

**YOUR COLLECTION OF  
CIVIL WAR BOOKS  
(AND MANUSCRIPTS)  
SELLING, AUCTIONING, GIFTING?  
SOMEDAY?**

Advice for  
Collectors (*of all ages?*) • Wives  
Children • Significant Others  
Trustees & Executors, etc.

***By Tom Broadfoot***

# **YOUR COLLECTION OF CIVIL WAR BOOKS**

**(AND MANUSCRIPTS)**

## **SELLING, AUCTIONING, GIFTING? SOMEDAY?**

Gift to Children .....	4
Selling Yourself .....	4
Auction.....	5
Gift to Library .....	5
Selling to a Dealer.....	7
Commonly Asked Questions .....	10
Insuring your Collection .....	11
How many books do you have?.....	12
What are your books worth? .....	12
Book Condition.....	13
Manuscripts.....	15
Transporting Books.....	15
Cataloging your Collection .....	17

# **YOUR CIVIL WAR BOOK/MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION**

## **SELLING, GIFTING, AUCTIONING ...SOMEDAY?**

If you have a collection of Civil War books or manuscripts, someday you or the person you have designated to act in your behalf after you have gone wherever you are going, will be disposing of your collection, and no doubt you or they have questions for which I may have answers. The first answer is “Yes,” this pamphlet has information and advice for you even if you are only 30 and young and immortal, and the second answer is “No,” you can’t take your collection with you, which evidently comes as a surprise to many collectors as they leave no instructions for the disposition of their collection, though there has been more than one book lover sent on the final voyage with a volume or two tucked in.

Even today, with the interest in the Civil War and its books at an all-time high, more Civil War book and manuscript collections are carelessly dissipated or sold in haste than are handled properly. Immortal as you may be, someday, someone is going to dispose of your collection and if that someone doesn’t know anything about books and doesn’t know who to contact, chances are your books will go to the Salvation Army, the library book sale, or to Joe the local book dealer who’s a fair enough fellow, but who doesn’t know anything about Civil War books and thinks \$5 per title across the board is equitable, including your first edition of *Company Aytch*, etc.

## **DISPOSING OF A CIVIL WAR COLLECTION— WHAT ARE THE CHOICES?**

1. **Gift your collection to children, friends, etc.** — A great idea if the children are interested, knowledgeable about books, would appreciate the books/manuscripts, and can afford to have the books rather than the financial gain their sale might fetch. Usually gifting a collection to a child will be quite apparent as the correct avenue as the offspring will have demonstrated a long-lasting and abiding appreciation and interest in the collection. Sudden appreciations should be treated with due respect and politeness and taken with a grain of salt, akin to my warnings to my daughter about “suddenly in love” suitors.

If you are among the blessed few who have a child or a friend who will keep, care for and appreciate your collection, and if you can afford to go this way—do so; it is the best of all worlds. And in doing so, if the gifting is part of dividing an estate, it’s a good idea to have the collection appraised so the books can be dispensed on an equitable basis with other assets.

Yes, we appraise collections—give us a call.

2. **Sell your collection yourself** — If you are knowledgeable about the value of your books and have the time and willingness to dispose of your collection, this is a possibility. However, there is no market for large collections at retail prices, so to realize a full return the collection will have to be sold book by book. Things to consider: can you accurately price and describe your books? Where will you advertise and market the books? Are you willing to wrap, invoice and ship the books? You will need to get a business license and tax number for becoming a dealer and you will have to file the necessary forms, though this is neither onerous nor expensive. Most importantly—are you a patient person? Even when a fine collection is placed on the

market at retail prices it will take several years to sell most of the books. You will need patience if you are to realize top prices for your books.

With the advent of the internet, if you couple a knowledge of books with a computer and inputting ability, a collection can be marketed over the internet, albeit slowly. Dealers figure they sell between 1% and 5% of their stock a month, but internet sales do offer an alternative to trying to develop a mailing list and attending Civil War shows.

**3. Auction your collection** — I have seen very few instances where an auction produced better results than a sale to a dealer at a fair price. At the last auction of a significant Civil War collection; we figured it up and the amount paid to the seller after commissions was less than one-half of what we would have paid for the collection. Exception—a top-notch expensive item that has great image and public appeal, like the dress that Marilyn Monroe wore while singing “Happy Birthday” to President Kennedy, can sell at auction very well indeed—maybe. You take your chances. However, such items must be truly exceptional, and that dress was, especially on Marilyn.

If you decide to auction your collection, please let us know when and where.

**4. Gift your collection to a library** — Sounds great; give your collection to a library where it will be cared for, kept together and used forever. However the reality is that a gift of scarce books for most libraries is a liability rather than an asset. Most libraries have no need for, nor the facilities to care for a quality collection of rare Civil War books. Most titles are available in reprint which are more suitable for libraries than scarce editions. Most libraries have neither the knowledge, time, personnel nor facilities to take care of rare books. The book pages are usually stamped multiple times inside and out,

often with perforation stamps, pockets are glued to the covers and white numbers are inked on the spine, all of which destroy the book's value as a collectable. Also the books are placed on open shelving where they are mishandled and frequently walk out the door. The exception in gifting to a library would be an institution that has a proven commitment and track record for collecting and caring for Civil War books, in which case I would give them the choice of the books they need rather than burdening them with the entire collection.

In 37 years I have yet to see the situation where donating a large collection of fine Civil War books to a library had a long-term beneficial effect. I can cite numerous cases where gifts of quality collections went awry — the son who checked to see where his father's fine gift to his alma mater was housed only to find that 12 years later, the books were still in cardboard boxes in the basement. Explanation: "They're valuable and we don't have a place for them." Another collector-friend gave a fine Civil War collection to a small college with the stipulation the books be catalogued and housed separately as his eternal memorial, and so they are, in a separate room, unused, unappreciated, owned by a college which doesn't teach the Civil War and has no interest or need the books. The bequest is an everlasting memorial to the misguided generosity and vanity of the collector, and an eternal financial drain on the institution—the legacy of a librarian who should have been fired for accepting the collection with such stipulations.

Support libraries? Darn right you should! Libraries are perhaps the most enlightening and humanizing institutions in our culture and should be supported to the fullest extent possible—and if you ask a librarian if they'd like your books, they'll say yes, because it is a long and enduring tradition that the local library is a welcome depository for any and all books and this is well and good and usually works to the benefit of the library as most gift books end up in the annual book

sale to the betterment of all—but worthwhile Civil War books don't belong in the annual book sale. If you would like to benefit a library sell your books and give them the proceeds.

Also if you sell your books to a library they are out of circulation—not to be enjoyed again by a collector.

Do your fellow collectors and books a favor—you've enjoyed your books now let someone else care for and enjoy them.

**5. Sell your collection to a dealer** — not just any dealer, but a person who specializes in out-of-print and rare Civil War books, and who has an established track record. In the case of a quality Civil War collection, this is usually the most satisfactory option, (*gosh Tom, I'm surprised you'd say that*). A competent Civil War book dealer knows the value of your books, has a market for your books, will care for your books and an honest dealer will pay you a fair price. Plus in selling to a dealer, the whole collection is sold quickly and in its entirety. However, before contacting a dealer to sell your collection, do yourself and the dealer a favor—to wit:

- A. Either have the books where they can be seen or have a list of the books or try to develop some sense of the number of books you have, their general condition and the subject matter. This is not so daunting and will save time and trouble (more on this later). Dealers are especially interested in the subject area of your collection. Yes, it's about “the late unpleasantness,” but what aspect of the war? If someone called and asked if I'd be interested in a large collection of recent Civil War fiction, I'd say no, though I might be able to suggest another person who would be interested.
- B. Before you offer a collection, remove all books you want to keep. It's frustrating and time-wasting for a dealer to look over a collection, then have the owner, trustee or widow say “There are

a lot of books we will be keeping, but we haven't decided which ones yet." Decide beforehand what is for sale and what isn't and physically remove the books that are not to be sold. If you wish, the dealer should be willing to offer advice and help in valuing titles if so needed for making decisions on which books to gift or sell, *i.e.* "The big picture books" that grandson Billy wants— that are original bound copies of Harper's and are worth \$6,000; Billy would probably be just as happy with a reprint set of *Harper's Weekly* with the same pictures and a value of \$50.

A word to widows, significant others, children, or anyone left with the task of deciding what to do with "John's collection." Whatever you do will probably be questioned, so before you dispose of the collection, consider whether you should contact and consult with those who have an interest in the estate or collection, including those who may develop an interest. It's amazing when an estate is to be divided how many cooks can get into the stew. Children, especially sons, get protective and decide that Mom can't make decisions and thus question all of her decisions, whereas in fact, from what I have observed, most of the time "Mom" can do just fine. Also, if a collection has value and most do, those who might benefit are interested, and understandably so, in making sure that any transaction or sale is to their best interest, and Mom's, while others develop a sudden and consuming love for "Dad's" books and want to take them all home right now.

These questions and problems should be considered in advance and addressed. Some people handle this by selling the collection and announcing the fact thereafter, *fait accompli*, and this can work quite well. Others go to great lengths to sort out everyone's wishes and sometimes this works and sometimes the whole matter just gets bogged down. Happily, most of the time, in the case of significant collections, John has made his wishes known and those in charge have

only to follow his dictates, sparing everyone a lot of hassle. John, are you listening?

*Thus*

“Dear John (*regardless of your age, condition, position*),

If you have a collection of books which is a significant asset (let’s say over \$10,000—which can be 100 books worth \$100 each, it doesn’t take many and hopefully, you know the value of your collection), do your wife or whomever will be handling your affairs a favor, a big favor, and dispose of your collection while you are able and competent to do so or take the time to decide what you want done with your books when you go to Valhalla, and leave instructions for the disposal of your collection in writing with your next-of-kin, plus inform all interested parties and insure their agreement, or be a good dictator and say they are your books and you’ll do with them as you damn-well please.

Get it straight and get it understood by all concerned—in advance. If you wish the collection to be sold, decide which dealer you wish to handle your collection and in case that dealer hits a tree in the meantime, have an alternate. Contact your chosen dealer and make sure you and he are in agreement regarding the sale of your collection and have answered any and all questions.

*Should you decide that your collection will be sold to a dealer, please consider Broadfoot’s, i.e. Tom Broadfoot.*

I’ve been a full-time out-of-print and rare book dealer for over 40 years. I know the value of Civil War books (my ***Civil War Books: A Priced Checklist with Advice***, now in its 5th edition, is the standard price guide to Civil War book values) and I have purchased hundreds of collections over the past 40 years, including many of the major

collections sold. I have issued over 400 catalogs of Civil War books and I am glad to provide references.

With knowledgeable employees, most of whom have been with me for many years, I can readily pack, transport, catalog and sell a collection of any size. We come to your home, pack your books and transport them directly to our store. Even large collections can be packaged in a few hours.

When I purchase a collection I catalog each valuable book individually; my purchasing method is clear, fair and easily understood. When you sell a collection to Broadfoot's you know exactly what you received for your books.

If you have questions or would like to talk about selling your collection, please give me a call and we can discuss the matter, or if you wish, I can meet with you and the person who will be handling your estate. Many collectors have advance purchase understandings with us—having told their executors — “Call Tom at Broadfoot's.”

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **1. If I wish my collection sold to Broadfoot's now or in the future, what do I do?**

Give me a call, we'll discuss the specifics and I'll answer any questions you may have. If you want to sell the collection now, the entire process can be taken care of in a few days.

### **2. Do I need to have a listing of my collection to sell it?**

No, we will make a complete listing of all valuable books by author, title, date and condition. Lesser value books will be grouped

at \$5 books, \$30 books, etc. Such a listing is excellent and complete for tax and estate purposes. However, if you have a listing with this information, it is most helpful in estimating the value of your collection and figuring out the logistics of packing and transport.

We highly recommend that anyone with a significant Civil War book collection maintain a record of their holdings both for insurance and estate purposes. Many collectors have found an easy way to list their books is highlighting the titles they own in our ***Civil War Books: A Priced Checklist with Advice***. The few titles not in the Price Guide can be added in the margins. Many collectors with valuable collections keep two annotated copies, a working travel copy, and another in a separate safe location in case of fire, flood, etc.

Some years ago a man called me to ask advice. His father's home had burned destroying most of his Civil War collection (1500+ titles). The books that were saved were smoked and most were wet. The son looked up the remaining books in my Price Guide, and determined that the average value per book was between \$100-\$300. There was no listing of the collection and no insurance. Probable loss: \$200,000-\$400,000.

Have duplicate listings of your collection and make a video of your collection panning over the books slowly so their condition is apparent. If you can't operate a camcorder, get your 12-year old child or grandchild to do it for you—they will know how.

Insure your collection. Not so hard or expensive to do; just insure for median value with no book to be valued over a certain price and thus avoid the cost of a fine arts policy. Pick a value, say \$100, \$200 or whatever, and the few books you have over that value take your chances on. There can be a big difference in insuring a collection of 100 and one books with 100 having a declared rate of \$100 each and one valued at \$1000. Do not get a fine arts policy with coverage up to \$1000 per item. Instead, get a policy with no book to be valued at over

\$100 and put the \$1000 book in a safe place, otherwise you have a policy covering items valued to \$1000 and that's a much more difficult and expensive ball game. 'Nuff said on insurance; just do it.

### **3. How many books do I have?**

We often get calls from people who have no idea how many books they have; usually the estimate is way over. An easy rule of thumb is to figure 10 books per foot of shelving or 25 books per the average 2 1/2 foot shelf. If the books are boxed figure about 20 books per average sized box which will weigh about 30 pounds. An easy way to approach boxed books is to weigh a box and divide by 1 1/2 pounds, which is the weight of the average book.

So—in calculating the number of books you have, a good and surprisingly accurate rule of thumb is that one foot of books equals 10 hardback volumes, the normal width of a bookcase is 2 1/2 feet, so a shelf of books is 25 volumes. A bookshelf is usually 6 feet tall and has 6 shelves or 150 volumes. Thus if you had 6 rows of bookshelves filled with books you'd have about 900 volumes. Once again, people tend to overestimate the number of volumes they have. It's amazing how many collections, when measured thusly, shrink from thousands to hundreds.

Whether we are advising you on packing books and packing material or sending our van to pick up books, we, and you, need to know what numbers we are dealing with.

### **4. What are my books worth, and what can I expect to be paid for them?**

If condition were not a factor it would be easy for you to figure out what your books were worth; take a copy of our *Civil War Books: A Priced Checklist with Advice*, highlight the titles you have, add up the values, and presto, you have a good idea of the retail value of your

collection. However it's not that simple; as the old adage goes—"What three things determine the value of a book?" Answer being "Condition, Condition, Condition." A book may be worth \$1,000 in fine condition but only \$100 in poor condition and the difference book?" Answer being "Condition, Condition, Condition." A book may be worth \$1,000 in fine condition but only \$100 in poor condition and the difference between the two will not be readily apparent to the untrained eye. However let's take a risky trip into the land of generalities. In my experience a collection of books is usually in good overall condition or poor condition. People who collected books with an eye to fine condition seldom stray and buy books in poor condition, excepting excessively scarce or expensive volumes, and those who collected books with an eye to buying books at the lowest possible price without regard to condition seldom have expensive books in fine condition; no discredit here—if you're buying for information only it makes sense to buy at the least cost you can.

##### **5. How do I tell if my collection is in good condition or poor condition?**

**Good condition:** newer books will have dust jackets and the dust jackets will be complete and not ragged at the top and bottom of the spine; there will be few if any books which have library numbers on the spine; few books will have been rebound unless in a binding to match the original or in leather; books will not have rubber bands around them holding them together; the spines of the books will be complete and not frayed at the top and bottom; leather books will be smooth and shiny, not dull and crumbling apart. In short, the books look good. Stand back, take a look—if you're not seeing flapping dust jackets, crumbling leather, rubber bands, spines frayed at top and bottom, you probably have a collection of books in good condition and can expect to receive "good" prices.

If, however, in standing back and looking at the books they appear ragged and worn, your books are not in good condition and should be priced accordingly. This may seem a simplistic approach, but it works and helps the ladies who are trying to understand and relate to me the condition of the collection they wish to sell.

**6. Tom, can you give me a guesstimate of what you would pay for my books?**

No problem. I pay a percentage of retail value for each title, so if you will send me an author, title, date listing of your collection, with your estimate of the overall condition, I will add up the prices, apply the percentages and provide a guesstimate. If you don't have a listing of your collection give me a call and I will send you, at no charge, a copy of my latest *Civil War Books: A Priced Checklist with Advice*, so you can highlight the titles you have and return it to me for an estimate. However the actual amount paid will depend on the condition of the books, and to determine that, I need to see the books and go through them carefully, and, in the case of rarer titles, count and verify that all pages, illustrations, and maps are there, etc.

**7. Are there Civil War collections that you don't buy?**

Yes, I don't purchase collections consisting mostly of modern paperbacks, recent Lincoln Books, social history, or collections that are entirely Reconstruction or Civil War Era economics. This isn't a prejudice on my part, just a reflection that there is little market for these titles. However, most collections have some elements of these subjects, and where the preponderance of the volumes is outside of these subjects, I take these subjects also. Most people, when selling a collection, want a clean sweep, and this I can do—bare shelves wall-to-wall.

\*A word to the wise. Before you sell your books, which you have probably lived with for many years in shelves all over the house, have a plan as to what you will put on the shelves in their place or plan to have the shelves removed and the walls behind them painted because once the books are gone, there are going to be big empty holes in your home and the sooner they are filled or eliminated the better you will feel. Not that you asked, but over the years I have received a number of calls from distraught collectors and widows after a book collection was removed from their home, "I didn't know it was going to be so empty." Thus, says my mother of her bed after my father died. So, plan ahead, visualize the books gone, and figure out what will take their place. As for the bed, my condolences, but no advice.

#### **8. Tom, do you buy manuscripts?**

Yes, I am also interested in purchasing manuscripts and collections thereof and have the expertise and experience to market any size collection. Give me a call.

#### **9. How will my books be packed and transported to Broadfoot's? Who does what? Do I have to pack the books? What size boxes? I can't cope with it! Help!**

First things first. In the case of larger collections of value on the East Coast, say 500 volumes and over, consisting of better books in good condition, I will come to your home in my van with a helper. We will bring packing materials, pack the books with expertise gained from packing thousands of books over the years, leave the premises neat and orderly, and transport the books directly back to our store.

#### **10. Books at distant locales?**

In the case of distant collections we will send you all necessary packing material, boxes, labels, etc. and have the boxes picked up at

your home and transported to our warehouse. We pay all transportation charges. We can send you boxes, packing materials, tape, labels, and clear, detailed instructions for packing books for shipment. You can pack your books and we will have UPS come to your home and pick up the boxes and deliver them to us. We will pay all shipping charges. In any and all cases, we can figure it out, it just depends on the variables. However, in over 40 years, during which we have bought hundreds of collections, we have learned to figure out the matter of packing and transportation to fit any situation, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

### **11. What happens to my books once they reach Broadfoot's?**

The books are unpacked and placed on shelves. Any books needing repairs are set aside and the repairs are made before the books are handled further; *repairs are made at no charge to you*. Books needing cleaning are cleaned, torn pages are repaired, writing and underlining is erased as needed, dust jackets are repaired, leather books are treated with preservatives and oils, etc. Rarer books are placed in acid-free mylar (clear) dust jackets to protect them, and valuable pamphlets and paper materials are placed in acid-free folders (again, at no cost to you). After your collection is “spruced up” and properly protected, Tom sorts the books into two categories, books worth \$200 and over, and books worth under \$200. The books valued at under \$200 are priced and placed for sale in our retail store in Wendell, NC. The books valued at \$200 and over are listed individually in a catalog. Each valuable book is given a price, thus you know what value we placed on your books and what we paid you for that book; plus the condition of each title is noted—so there is a detailed record of your collection and its sale. If I seem to emphasize this matter of a detailed record, it's because it makes matters easier all the way around if the entire transaction is clear and easily understood. In fact, it's just good

business sense, and if you are selling or thinking of selling a collection, the potential buyer should be willing, and able, to answer any and all questions. If the gray areas can't be cleared up, don't go there. When discussing the purchase of a collection, I suggest and recommend that all interested parties—wife, children, lawyers, whomever—feel free to call me and ask questions.

## **CATALOGING OF YOUR COLLECTION — Your Input and Help Please!**

In the interest of bibliographic knowledge we urge those who have gathered better collections to write up their collecting experiences, etc., as fellow collectors are interested in who collects books and the whereof and whyfor of their collections. Thus, where agreeable to the collector, we prefer to issue catalogs identified as belonging to a certain collector with notes and reminiscences by the collector regarding his collecting career. Such recollections and knowledge are of interest to all collectors and regretfully are being lost in this electronic age. When a book is sold on the internet it is not viewed in the context of a larger collection, nor is it identified or associated with a collector.

And yes, I know selling a collection is not an act of great joy, I've done it myself, but if the average collecting career is 50 or more years, and books have a theoretical life span of some 500 years, then your ownership of any particular book was just a temporary waystop on a long trip—especially considering that most Civil War books are less than 75 years old.

You had them, you enjoyed them, and unlike the steaks and beers you have enjoyed, the books get to continue on and may well be owned by numerous collectors over the next few hundred years. (The violin section should be in full swing at this point). Short and simple,

you're just a stop along the way, and you did good to collect and take care of your books, so pat yourself on the back, drink one of those here-and-gone beers and try to think warm thoughts as you visualize your books heading out to the next stop.

If you wish, I will be glad to send you a catalog from one of the collections I have sold in the past—Bell Wiley, Bob Summerfield, Whitley Butner, Cary Close, Richard Harwell, Bob White, Lee Wallace, Gerry Green, Scott Black, Mike Mullins, etc. All of these collections were significant and were cataloged and sold with the welcome help of the owners. If you have built a significant collection, you have developed a worthwhile knowledge of collecting and books which, if shared, will be welcomed by other collectors. Be proud of your collection and let us offer it to other collectors with your input and help.

Here's to enjoyable and sensible collecting. If you have any questions or if I can help in any way, please give me a call. I've lived a life of books and enjoy talking about them.

Live long and prosper.

Sincerely,

Tom Broadfoot

Questions? Give me a call.



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