

been around books and been interested in keeping them after I read them. But I'd say in the last 10 years I really started to become more cognizant of collecting as a discipline."

He educated himself by reading the memoirs of booksellers and book collectors, and questions of how to channel his own passion for collecting constantly presented themselves. Books on fishing gave way to early books about fish in North America and books highlighting the development of scientific thought regarding fish.

"As I learned more about books themselves through reading a lot of stuff on the Internet—a lot of blogs and that sort of thing, but also books on the history of printing—I became more interested in antiquarian books, but also in having a well-defined collection," he says.

While many collections have, in the past, depended on the collector's relationship with a dealer, younger collectors have to watch out for themselves because they don't have the cash that's essential to maintaining the commercial side of the relationship. Hanisch is grateful that the cash

he earns in Canada goes farther in the U.S. book market thanks to the exchange rate, but he still keeps an eye out for interesting titles on sites such as AbeBooks and titles that come up at auction.

Right now, the book he has his eye on is Peter Artedi's *Ichthyologia* (1738), which was edited by Carolus Linnaeus and is an important work on account of this connection. A copy sold at auction this summer for €850 (well above expectations). While financial limitations put it beyond reach, Hanisch one day hopes to acquire a copy.

The dream shows that while there may be plenty of fish in the sea, it's the ones that get away that keep the diehards trolling for the next big catch.

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~ An online exhibition of images of books in Justin Hanisch's collection will go live this summer at http://exhibits.library.ualberta.ca/streetprint_fish/.

~ Peter Mitham is editor of *Amphora*.

A History of Fish

by JUSTIN HANISCH

MY FINGERS TRAVEL DOWN the book's spine and the smooth leather gives way to a slight indentation where the binder's stamp applied gold. I briefly trace the gilt ornamentation in the first spine compartment, following an elaborate maze of flourish. My fingers continue to a raised band, which adds not only beauty to the spine but also conceals the binder's cords that have helped hold the book together for 200 years. I think of the bookbinder, the man who bound *this* book that I hold in my hands. He is long dead, likely forgotten, but I hold *his* work in *my* hands. My thoughts linger but my fingers move on to the next compartment, containing the book's title, *Histoire des Poissons*.

Again, I imagine the bookbinder and this book, new and smelling of fresh leather, text block and binding united for the first time. The binder lays his tools on the spine. "Histoire des Poissons"

appears new and sparkling in gilt. Imagination yields to the present, and I see *Histoire des Poissons* as it is today, slightly chipped and dulled but still proud. I remove the book from between its shelf mates—two other books with their own histories—created decades and continents apart but now united, however briefly, in a collection. I place the book in my lap and smile. Its weight feels familiar. I open the book and the front hinge creaks. I read the title page and feel the bite of the type—*Histoire des Poissons*. A History of Fish.

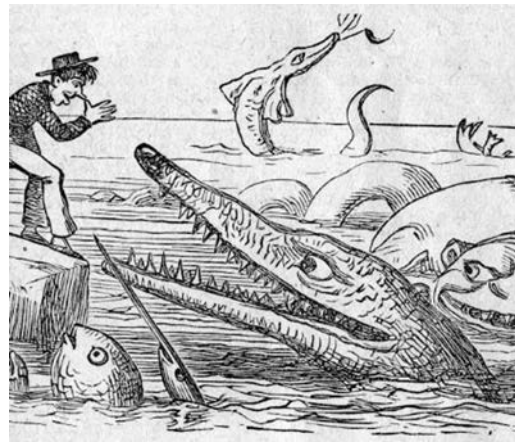
I collect books on fish and have for nearly as long as I can remember. Specifically, I collect books on fish published before 1901. As a PhD candidate in ecology who studies fish, I know much of the information contained in my books is, well, antiquated, but that is precisely part of their appeal. My collection satisfies for me three unifying purposes. First, and most generally,

collecting satiates the impulse to acquire. For what collector does not enjoy the thrill of the hunt—discovering, obtaining, and integrating a “new” book into a collection? Second, and more specifically, my collection affords the opportunity to immerse myself into the history of my chosen field, to understand better the research and researchers who came before me. Third, and most personally, collecting pre-20th-century books allows me to appreciate intimately the book as an object. I love everything about a book—binding, paper, type, illustration, provenance—everything. These three unifying principles motivate and focus my collecting. I will explain, with a series of examples, how these principles manifest in specific books from my collection.

I will start with my oldest book, Conrad Gessner’s *Fischbuch*, the second German edition printed by Christoffel Froschover in Zürich (1575). *Fischbuch* is bound in recent full vellum. Through the centuries it has lost its original binding, likely oak boards covered in blind-stamped pigskin and held shut with metal clasps. The book also has other evidence of brushes with destruction. The margins of several folios contain old repairs to cuts and tears, damage that presumably accumulated as the original binding perished. But, even with repairs and a new binding, oh, what a book it is!

Gessner’s effort on fish, part of a larger *Historiae Animalium*, is a compilation of all extant Western knowledge on “fish” at the date of publication. It remains the oldest (and most significant) book I’ve purchased, and researching editions, auction records, and collations of other copies to assure completeness was just plain fun. Additionally the book provides fascinating insight into the context of 16th-century natural history, and without doubt, this book, as an object, is beautiful.

While I enjoy purchasing and preserving “character copies” of fish books, not all my books fall into this category. As mentioned, understanding the history of ichthyology is one of my core collecting principles, and several of my books reveal significant historical aspects of fisheries. For example, I include in my collection a copy of William Harris’s *Angler’s Guide and Tourists’ Gazetteer of the Fishing Waters of the United States and Canada*, published in



From Thomas Alexander,
Fish and Fishing (1877).

New York in 1884 by the press of the Armchair Angler. While I do not typically include books strictly on fishing in my collection, this book is valuable for its thousands of entries detailing fishing waters and their resident fishes in the latter portion of the 19th century.

Many other “fishing books” contain interesting natural history observations of fish, and I include some carefully chosen fishing books in my fish book collection. I include, for example, the first edition (1845) of John J. Brown’s *American Angler’s Guide* in original gilt-stamped publisher’s cloth. This book is significant, as it is the first book composed and published in North America devoted solely to fishing. In addition to tips on fishing, however, the book contains over 150 pages of natural history observations of numerous fish species. Rigorous description of American fishes was in its infancy in this time period, so the observations contained in *The American Angler’s Guide* were important additions to the burgeoning knowledge of American fishes.

I also include books in my collection whose historical interest is derived from their provenance. Many scholarly books were inscribed by their authors to other academics, and I include such association copies in my collection. My copy of George Brown Goode’s *American Fishes*, published by the Standard Book Company in 1888, is inscribed to another famous author of fish books, Frederick Mather. As well, my copy of Edward Cope’s *Synopsis of the Cyprinidae of*

Pennsylvania, published by the Transactions of the American Philosophical Society in 1869, is inscribed to an influential scientist, Frederic Ward Putnam. These inscribed copies provide insight into the personal relationships that existed among scientists of the 19th century.

All my books have been individually chosen for my collection. Collectively, I feel my books provide historical context to man's relationship to fish. Moreover, each book also has an intangible, almost primal appeal. The tactile experience of books is real, important, and moving. The great book collector Robert Curzon, writing to Sir Thomas Phillipps in 1861, provides an apt summary of my feelings when I add a book to my collection:

Why when I get a new book, (or rather an old one,) I never stop looking at it, inside & out, right side uppermost, & upside down and I torment all the other old volumes, by shoving the new one between them, on the shelf. Heavy broad-backed old MSS. are disturbed, routed out and pushed about, woke up from their slumbers, & poked in the ribs, by the new arrival, till I have found a snug place for him, between 2 other old fellows about his size more or less, & then I pat him on the back & let him alone for a while, but I could never let him remain in the box for ½ an hour after I get him, even under the most desperate circumstance.

These sentiments, or something very close, have been felt by bibliophiles through the ages, and I look forward to experiencing that moment of bliss for many more years, and many more books, yet to come.

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~ This is an edited version of book collector Justin Hanisch's prize-winning essay for the 2010–2011 National Book Collecting Contest, sponsored by the Alcuin Society, the Bibliographical Society of Canada and the W.A. Deacon Literary Foundation. All three prize-winning essays will be available on the website of the Bibliographical Society of Canada, www.bsc-sbc.ca/en/news.html.

THE RUNNERS-UP

This year's National Book Collecting Contest attracted submissions on a variety of topics.

Edmonton's Justin Hanisch received a \$1,000 award for his first-place collection regarding the history of fish. Runners-up this year also hailed from Western Canada.

Gregory Robert Freeman, 26, of Surrey, B.C., ranked second with his extensive collection of Tudors and Stuart imprints, and received an award of \$500. Kieran Fox, 27, of Vancouver, ranked third with a collection of works examining Tibetan works in translation. He opted to donate his prize of \$250 to supporting the libraries of the Buddhist monks whose help was invaluable in assisting him build his collection.

The third National Book Collecting Contest is now accepting entries from collectors under the age of 30. The deadline for submissions is March 5, 2012. AbeBooks has committed to providing the cash prizes, while the National Post and CBC Books will serve as media sponsors of the contest. The contest will continue to be organized by the Alcuin Society, the Bibliographical Society of Canada and the W.A. Deacon Literary Foundation. Complete contest details are available at www.alcuinsociety.com.



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John Meier of the W.A. Deacon Literary Foundation congratulates Justin Hanisch.