In Praise of Bookshops / Old New York Book Store, Atlanta, GA

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New Feature!!
In Praise of Bookshops

by Jack Walsdorf (Blackwell)

The Old New York Book Store, which was established in 1971, is such a delightful place, turning what was once a 1915 carpenter-style house, still with the vestiges of living room, dining room, kitchen, and bedrooms, into a quiet, well-organized and neatly shelved hardback bookstore. The 20,000 or so volumes cover most subjects, but clearly American history, theology, literature, fiction, modern firsts and signed books are some of the strong points. Since I am a collector of Southern writers, the room devoted to modern first, limited editions, and signed books took up most of my spare cash and most of my spare time.

After two hours of book hunting, I left the shop with two wonderful additions to my Anne Tyler collection, finding a copy of her 1993 children's book, Tumble Tower, with illustrations by her daughter Mitra Modarressi, this copy signed by both the author and the illustrator. I also found a copy of the 1993 Twayne's United States Authors Series, Anne Tyler by Elizabeth Evans. This was the especially signed edition limited to 110 numbered copies, signed by both Evans and Tyler.

I also collect Willie Morris, the Mississippi writer and author of the recently published New York Days (Little Brown, 1993). Perhaps my most unusual find at The Old New York Book Store was a set of page proofs and an early manuscript copy of an essay Willie did for the magazine Goodlife in the early 1980s. This essay, originally entitled "One for my Daddy," later appeared as a chapter in his book Always Stand in Against the Curve. I'm happy to add this to my collection both because of the Willie Morris association and because of the baseball connection, a collecting interest I share with my son.

While a small minority of the books found at The Old New York Book Store can be classified as antiquarian, and are priced accordingly, the vast majority of books (with the exception of art books) are under $15, with a nice selection of recent novels priced at $10. For true book hunting, the kind of hunting which requires getting your hands dirty and perhaps your knees too, as you check the lower shelves, the basement is the place to be. Here you will find first editions and later printings of Updike and Tyler, Robert B. Parker and Dick Francis, and even a whole mystery section. In the basement will also be found rooms and sections devoted to gardening, travel, sports, drama, theology, cinema, philosophy, a full room of quality paperbacks, cooking, anthropology, Latin American history, Asian history and travel, Western and Eastern European history, African-American studies, and even a smallish bookcase devoted to "Books about Books and Printing." It was here that I found an inexpensive edition of Oscar Wilde's The Sphinx, published by John Lane in 1910. This particular copy was made more attractive and had found a home in the Books About Books section because it bears the Ex Libris label of Thomas B. Mosher, the renowned turn-of-the-century printer from Portland, Maine.

The main floor of the shop devotes the best room, what was once perhaps the sitting room, to the best books, holding the modern first editions, limited editions, and signed copies. The other major rooms on the floor are devoted to history, literature, and art. A hallway which runs the length of the house is devoted to biography, Southern history, and English and American literature. The shop is open Tuesday through Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. It is closed on Sunday and open on Mondays on a catch-as-catch-can basis.

Phone number (404)881-1285. Address: 1069 Juniper Street NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30309. Mr. Cliff Graubart, owner, publishes catalogs on an infrequent basis for both art and literature.

(Note: This is the first of what will be a continuing series co-authored by Tom Leonard of the University of Oklahoma and Jack Walsdorf of Blackwell's, detailing their experiences visiting little-known and well-known used, rare, and sometimes antiquarian bookshops throughout the United States.)