Beyond-the-Catalog
Expanding Your Collection with Books

by **Ron Breznay**



Figure 1. Jersey souvenir sheet commemorating 200 years since the publication of Frankenstein.

I enjoyed the first installment of "Beyond-the-Catalog: An Introduction to Expanding Your Collection," by Jeff Hayward, in the March-April 2026 issue of *Topical Time*. This article resonated with me as I have gone beyond the catalog in building my topical collections.

I have two main topicals: horror and Alfred Hitchcock. For the latter, it is necessary to go beyond the catalog, as there are not many Hitchcock stamps out there. Therefore, I have many non-stamp, or at least non-cataloged, items in my collection.

Some of the non-cataloged items in my Hitchcock collection are first day covers, other covers, maximum cards, postcards, a United States Postal Service Souvenir Page and Commemorative Panel, Cinderellas, a set of Stampers Saver cards and a first day ceremony program.

I have similar items in my horror collection, but I want to discuss non-philatelic books that fit my horror topic.

I have hundreds of horror novels, but the ones I consider suitable for my topical collection are the novels and stories that have been commemorated on stamps. Two classic horror novels, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, have been depicted on several stamp issues. Also shown on various stamps are the Washington Irving short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and the Charles Dickens short story "A Christmas Carol."

Frankenstein

On June 18, 2018, the island of Jersey issued a souvenir sheet of eight stamps (Scott 2155a) showing scenes from the book *Frankenstein*. These illustrations are said to be true to the story in the book, and they are accompanied by quotes from the novel (Figure 1).

One rainy evening in June 1816, during a summer of violent thunderstorms in the area of Geneva, Switzerland, Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and others gathered at a villa on Lake Geneva and read aloud German ghost stories, one of which was about the reanimation of a stolen corpse head. Byron suggested they each write a horror story. Mary started a story, and in London the following year, she finished the book. It was titled *Frankenstein*; or, the *Modern Prometheus*. In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a cousin of Zeus, who is said to have fashioned the first man from clay, after which the goddess Athena breathed life into the figure. Despite Percy's efforts, the book did not easily find a

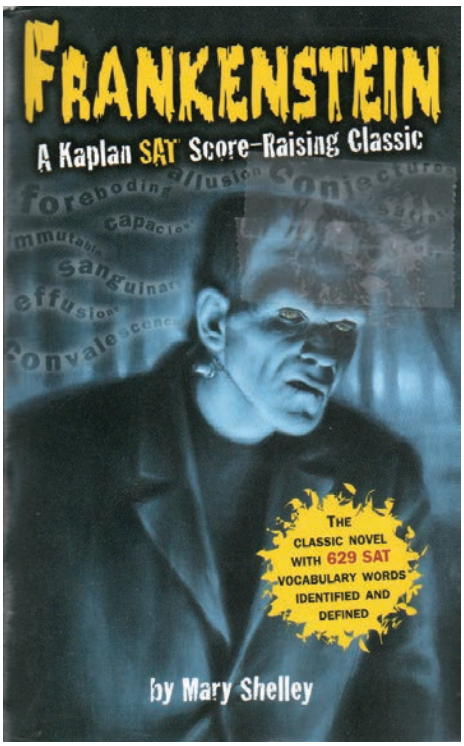


Figure 2. **Frankenstein*; or, the* Modern Prometheus *by Mary Shelley.***

publisher. A not-quite-reputable house, Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones, published the book anonymously in 1818. A more recent edition of the book is shown in Figure 2.



***Figure 3.** Dracula* **by Bram Stoker.**

Dracula

In 1890, Bram Stoker began the groundwork for *Dracula*. He claims the idea for the novel came to him in a nightmare. Still, he was probably also influenced by the tales of Arminius Vambery, a Hungarian adventurer and folklore expert, who introduced Stoker to the legends of the vampire. He also may have been influenced by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's vampire novel *Carmilla*.

Dracula was published in 1897. It sold fairly well, more so in the United States than in Europe, and earned mixed reviews. Stoker's mother wrote him: "It is splendid. No book since Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein* or indeed any other at all has come near yours in originality and terror." Sir Arthur Conan Doyle also praised the book: "I think it is the very best story of diablerie which I have read for many years. It is really wonderful how with so much exciting interest over so long a book there is never an anticlimax." Many editions of the book have since been published, such as the volume shown in Figure 3.

On October 1, 1997, in celebration of the centenary of the publication of *Dracula*, Ireland issued four individual stamps,



***Figure 4. Stamps issued by Ireland in 1997 in honor of the centenary of the publication of** Dracula.*

with denominations of 28-pence, 32-pence, 38-pence, and 52-pence, showing various scenes from the novel (Scott 1086-89). The 32-pence also came in a souvenir sheet of one (Scott 1087a), and all four stamps were combined in another souvenir sheet (Scott 1089a). The souvenir sheet of four is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 5. Artcraft first day cover for the Legend of Sleepy Hollow stamp with the Washington Irving stamp in the Famous Americans series.

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

The classic horror story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," by Washington Irving, is illustrated on a United States commemorative stamp issued in 1974 (Scott 1548). Shown on the stamp are a spooky tulip tree, the Headless Horseman about to hurl his head, and Ichabod Crane on his horse, Gunpowder, all set against a full moon. In Figure 5 is an Artcraft first day cover for the Legend of Sleepy Hollow stamp in combination with a stamp from the 1940 Famous American series honoring Irving (Scott 859).

Washington Irving was born in New York City on April 3, 1783. He temporarily moved to England for the family business in 1815, where he achieved fame with the 1820 publication of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, in which "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" first appeared. Irving returned to New York in 1832 and purchased a house and its surrounding riverfront property in Tarrytown, New York, on the Hudson River. Irving died in 1859 in Tarrytown and is buried in nearby Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" is set in Tarrytown. Above Tarrytown is the village of North Tarrytown, where the first day ceremony was held at Philipsburg Manor House. The town officially changed



Figure 6. Rip Van Winkle & The Legend of Sleepy Hollow *was published in 1974 by Sleepy Hollow Press of Tarrytown, New York.*



Figure 7. Maximum card for the Legend of Sleepy Hollow stamp with an illustration from the Sleepy Hollow Press edition of Rip Van Winkle & The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

its name to Sleepy Hollow in 1996. South of Tarrytown is Irvington, which was named after Washington Irving.

I have three books related to Irving's story. *Rip Van Winkle & The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* was published in 1974 by Sleepy Hollow Press of Tarrytown, New York (Figure 6). The book contains illustrations created in 1849 by Felix O.C. Darley and illuminated in color by Fritz Kredel. The maximum card shown in Figure 7 has one of the illustrations from the book.

In 1974, Fleetwood released several first day covers and a maximum card for the Legend of Sleepy Hollow stamp. They also issued a reprint of the first edition of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (Figure 8).

The commission to design the Sleepy Hollow stamp was given to Leonard Everett Fisher, one of the Westport (Connecticut) Artists. Fisher had prior experience, having designed the Colonial Craftsmen block of four issue of 1972 (Scott 1456-59). For the Sleepy Hollow stamp, he was tasked with designing a stamp that would be immediately recognizable and tie in with Halloween, including the colors black and orange. The story of the Westport Artists is told in the book U.S. Postage Stamps Born in Westport (Figure 9).

Shown in Figure 10 is a portion of a first-day ceremony program, which Fisher signed.

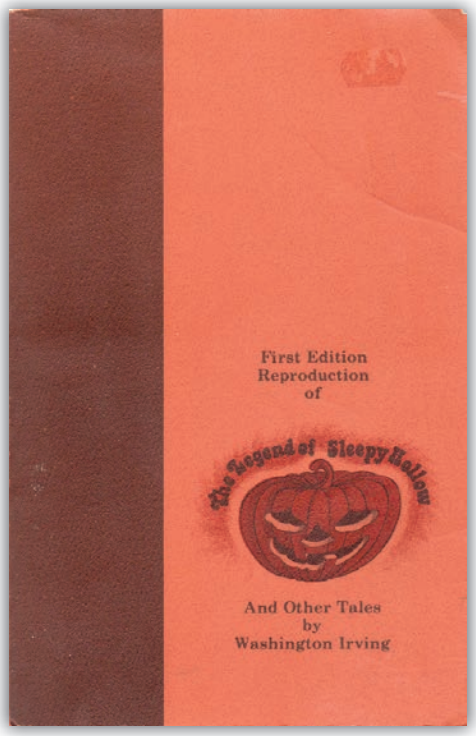


Figure 8. Fleetwood reprint of the first edition of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

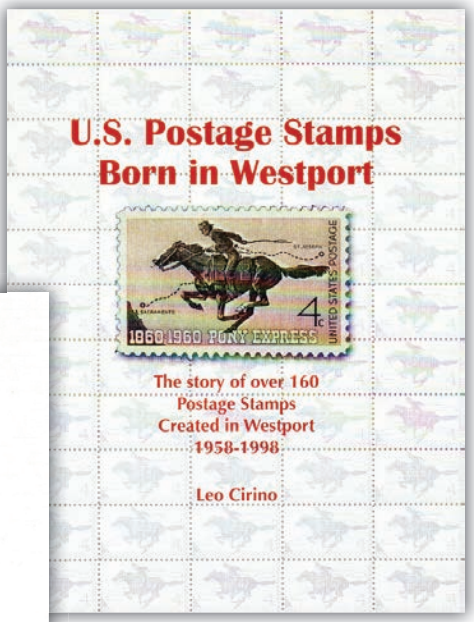


Figure 9. U.S. Postage Stamps Born in Westport contains information on Leonard Everett Fisher, the artist for the Legend of Sleepy Hollow stamp.

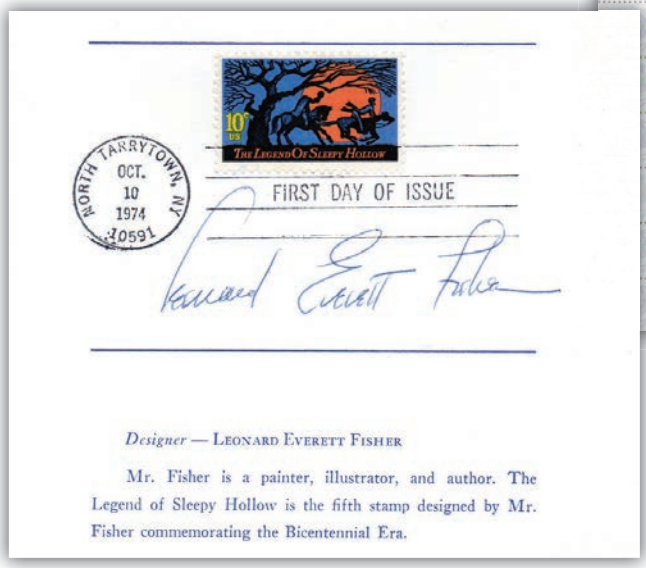


Figure 10. Portion of first day ceremony program signed by Leonard Everett Fisher.



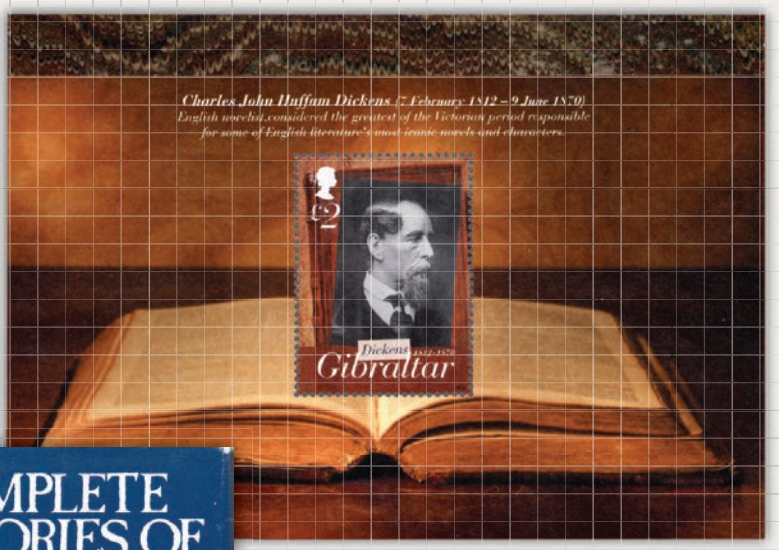


Figure 11. Stamps (above) and souvenir sheet (right) issued by Gibraltar in 2012 to celebrate the bicentennial of Charles Dickens' birth.

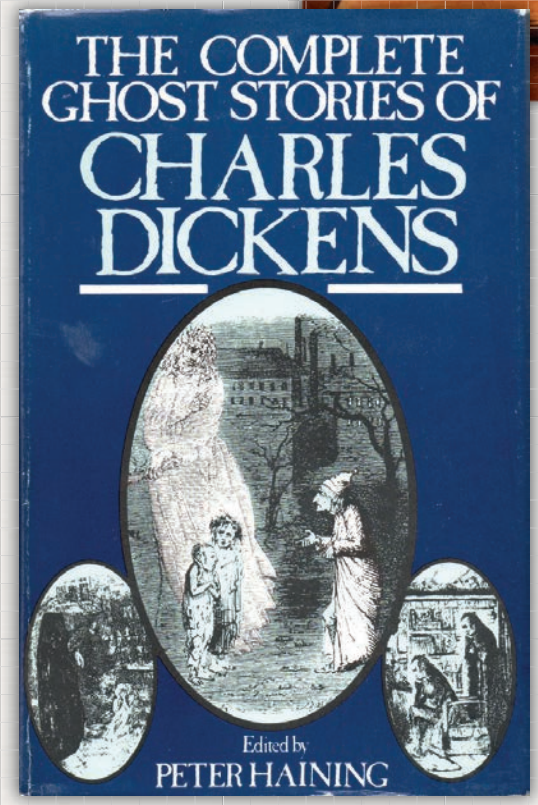


Figure 12. **The Complete Ghost Stories of Charles Dickens**, *edited by Peter Haining, contains 20 ghost stories written by Dickens.*

A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens is not thought of as a horror writer, but he penned one of the most famous ghost stories in the English language, "A Christmas Carol." The story was published in book form in December 1843 and was an instant success, both popular and critically acclaimed. The first edition of 6,000 sold out within days, and second and third editions quickly followed. Within a year, over 15,000 copies had been sold.

Shown in Figure 11 is a set of four stamps and a souvenir sheet issued by Gibraltar in 2012 (Scott 1347-51) to celebrate the bicentennial of Dickens' birth. The £2 stamp shows a scene from "A Christmas Carol."

The story is readily available in many editions. But this isn't the only ghost story from Dickens. Altogether, he wrote

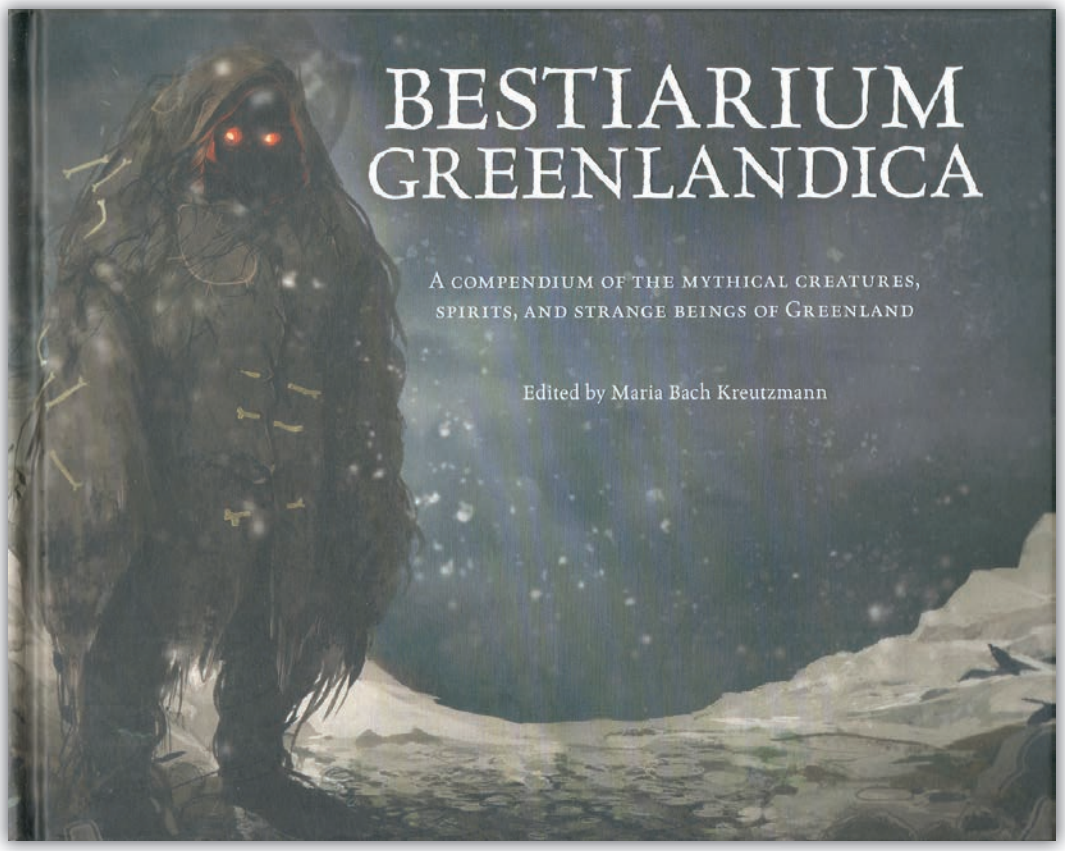


Figure 13. **Bestiarium Greenlandica** ***contains the images used on the Greenland Ghost Stories stamps.***

20 spooky tales. They have been collected in *The Complete Ghost Stories of Charles Dickens*, edited by Peter Haining and published in 1983. The book (Figure 12) contains illustrations from the original publications of the various stories. Some of the other stories are "The Ghost Chamber," "The Haunted House," and "The Signal-Man."

Greenland Ghost Stories

Snow and icy winds chill the desolate expanses of Greenland. But that is not all. Tales of ghosts and monsters also send shivers down the spines of Greenlanders. Tusass, the postal administration of Greenland, issued four sets of two stamps each from 2020 through 2023 depicting the ghostly legends of the not-so-green land.

All the designs on the stamps and the stories behind them are taken from the book *Bestiarium Greenlandica* (Figure 13), published in 2018 by Milik Publishing. The book was edited by Maria Bach Kreutzmann and illustrated by various artists. It contains stories of 67 Greenlandic ghosts, spirits, mythical creatures, and strange beings, as well as background information and reference material.

The first set of stamps (Scott 852-53) was issued on November 6, 2020; the second (Scott 879-80) on September 17, 2021; the third (Scott 892-93) on May 31, 2022; and the



Figure 14. Greenland Ghost Stories Stamps I-IV.



Figure 15.

fourth (Scott 921-922) on February 27, 2023. All of the stamps are shown in Figure 14.

For more about the Greenland stamps, please see my article "Timely Topicals: Greenland Ghost Stories" in the September-October 2023 issue of *Topical Time* (Figure 15).

Exhibiting

The combination of stamps and books would not work well as a traditional philatelic exhibit. However, another type of exhibit could be done. I am in the Wyoming Valley Stamp Club, located in northeastern Pennsylvania.

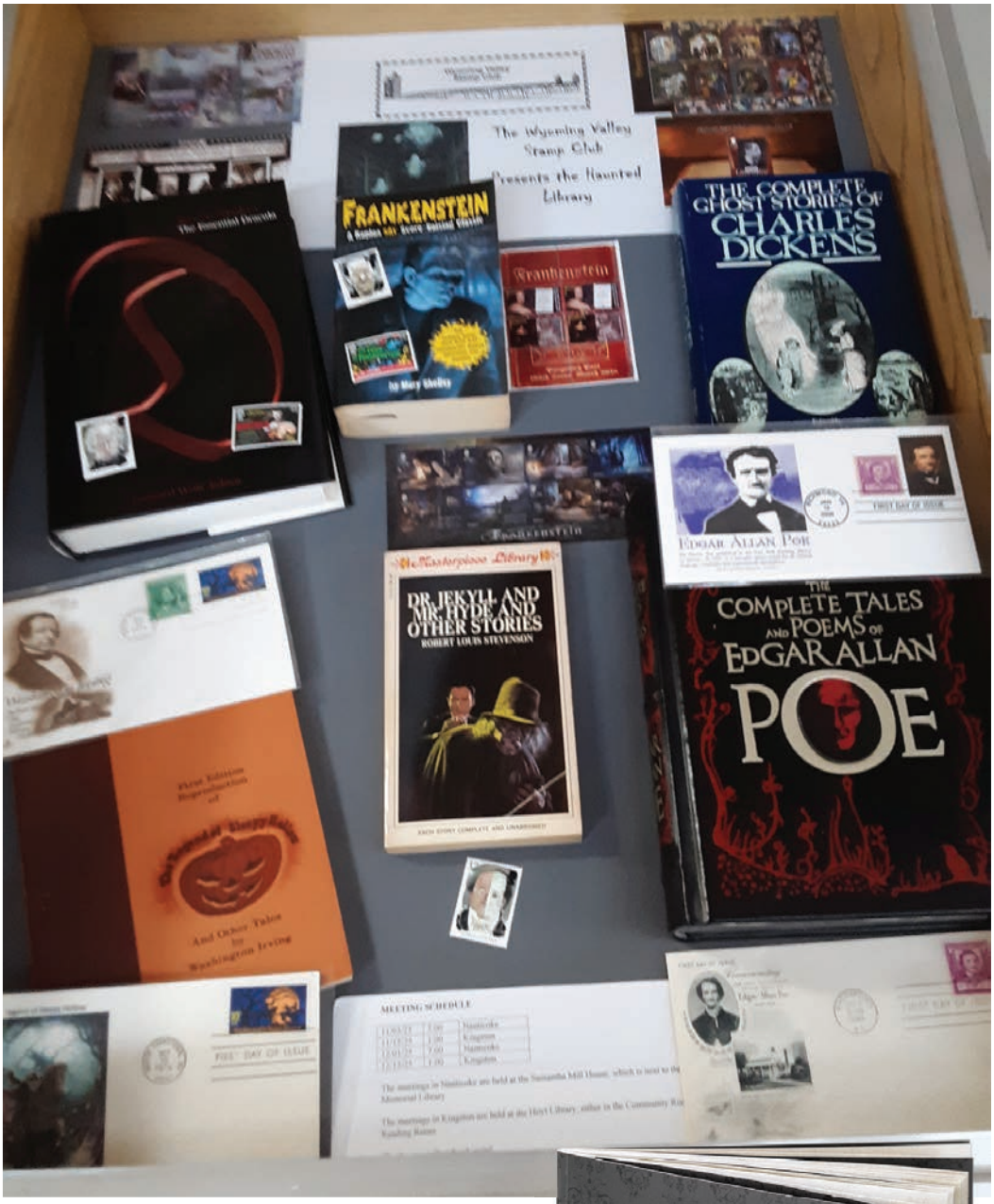




Figure 16. Wyoming Valley Stamp Club library display titled "The Haunted Library."

We have a display case at the Hoyt Library in Kingston, where we have meetings. For Halloween in 2025, I prepared a display titled *The Haunted Library*, containing horror books and related stamps. This is shown in Figure 16.

As a more permanent installation, my collection is a row of horror books on a shelf and an album of horror stamps lurking alongside.