant, and (3) whether possibly the book is, in fact, listed in it but under some less than obvious heading.

It is easy enough to score off an out-of-date author bibliography or a notoriously incompetent bibliographer. It is not fair to saddle a general survey with an unclaimed obligation to list every minor production, and then trumpet up something it does not mention

Although some positive or negative bibliographical citations in catalogue descriptions are dubious or simply wrong, most of them are quite helpful and serve a greater purpose than the display of the intellectual prowess of the dealer. They can lead the reader to reference works which identify the book more precisely and which often contain a great deal of information about its physical characteristics and its historical or literary significance. In addition, these citations can serve as a guide for readers to the principal reference works in a particular field.

An awareness of useful reference books and how they function will not only increase your knowledge and enjoyment, but the information that you discover will enable you to buy and sell books more intelligently and profitably. None of us will ever learn to identify all of the citations to the countless thousands of bibliographies and other reference works that have been published over the centuries. We usually learn the basic sources in our specialized fields by repetition and use, and we gradually add others

as we come across them.

But how do you first identify the reference book to which the citation is referring? Since most booksellers' catalogues use an abbreviated method of citation, it can be difficult or time-consuming to try to track down a cited book or article, especially if you're new to the field. One of the basic problems in identifying unfamiliar citations is the lack of standardization in the way reference books have been cited by dealers, collectors, and librarians. To take a simple example, the *Bibliography of American Literature*, published in nine volumes from 1955-1991, has usually been cited as "BAL," but it has also been frequently-cited as "Blanck," since Jacob Blanck was the editor of the first six volumes.

Things can become much more confusing if the name of a compiler or editor is a common one. A bibliographical citation to "Smith" could be understood by the reader to refer to Charles W. Smith's *Pacific Northwest Americana*; David Eugene Smith's *Rara Arithmetica*; one of several bibliographical works by Joseph Smith, such as *Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana ...* or *A Descriptive Catalogue of Friends' Books*; or F. Seymour Smith's *The Classics in Translation*; among several dozen other bibliographies and catalogues.

In such cases, the correct bibliography can often be deduced logically from the subject of the book, but sometimes it's not that easy. For example, one would expect to find a bibliographical description of a 19th-century British travel account in a travel bibliography, or in a reference work covering a particular country that the traveler visited. But in addition to these, and depending on what people, events, or objects the author described in the narrative, the book might also appear in reference works devoted to religion, language, costume, science, medicine, sports, or military history, among others. It could also be included in additional bibliographies or catalogues that happen to cover the works produced by the book's printer or publisher, or in general bibliographies or catalogues covering 19th-century British publications.

For those who buy, sell, or collect books, it can be costly as well as disappointing to limit your knowledge only to specialized reference works in your current chosen field. There is much to be discovered and learned from "off subject" books, and a broad knowledge of reference works is a good way to gain access to new customers, find new ways to sell books currently in stock, or to locate some surprising additions for your collection.

But if you are new to book collecting or book-selling, or if you don't understand a cryptic bibliographical citation, where do you go for more information? First, and most obviously, look in the catalogue itself for any list of frequently-cited reference books. Regrettably, relatively few



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15	Hull , Mortimer Suite, City Hall	10-4
18	Print, Map and Ephemera , St. Olave's Parish Hall, Mark Lane, EC3, Free	10-6
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22	* Haywards Heath , Clair Hall, Perrymount Road	10-4
22	* Northwich , Memorial Hall, Northwich, Cheshire	10-4
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dealers include such a list, although the number has been increasing in recent years, particularly in specialized catalogues. For example, the London firm of Bernard Quaritch often includes such a section at the end of their catalogues under a title such as "Reference Works Cited in this Catalogue," which provides sufficient bibliographical information to enable the reader to identify the cited works. Examples of such Quaritch catalogues that I have found especially useful include *Catalogue 1185: Islands & Empires*, with a very good list of reference works on travel and colonial history, and *Catalogue 1226: The Society of Jesus, 1548-1773*, with an extensive list of works related to the history of the Jesuits.

Among the several Americana dealers who now identify many of the citations in their catalogues is the William Reese Company, which has also placed a list of "Fifty Basic Reference Works on Americana" on their World Wide Web site on the Internet

(<http://www.reeseco.com/~coreese/ref.htm#top>), where it may be consulted by anyone with Web access.

If the catalogue itself does not contain an identifying list, then your search must begin elsewhere. Although you may not wish to reveal your seeming lack of bibliographical knowledge to anyone else; you can try telephoning the bookseller and asking about the meaning of the citation. If you can overcome your reluctance, this is usually a successful approach, and it can occasionally also lead to a lasting business relationship with the bookseller, in addition to the particular information that you are seeking.

It can, however, lead instead to a lack of confidence in the description and in the dealer, if the bookseller admits that he or she has no idea what the citation means, because it was simply copied from a previous dealer or auction house catalogue entry, or from a handwritten notation that happened to be on the book's endpaper when it was catalogued for stock.

In addition to the direct personal approach, which you might not choose to employ each time you encounter an unfamiliar citation, there are fortunately many other places to look. You'll gradually develop your own favorite sources, but I've found several works to be of great help in tracking down citations.

Peter M. VanWingen and Belinda D. Urquiza. *Standard Citation Forms For Published Bibliographies And Catalogs Used in Rare Book Cataloging* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996). This new edition of *Standard Citation Forms* is a revised and expanded version of the first edition of 1982, and was produced jointly by the Library of Congress and the Bibliographic Standards Committee of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

As stated in the introduction to its first edition, *Standard Citation Forms* "is an attempt to draw together and establish citation forms for those works that are helpful in verifying, identifying, and describing items held in rare book and special collections. It is not a fixed canon of recommended bibliographic sources nor is it a bibliography of bibliographies; its sole purpose is to establish and record standardized citation forms."

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Forms has an enlarged purpose, and is a checklist of 789 "bibliographies and catalogs that are useful in verifying, identifying, or describing items held in rare book or special collections and that have been or are likely to be cited in machine-readable cataloging records. Bibliographies of or about individuals, printers, publishers, or jurisdictions below the national level are largely excluded..."

Since collectors and booksellers buy and sell the same kinds of books that are housed in rare book and special collections libraries, they also use many of the same reference works. As it explicitly states, *Standard Citation Forms* is not the place to look for author bibliographies or checklists of local imprints, but it is a good place to look up citations as diverse as Abbey, Barber, Duveen, Evans, Heartman, Holzmann & Bohatta, IGI, Koeman, Murdoch, Osler, Polain, Sabin, Vicaire, Wegelin, and Zimmer, among several hundred others.

The prescribed forms of citation given in *Standard Citation Forms* will probably be adopted far more readily by librarians than by the trade (e.g., booksellers are more likely to continue to cite "Church" rather than "Church, E.D. Discovery"), but it would be a pity if the library orientation of this work prevented dealers and collectors from using it for citation identification and as an aid in learning about important bibliographies and catalogues.

Robert Balay, editor. *Guide to Reference Books. Eleventh Edition* (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1996). This is another tremendously valuable source that is al-

so used far more by librarians than by booksellers. This 11th edition of the A.L.A.'s standard *Guide to Reference Books*, edited by Balay is the latest in a long series, whose editors have included Eugene Sheehy, Constance M. Winchell, and Gilbert Mudge.

"Balay," as the *Guide* will likely be referred to, is an annotated listing of nearly 16,000 reference works, including electronic as well as printed sources. It includes a large number of catalogues, bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other rare book reference sources, and it is an excellent place to locate and learn about the basic reference literature in dozens of subject areas. For quickly researching unknown citations, Balay's extensive index can often lead you to the answer, but due to the book's necessarily limited size, and its need to include up-to-date works in many different fields, there are necessarily thousands of frequently-cited rare book reference sources that are not included in Balay or its predecessors.

Even though Balay may not contain the entry you're looking for, it usually can lead you to other important reference guides devoted to personal author bibliographies, particular time periods, geographical locations, or specialized subjects, which in turn may be able to answer your citation question or lead you to even more valuable reference sources. For example, if you are looking for author or genre bibliographies related to English and American literature, Balay lists and describes such sources as the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, Charles H. Nilon's *Bibliography of Bibliographies in American Literature*, Michael J. Marcuse's *A Reference Guide for English Studies*, James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide*, and Trevor Howard-Hill's *Index to British Literary Bibliography*.

The source to which I usually turn if a citation I'm looking for is not in Balay is Theodore Besterman's *A World Bibliography of Bibliographies. Fourth Edition* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1965-1966; five volumes). *A World Bibliography of Bibliographies* is a remarkable listing of more than 100,000 published bibliographies, organized under some 16,000 alphabetically ordered subject and personal name entries, and its extensive index volume simplifies enormously any search for an author's name, although the search can still be cumbersome if the author happens to be named Brown, Smith, or Jones.

If neither *Standard Citation Forms*, Balay, or Besterman provide an answer, and if the citation appears to be the name of an author, or an abbreviated form of a title, then a library catalogue or bibliographic database may be the next logical places to look. If you have access to a large online database, such as OCLC or RLIN, an online search, especially if you are able to narrow it down enough, may give you some plausible possibilities. If you don't have access to these databases, but you do have access to the World Wide Web, then a search of the online catalogue of the Library of Congress or a large university library may also reveal the answer.

Of course, a good printed library or union catalogue may also help you to find the cited reference, but the search can be both difficult and

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time consuming. If you have access to the massive *National Union Catalog, pre-1956 Imprints* and its supplements, you may be able to track down the citation, especially if you're researching the name of an author that is at least a bit unusual. It's easy to get bogged down amid the endless columns of small type, however, and your fatigue might cause you to overlook the answer even if you do finally come across it.

If all else fails in your search, then you can ask a friendly rare book reference librarian, or send out an SOS e-mail message to an appropriate electronic mailing list on the Internet. It may be that the reference that you are trying to track down is a ghost, created by a misreading or a typographical error, or the reference source may indeed be so obscure that few people know about or have recorded it.

In the meantime, one of the best ways to enrich your life with antiquarian books is to increase your knowledge of available bibliographical reference sources. One of the best and most pleasant ways to accomplish this is to take a close look at the list of reference works cited in some of the bibliographies that you may already use regularly.

If you happen to be interested in Western Americana, study the list of cited references in Colton Storm's *A Catalogue of the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana* (Chicago: Published for The Newberry Library by The University of Chicago Press, 1968; pp. xix - xxv), or in the Fourth Edition of *The Plains & the Rockies* (San Francisco: John Howell — Books, 1982; pp. xvi - xx), by Henry R. Wagn-

er and Charles L. Camp, as revised by Robert H. Becker.

As another example, if you want to learn more about appropriate reference works for 16th-century books, look at the bibliographies in Ruth Mortimer's catalogues of French and Italian 16th-century books and manuscripts in the Harvard College Library Department of Printing and Graphic Arts (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. xv - xvii and 1974, pp. xiii - xvii), or in Fred Schreiber's *Simon de Colines: An Annotated Catalogue of 230 Examples of His Press, 1520-1546* (Provo, Utah: Friends of the Brigham Young University Library, 1995; pp. 231-236).

AB readers who have read any of my previous articles about bibliographies, catalogues, and other reference works know how I feel about these books. They are indispensable to anyone who works with antiquarian books, and they will more than repay whatever time you devote to learning about them, regardless of what field they happen to cover.

As Americana specialist Michael Ginsberg has stated so directly and succinctly at the annual Colorado Seminar-Workshop on the Out-of-Print and Antiquarian Book Market, "Reference books will make you money." The careful reading of bibliographical citations represents an easy way to identify and to learn about some of the most useful and interesting of these reference books, and the more that you are able to learn about them, the more intellectually and financially rewarding your antiquarian book pursuits will be.

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