



## Book Notes

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### **The One That Got Away —Rick Ring**

Among the finest bookseller catalogues issued recently comes from the Dutch firm Antiquariaat Forum, in celebration of their 50<sup>th</sup> year in business.

[https://www.forumrarebooks.com/uploads/catalogue/224/224\\_attachement\\_catalogue.pdf](https://www.forumrarebooks.com/uploads/catalogue/224/224_attachement_catalogue.pdf)

Almost my first experience with the high end of the trade was with the founder of this firm, Sebastiaan Hesselink, and it became my best fishing story (as in, “the one that got away”).

In April of 1999, just six months after I had moved from graduate school in Indiana to Providence for my first professional job at the John Carter Brown Library, I attended my first New York Antiquarian book fair. It was a daunting but exhilarating experience to be plunged into the cavernous Park Avenue Armory full of an international array of prosperous, urbane, brilliant book-sages (or so it seemed to me). I was welcomed with open arms by all—but of course, it was really the JCB that was welcomed, which took some time for me to realize. Plied with wine at various booths, offered cigars and port when I went to one dealer’s apartment to see his stock, I tried not to let it turn my head too much, but it was a challenge.

Booth after booth held more books, maps, and ephemera than I could possibly digest. One such was Sebastiaan’s booth. He welcomed me with a big smile, and said he had a very special book for us. Not only was it a “European Americanum” (we collected books printed in Europe before 1800 with Americana content), it was also an important book in maritime history—Toussaint de Bessard’s *Dialogue, de la longitude* (Rouan, 1575), the first French book on navigation with an early description of South America. There were only three other copies extant: in the British Library, the Bibliotheque Nationale (Paris), and the Crone Collection of the Scheepvaart, the Dutch Maritime Museum.

The price was \$40,000, a good bit more than my annual salary at the time. Sebastiaan urged me to take it back to the JCB and think about it. I was inexperienced and the price was daunting. I could not imagine just putting it in my bag, taking it back to my hotel, and carrying it on the train back to Providence. I also suspected the price was inflated, so I told him to let me know if he didn't sell it at the fair, and he just shook his head, probably knowing he would—and he did, as I learned later. It wasn't until the very same book was quoted to me two months later by a California dealer for \$95,000 that I realized my mistake! The next year I met his son Laurens, who would eventually take over the business in 2008, and I was never again shy about taking a book “on approval.”



### **From My Bookshelf**

—Sean Briody

In my private collection lives a c1911 copy of William James's *On Vital Reserves* (New York, Henry Holt and Company). This book on its own commands no more than \$10 in a retail shop, for it is a fairly common later printing.

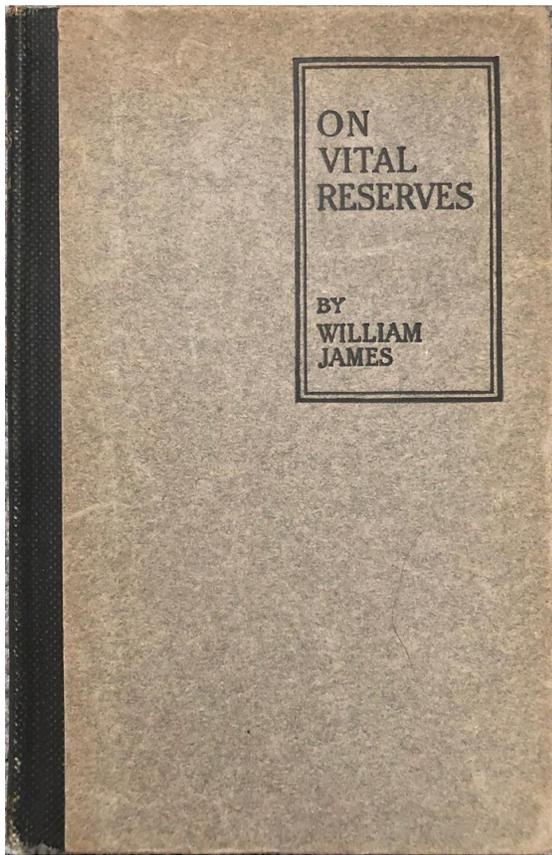
However, my favorite part of collecting old books is the stories – the history, provenance, inscriptions – that come with them. This particular volume tells a Providence love story. On the front endpaper is inscribed,

To My dear friend  
Henry D. Sharpe  
alias “Harry Hotspur”  
with all good wishes from  
Mary Elizabeth Evans  
Sometime in 1918.

Henry Dexter Sharpe (1872-1954) succeeded his father Lucian as president of Brown and Sharpe Manufacturing Company in 1899, but he is best known to Brown students as the namesake of the Sharpe Refectory dining hall, for he served as twelfth chancellor of Brown University. His wife, Mary Elizabeth Evans Sharpe, is best known for her achievements in gardening and landscaping. The papers of the Sharpe family are held at the John Hay Library.

Sharpe and Evans met before World War I on a horseback-riding trip out west and were married in 1920. There is more to a book than its content. The inscription's reference to Henry Sharpe as “Harry Hotspur” is likely a pet name Mary gave him while

horseback riding. Furthermore, the Sharpes were avid readers of William and Henry James; Mr. Sharpe has annotated this book profusely, having read it in its entirety.



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