

Publication: Jnl Final Edition 8/2005-today; Date: Aug 20, 2008; Section: Metro & New Mexico; Page: C

STOLEN BOOKS RECOVERED

A Rare Crime

Thief Tried To Sell Books Taken from Special Collections Library

Copyright © 2008 Albuquerque Journal By Hailey Heinz Journal Staff Writer

When David Johnson, 39, came into Simmons & Simmons Fine Books to sell a book, co-owner Melanie Simmons Bowley knew something wasn't right.

"You don't find vellum-covered 1600s books on the street," she said. "Usually we know about how they've been acquired. These books just don't walk in with a guy who, although clean-cut, is just a fella."

Her instincts proved valuable to police, who arrested Johnson and held him initially on shoplifting charges. He was indicted Thursday and charged with possessing and disposing of stolen property. He is being held at the Metropolitan Detention Center on \$2,500 bail.

Bowley said Johnson came into her store on Central east of Carlisle numerous times, each time with increasingly valuable books. He told her they belonged to his grandmother, who had been an antiques dealer and now needed the money.

The books were mostly from the 1600s and 1700s, and Simmons Bowley appraised some of them at \$1,000 each.

Most local rare book dealers know one another, and Bowley said many lightly mark their books in pencil.

"There are very few of us in the business. We know each other's types of books, and we know each other's marks," she said. "Most casual thieves won't even erase the marks, so it's easy to confiscate and return the books."

Simmons Bowley began calling around to see if any rare book dealers were missing merchandise. As it turned out, the city's Special Collections Library at Edith and Central had been broken into, and dozens of books were missing. Employees at the library and the bookstore compared notes and determined that the questionable books at the store were those missing from the library, police said.

Library staff and Bowley contacted police, who arranged to be on call the next time Johnson came into the store to make a sale, according to the complaint. When he did, an employee stalled him until police could arrive. Johnson was arrested down the street from the bookstore, his pockets allegedly stuffed with collectible postage stamps worth more than \$500 that had belonged to the store, according to the police complaint. He was charged with felony shoplifting.

Albuquerque police spokesman John Walsh said Bowley was right to follow up on her suspicions about

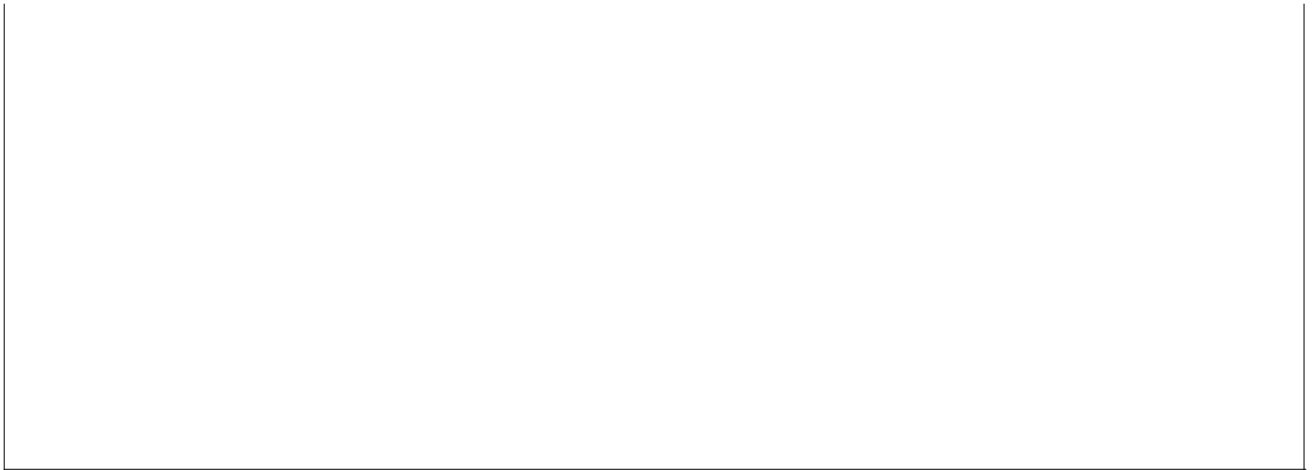
Johnson.

"If you feel something is wrong, trust your gut," Walsh said. "More times than not, it ends up being the truth."

Julia Clarke, director of the city and county library system, said the stolen books were part of an interactive program aimed at fourth and fifth graders. The books are set out on tables, and the students are allowed to touch them, she said, to learn about the history of book-making and how printing used to be done.

"We very much value these books, and they have played an important role in our community for a long time," she said. "We're so pleased they've been found."





RICHARD PIPES/JOURNAL A book published in 1554 was among the boxes of stolen books recovered by Albuquerque police.