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antiques & collectibles: Lynn Hopper

Textbooks rarely are valuable

Important as they are, about the only time textbooks get much respect is about now, when parents are paying for them. Kids write in them, lose them, drop them in puddles and just generally use and abuse them.

This has been true for generations, and that's one reason why even very old textbooks rarely have a great deal of value -- often a few dollars at most.

And that's what I thought I'd have to tell a reader recently when he asked about an 1884 "Primary History of the United States," by Edward S. Ellis. The reader thought it might be valuable because it features a picture of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart.

That alone would not add to the value especially, because many, if not most, elementary textbooks of the time featured one of the famous Stuart portraits of Washington. There were three poses Stuart painted, including the one on the \$1 bill.

However, when I checked the value on www.abebooks .com, I was pleasantly surprised to see that this particular history is held in high esteem, with values ranging from \$14 to \$32.

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The wide price range reflects two things: first, the seller sets the price, so some people estimate higher than others, but probably more important is the condition. Some books were not as heavily abused.

The Washington picture might have some interest, as old engravings are sought today for their quality, and many an old book has been cannibalized for the engravings.

In this case, however, it would probably be best to keep the book intact. If there are used bookstores in the reader's area, and if the owner checks with abebooks, he might be able to sell it there, at about half price, once the condition is agreed on.

Surfing the fair

Research is fun! It takes me to places I'd never think of going if a reader hadn't asked a question. Most recently, I have been indulging in Web sites about the St. Louis World's Fair. I'd recommend them to anyone, just for browsing!

Try www.1904worldsfair.com, www.bitwise.net/~ken-bill/fair.htm, or http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_Purchase_Exposition.

You will learn that the Exposition was held a year later than it was supposed to have been, lasted less than a year, and was enormous. It was located approximately where the city's Forest Park is now, and although a number of the elaborate buildings erected for the fair were temporary and are gone, a few remain.

But reader L.H. didn't ask about the fair itself. He had found a good luck coin with the words Louisiana Purchase and the dates 1903-04. Most such souvenirs of the fair are marked only "1904," so this may well be an early one.

World fairs in general have a good collector following, with several groups specializing in the St. Louis Exposition. Max Storm of St. Louis is especially noted as a collector and expert, and he, alas, reports that he could not locate this particular item.

Storm notes, however, "Any of the 'good luck' items that I know about are simple souvenir tokens and are so common that they have very little value."

Although none of us could find this particular "coin," one that was termed an "official souvenir" in the 2006 Schroeder's Price guide lists at \$85.

Send photos or letters about antiques or collectibles to Lynn Hopper, P.O. Box 347, Clayton, IN 46118, or send her e-mail at She is unable to reply personally or return photos.

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