

Book Reviews: The Addictive Allure of Private Libraries and Historical Documents

WILLIAM BUTTS

BYERS, Reid. *The Private Library: The History of the Architecture and Furnishing of the Domestic Bookroom.* New Castle, DE: Oak Koll Press, 2021. Small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. xi, 540pp. Numerous color illustrations, floor plans. **\$85.00.**

RENDELL, Kenneth W. *Safeguarding History: Trailblazing Adventures Inside the Worlds of Collecting and Forging History.* Pelham, AL: Whitman Publishing, 2023. Small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. xiv, 314pp. Numerous illustrations. **\$24.95.**

When an author begins a book by confessing “I am the wrong person to write this book,” your choice is to either 1) take his word for it and close the book or 2) prepare for a really unusual ride. And if the phrase “book wrapt” is not part of your lexicon—well, strap in and buckle up, for the roller coaster is about to launch. You will encounter this mantra in Reid Byers’ *The Private Library: The History of the Architecture and Furnishing of the Domestic Bookroom* as often as the chorus in an ancient Greek drama. Byers explains:

It is the reason the private library will last, and it is the subject of this book: that beneficent feeling

of being wholly *imbooked*, *beshelved*, *inlibriated*, *circumvolumed*, *peribibliolated*, let me settle on *book-wrapt*, a portmanteau word that describes this feeling pretty well. It implies the traditional library wrapped in shelves of books, and the condition of rapt attention to a particular volume, and the rapture of being transported into the wood beyond the world. *Book-wrapt* describes a feeling that many of us will refuse to surrender to the virtual-worldly schemes of high-tech innovators.

If you then check out the author's credentials and learn that Byers is a Presbyterian pastor turned computer language programmer turned high-level IT architect, you may just decide to join this joy rode. I hope so.

Byers *gets it* – the intense, soul-nourishing psychological effect of a private library on the state of mind of anyone under the spell of books and paper. If you're unfortunate enough to *not* suffer from this delightful malady and the prospect of reading several hundred pages more fails to pique you, read no further. A screen of some sort – phone, computer, television – I'm sure awaits.

Even those of us who handle books and paper all day every day usually know nothing about why we house them the way we do and how that came to pass: The special rooms, bookshelves that line the walls, the specialized furniture that fills the room. That's just how it's always been done, no? No.

Lengthy, meaty chapters survey vast chunks of book and library history and set the stage for how a private library looks today. Byers describes these as "Type One Libraries" (Egypt, Classical Greece), "Type Two Libraries" (Hellenistic Greece, Roman Republic) and "Type Three Libraries" (Roman Empire, Early Middle Ages). These lay the groundwork for all we now know as public or private libraries. By the fall of the Roman Empire, after examining scattered archeological evidence of the earliest libraries and ancient library references, Byers posits that "by late Roman times, some private spaces had become rooms

that we would recognize as private libraries today: we would surely have felt more at home in these rooms than we would in the later libraries of the Middle Ages... then we lost it again for a thousand years.”

Pre-Gutenberg (ca. 1450), books were extravagantly expensive handwritten codices that few but the nobility and the church could afford. Renaissance libraries displayed them face out on space-consuming lecterns with tops angled like a roof for showing two books (sometimes with storage below for more) and a seat in front of each. A good-sized private library might consist of only a couple hundred volumes. These “had little to do with the classical design,” Byers explains.

...all the books were kept in a single room instead of two, they were not stored around the walls as they had been in Rome, the shelves were not raised high from the floor, they did not sit within wall cabinets for storage, the books were not handed out by attendants, and there was no central statue of the deity.

Surprisingly, Byers attributes a major shift away from the cumbersome medieval model to the library of Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino, Italy. I’m skeptical of his claim that “the ancestry of most of today’s private libraries can be traced to this one room in Renaissance Italy.” Surely this library from the 1460s is the only *surviving* example and others that did not survive never made it into the historical record. In any case, it contained “Eight presses [bookcases] with seven shelves each... carrying between nine hundred and a thousand books, or about eighteen books per shelf. With so many volumes to the shelf, they could not have been leaned back face out to the room, although whether stacked or standing remains a puzzle. The furnishings of the room included a central table with benches, a table covered with a rug, braziers for heat, three ladders, and a bronze lectern...” The idea is admittedly intriguing and he lays out the evidence convincingly, but I find the theory heavy with circumstance and supposition.

Other notable private libraries, namely the 1584 Escorial library at the royal monastery in Spain, cemented this design. “The system originating in Urbino,” Byers maintains, “became the standard for the arrangement of shelves in the great private libraries of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries and continues... to influence private libraries today.” The later English Renaissance alters this, introducing “*stalls*... invented at Oxford in the mid-fifteenth century... changing completely the feeling of being in a large library.” This morphed into the *bay* system – “a stall library with stalls wide enough to be used as small separate rooms.”

The first 176 pages of *The Private Library* seem preamble to “The Early Modern and the Empire” section, three chapters of which feel like what Byers has been waiting for all along. In “The Seventeenth-Century Scholar’s Library,” “The Eighteenth Century Family Library” and “The Nineteenth-Century Social Library” he peppers these analyses with a couple dozen loving profiles of magnificent English private manorial libraries, all of which he seems to have visited. Often accompanied by color images and floor plans, these detailed descriptions focus on minute architectural features of the rooms and their furnishings and illustrate the advances covered in these chapters. So meticulous is Byers’ study of these that in reporting on Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire he remarks on “the bracket clock on the library table. It strikes the quarter hour, the startlingly loud tone hanging in the air for full sixteen seconds.” Clearly he timed the “Ding!” with stopwatch until the ring completely dissipated – now *that’s* thorough! (And if you’re the type of reader who actually reads a book’s acknowledgments you would have wondered why the two columns’ worth of names include The Marquess of Bath, Baron Browne of Madingley, The Duke of Devonshire, The Earl of Harewood, The Marquess of Hertford and other gentry – no doubt these were mansion owners and tour guides.)

Byers brings out well how advances in printing technology spearheaded change. Once books dropped in price and increased in availability, average persons realized they could afford to acquire some. The transition of private libraries from

the exclusive domain of scholars in the seventeenth century to families in the eighteenth century began in earnest. Circulating rental libraries came into vogue for those of modest means – a reading revolution:

This new mechanism had several happy effects: it made many books available to people who previously had access to only a few, it allowed people to read many books once or twice instead of one or two over and over, it changed the range of what people wanted to read, it changed the identity of the overall readership, and it changed the size and nature of the private library.

Byers chronicles the transition of the home library into a *social* library with many uses by the nineteenth century. Finessing took place on many levels. His description of the raging debate over the bookshelves themselves shows the intensity of feelings:

...there were a great many opinions in the air as to how shelves should be arranged, whether they should be adjustable or fixed, whether they should have doors or remain open, whether they should consist of continuous shelving or separate cases, whether they should be constructed of deal or hardwood, whether they should be painted, whether they ought to have a break at the dado, whether they needed a gallery, how high, in fact, they ought to be built, and all this was before anyone even *mentioned* style.

By this time home architecture and design manuals were all the rage. All chimed in on the topic and Byers surveys many of them.

“The English Country House and Its Library” showcase Byers’ belief that British grand rural residences are the absolute epitome of the idyllic private library. He offers up a fascinating progression using many floor plans that reveal evolution from “the modest door that opened into milord’s closet... to a

dedicated upstairs private room, thence to a private space on the main floor, then to a public room on the main floor, then down to an analogous space on the ground floor, eventually to a dispersal through the other rooms of the house.” His elaboration of how English floor plans transitioned from the ancient Saxon layout (“a timber structure with two large rooms”) to the search for more and more privacy (a home library being the ultimate) makes a persuasive argument for form following function in architecture. It culminated in the sophisticated symmetry of Palladian homes in the first half of the eighteenth century and even more grand asymmetrical arrangements later.

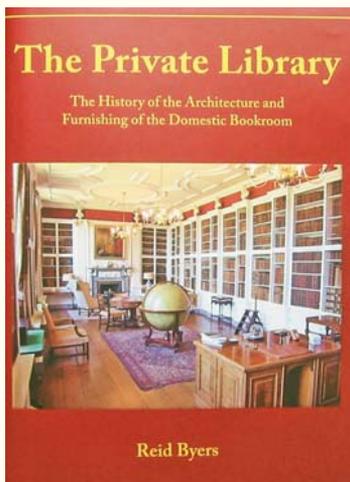
“The Future of the Private Library” chapter should be required reading for every book enthusiast whether they have a private library or not. It will warm the heart of any bibliophile. Byers, an IT guy with serious computer credentials, is quite at ease with digital technology. He does not disapprove of electronic book replacements (Kindle, Nook and their ilk) and articulately debates their impact on libraries. He presents their pro’s and con’s dispassionately – no militant technophobe here! – which makes his pro-book stance that much more persuasive. I admire his well-informed cautions regarding electronic communications:

All hard disks eventually fail. Computer files “rot,” because the hardware around them is continually replaced by the acceleration of technology. Can any of us locate the e-mails and digital documents we had in 1985? 1995? 2005? Last year? Books tend to last unless disturbed. Digital documents do not (so far). If we have a digital collection, we must keep it backed up, and move it step by step to *the next new thing* every time the technology changes. This is not necessarily bad, but it is something we must be prepared to do in order to maintain our collection.

Byers presents seventeen talking points of the physical book versus digital book debate – refreshing and eye-opening for anyone concerned about the future of libraries and the printed

book. “*Books last; bytes become inaccessible,*” notes point #2, and the argument that follows is powerful stuff, concluding, “It is crucial that our libraries, especially our great research libraries but also our focused private libraries, should stay in *paper* existence.” It’s a provocative argument and applies to documents as well as books – “Paper lasts. Bits don’t.” His clear reasoning favoring books in a library over everything digital is a must-read for book lovers and an ought-to read for those who think digital will overtake and eliminate the book. “We should by all means search and use e-books,” he warns, “but we should *read* paper books.”

Autographs do make incidental appearances in *The Private Library*. Call it a stretch, but the development of writing surfaces in private libraries since ancient times proved crucial to the practice of letter writing. Byers reminds us that private libraries are where you retired to not only select and read a book but to write honest-to-god letters. Many of those letters we collect and cherish would have been penned at an escritoire in an inviting home library – picture Robert Crawley, Earl of Grantham, at his library desk in Downton Abbey. Map cabinets, too, came about in recent centuries – wide and deep stacked drawers in a case often topped with a bookcase, just as often used to store prints and manuscripts.



Byers also notes that “Collectors... have for centuries kept archival material that is relevant to their collections shelved with the books themselves. A set of letters from Hemingway would normally be kept with the first editions of the books. A manuscript poem of Housman would be kept in a specially made folder beside the volume in which it appeared...” I question “normally,” since home libraries are less common

than earlier and autograph collectors often prefer the metal filing cabinet route, but I like this Old School approach. I encourage integrating autographs into private libraries, for autographs are to books as ying is to yang. On a phenomenally less grand scale than Hemingway and Housman, this reviewer keeps extensive correspondence with poet Richard Wilbur alongside Wilbur's books, correspondence with critic Malcolm Cowley alongside Cowley's books, correspondence with biographer Gay Wilson Allen alongside his books....

Throughout *The Private Library* Byers manages to keep things light and lively with a style that's disarmingly wry and witty. For instance, in covering the evolution of private libraries in the east, he mentions that the eighth century Islamic poet al-Fath ibn Khaqan "always carried a book hidden in his sleeve" – to which he adds the admonition "So also shouldst thou." Or in discussing how the rise of book rental libraries in the 1750s diluted the notion that only the upper crust might have private libraries, he remarks: "I suspect that the proportion of the population who want a room specifically to house their collection of books has always been something like a constant. We are a chosen people." Occasionally these asides lapse into enjoyable churlishness, as when he observes: "For many owners, the library represented the possibility of sharing books with friends. For others, the lending of books was the surest way of bidding them farewell, or indeed of destroying a friendship. People don't return books; they *don't*." Nothing like a learned lecturer unafraid to inject caustic comments.

"Language," I've noted bluntly on many sticky notes jutting from *The Private Library*. As the block quote in the opening paragraph of this review shows, Byers is a wordsmith whose prose sometimes bubbles over, as if James Joyce and a bookseller produced a love child. Like an absent-minded academic, he does sometimes meander a bit from the narrative. If you enjoy stretching your vocabulary, in reaching for that dusty Merriam-Webster's, in brushing off your rusty Latin and French, you will rejoice in *The Private Library*'s linguistic acrobatics. Phrases such as "the way that our own bookroom's ontogeny has

recapitulated its own phylogeny” strain your memory on biology and Ernst Haeckel’s recapitulation theory – or you look it up, as did I. So too may Byers’ mention of two architects “being so fortunate as to have their *ipsissima verba* in regard both to these new requirements and to their architectural solutions.” In English: “precise words.” Literary and cultural references crop up as well, such as a modern library transformed from a farm silo that featured “an observatory from which to watch the conjunction of Tarva and Alambil.” Non-fantasy fiction fans such as myself have to research that these are planets found in C.S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Or in discussing a 17th century scholar’s pleasantly cluttered study, a comparison to Mr. Pickwick’s study in Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers* is followed by: “Perhaps the bookroom in the house of Rev. Venables. This would be just the place to research a book on campanology.” A bit of checking tells me that Rev. Venables is a character in Dorothy Parker’s 1934 mystery *The Nine Tailors* and that campanology means “the art or practice of bell-ringing,” a central element in this novel. Most often Byers’ arcanities take the form of individual rarely-heard words: “ferial” (weekday), “liminal” (transitional), “deal wood” (soft wood) and many others. All are simply Byers’ style and you either like it or you work with it. I never called *The Private Library* bathtub reading or beach reading, did I?

Minor beef: Unlike almost all books with ample illustrations, *The Private Library* does not print explanatory captions beneath each image. Most explanations appear within the text nearby, a less than satisfactory arrangement that usually works. When pages feature two or more illustrations, though, it sometimes becomes confusing and difficult to tell which comment goes with which image. Easily fixable: Use captions.

For those who prefer their tomes lap-crushingly hefty, *The Private Library* will please no end, though if you also enjoy reading in bed with a book held above the head beware of concussion (and I know whereof I speak). For those who prefer lighter fare it may feel like an anvil. In either case, *The Private Library* is one of those books that, when you turn the last of its 540 pages, makes you sigh with pleasure. Prepare to challenge and enlarge

your architecture and furniture vocabulary. Unless you're multi-lingual, prepare to scurry for translations for obscure phrases with which Byers salts his text (page 342 offers up both Latin *and* French phrases) – a habit you will find either endearing or annoying. This densely informative, thought-provoking and entertaining volume proves as stimulating an experience as the room it studies and celebrates.

Of the hundreds of titles reviewed in this column over the past quarter century plus, no author has appeared more often with more titles in these pages than Kenneth W. Rendell, former Manuscript Society president. Starting with the Winter 1997 *Manuscripts* issue and my review of his *History Comes to Life: Collecting Historical Letters and Documents*, a string of books as entertaining as they are useful and instructional have followed, a remarkable output.

At the risk of endless spoiler alerts, of a litany of accomplishments and high points and giving too much away, let me aim on brevity for once!) – just enough flavor to pique one's interest.

Rendell opens with his rather Dickensian childhood in Boston, which came as a surprise. "My paternal grandparents lived upstairs – they owned the house," he recalls, "while my father's mother lived with us, another family lived in the spare bedroom upstairs, and another in the attic (the house was designed for two families)." The ever self-analytical Rendell interprets how these early experiences and, indeed, events throughout his life form and shape his attitudes as a person and in business. He writes, "Seeing everyone as individual human beings, with normal concerns about their lives, families, beliefs, hopes, worries, and perceptions of events, formed the basis of my fundamental approach to everything in my life. It has also caused me to have an understanding of myself that has been critical in business but, more importantly, personal. The greatest adventure is in exploring yourself, discovering who you really

are, learning what is important to you, and finding out what you really want and enjoy in life and – equally important – what you don't want."

This youthful enthusiasm combined with self-confident objectivity he feels has served him well, especially in the world of rare books and autographs. "It was a startling reality," he observes, "to see otherwise very competent business executives so overwhelmingly focused on what they wanted to see that they ignored what, to me, were obvious indications something was a fraud. This was most notable with journalistic frauds, such as the Hitler diaries and Jack the Ripper..."

Anyone familiar with Rendell knows he began quite young as a coin dealer – but perhaps not that at his parents' drugstore "a customer gave my mother a half dollar. She immediately felt that it was a bit bigger than a normal half dollar, and then she saw the date: 1806. She gave the coin to me as a curiosity" – and that thus in the early 1950s his path seems to have been set. A juvenile coin dealer extraordinaire was born. Amazingly, "That half dollar has sat on my desk ever since that day in 1954." Within a few years he publishes "A Descriptive List of an Outstanding Collection of Hard Times Tokens" and succeeds in selling it *en bloc* for the huge sum of \$8,000, partly by telling the customer which coins he need not buy since they duplicated others. "He was very surprised I didn't encourage him to buy the whole collection, and I replied that I was giving him honest answers to his questions.... I had no expectation that my straightforward, critical, and honest opinions would create a trust that would result in the sale of the entire collection."

One early and extreme example of Rendell's knack for pioneering neglected fields came in 1959 when he and a friend visited London to acquire British coins, which he felt were "undervalued and underrepresented in the American marketplace." While there it was announced "the British farthing was going to cease being legal tender" – and he was off and running. A niche within a niche opened. They bought farthings below face value from banks eager to unload and "we ended up with about six million of them. Then we faced the next problem:

Nobody collected farthings!” This is thinking outside the box of the highest order. Some would call it brash, foolhardy. I call it gutsy confidence in your convictions. In the end they sold them off “in units of a thousand at a time. It was a wild adventure, and 1959 came to a spectacular and profitable end!”

Autographs enter Rendell’s world when, almost by accident, he buys a collection of presidential letters from Q. David Bowers, one of the most successful modern coin dealers and like Rendell a prolific author. Enter the relatively new Manuscript Society at this point, whose membership directory of 1300 member addresses provides “a viable way for me to get started.”

Rendell’s learning curve in the manuscript business was steep but also deep. I appreciate his analysis of the mistake many rare book dealers continue to make in dealing with autographs:

Forgeries were something dealers talked about in the context that they just “knew” what was genuine. Accumulating years of images in your brain of what paper and ink look like at different periods, and what the handwriting of prominent figures normally looks like, creates an instant reaction. There were several forgers who were well known from earlier in the twentieth century; they focused on major figures like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Knowing what their forgeries looked like created a false sense among dealers that they couldn’t be fooled; more recent forgers were aware of overcoming the aging issues and the skill needed to imitate handwriting. Nothing had been written on the subject of historical forgery detection. Expertise relied solely on the experience of seeing genuine handwritten documents, and not on any conscious forensic analytical ability.

This is spot-on accurate even today – except reference works galore on historical forgery detection *do* exist now and there’s no excuse for dealers to not diligently study them. (Albert S. Osborn’s *Questioned Documents*, first published in 1910 and

reprinted numerous times, is an old chestnut and the “gold standard” many decades ago, mainly for law enforcement – you can still learn fundamentals from it, although it’s since been supplanted by shelves’ worth of forensic and historic forgery detection books.) All too often, though, full-time dealers continue to shoot from the hip and make snap intuition-based judgments and are not able to articulate at length and in detail *why* a given document is or is not authentic. Beware of dealers who rely on the B.I.S.S. (“because I say so”) approach. That’s why this column preaches incessantly about the necessity for dealers to read and study and acquire reference works of all types. Yours truly remains concerned that rare book dealers neglect serious study of authenticity and forgery works -- even some autograph dealers have appallingly inadequate reference libraries.

Among many such examples, the most damning incident Rendell cites of dealers not doing their homework – worse yet, not even being *able* to do so – occurs in the brief but disturbing chapter “Is Nothing Sacred? Forging Elvis Presley Manuscripts.” When “Three reputable autograph dealers and one prominent rare-book dealer” offer him manuscripts for some of Presley’s iconic songs, warning bells go off. That these dealers never questioned authenticity and relied solely on *others* having “authenticated” them and well-known auction houses having handled them as their basis for authenticity naturally bothered Rendell. “The source for one dealer had given him two very ornate letters of authenticity and a certificate of authenticity, complete with embossed and wax seals,” he marvels. “These did not say one word about how they were authenticated – only that they were, and they were signed by an unknown ‘expert.’ No one questioned the authenticity...” Such worthless “LOA”s and “COA”s still proliferate on the market today. Rendell felt the need to “sen[d] each of them a copy of my book on forgery detection, so they were aware of the thorough authentication examinations that uncovered many forgeries” – it’s staggering, but sadly not unreasonable, to think that supposedly reputable dealers would not already own copies of the 1994 book *Forging History, The Detection of Fake Letters & Documents* and other

standard reference works, but—well, there you have it. Know thy dealers.

Further along, I do have a friendly bone of contention with Rendell's characterization of rare book dealers. In the chapter "Developing New Collectors," he mentions addressing the semicentennial meeting of the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America – the ABAA (of which I have been member since 1996):

My talk was entitled "The Future of the Manuscript and Rare Book Business." Rare-book dealers were always reminiscing about the "good old days," and I quickly defined my talk as not about nostalgia, nor that "in general, the whole field has gone to hell." I know I must have horrified quite a few of them by saying that "I enjoy this business more today than I have at any other time during the past 40 years. The collectors we deal with today are more appreciative, responsive, and interested than any previous generation."

I agree wholeheartedly with this last assessment – but not with what follows:

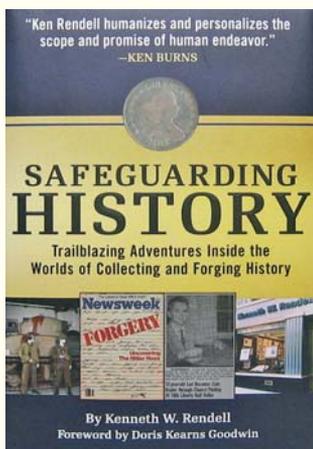
...most of them [dealers] were appallingly condescending, even with me, and most were bibliographical snobs, telling collectors how they had to collect, acting as intellectual elitists, and presuming that anyone interested in a rare book would already know everything about it. I was honest in telling them how much these attitudes benefited my approach, which was to respect prospective collectors and know what pieces they could be interested in if the descriptions were written for intelligent people who did not have an advanced degree in the subject.

Do these snobs and elitists exist in the ABAA? *Absolutely!* And I have experienced their condescension as well – but truth is

they represent a decidedly miniscule portion of the membership, largely high-level older dealers who have not transitioned to new technologies and feel scornful and resentful as a result. *Any* professional membership in *any* field contains some miscreants, human nature being what it is. But to enlarge this tiny minority to “most of them” is flat out false. In more than 25 years as member, I find the rank-and-file membership operates much like Rendell: Overwhelmingly friendly and collegial, welcoming to collectors both advanced and just starting out, happy to instruct and guide – and to learn from them as well. In the increasingly ultra-competitive collecting world, this is simply sound business practice and those who behave as Rendell charges cannot survive for long. These criticisms of “the self-created snobbism of the rare-book world” just ain’t so, Ken, and you and I may have to agree to disagree.

We all of us are guilty to some degree of taking part in the “good old days” and “the whole field has gone to hell” trap. Despite Rendell’s distancing himself from it, in his “Entering the World of Historical Documents: The 1960s” chapter he quotes himself in the introduction of one of his catalogues as writing, “These past nine years have... provided a source of frustration: the disappearance from the market of the fine material available when I began.” This written when he was 26 years old and sounding like a grizzled veteran! In fairness, his 1969 self does then note, “Such lamenting is an ‘occupational hazard’ for collectors and dealers alike.” The same lament is heard today; the same lament was heard a century ago.

Just as I cautioned readers to “Know thy dealers,” another valuable lesson learned in *Safeguarding History* is to know thy customer. In the mind-bending “Bill Gates and the Quintessential Library Project” chapter, Rendell writes of being approached to help



Bill and Melinda Gates to assemble the books for their new home. He writes:

I had studied everything I could about Bill Gates. This is always my approach with any potentially important client. It is critical to understand clients personally and be able to suggest historical subjects or people who might be of interest. In the case of Bill Gates, there were many books about him, all discussing his business career. There was almost nothing about his personal life.... I would be well prepared in the subjects, specifically math and computers, that I assumed would interest him. I knew the major figures in the history of mathematics. I had handled letters of Leibniz, Descartes, Newton, and of course Einstein. There were many other important people, and I learned about the contributions they made to mathematics, the books they wrote, and the rarity and availability of their first editions. Fermat, Pascal, Gauss, Euler, Gödel, Boole, and many others were on my study sheets.

Were this tale presented as a short story, the author would be accused of writing wildly unbelievable fantasy fiction.

I gloss over what some may consider the most important chapters of *Safeguarding History*, lengthy narratives on the high-profile Hitler diary hoax, Jack the Ripper hoax and Mormon forgeries. Many books have been written on this trio of famous forgeries. Rendell's insider account puts all of them into perspective and fills out the back story – a valuable postscript to these notorious cases. Each of these is worth the cost of admission.

Strangely enough, as I encountered Rendell's many, many encounters with the ultra-wealthy collectors and business tycoons and others with whom he has rubbed shoulders, I'm reminded repeatedly of Tevye the Dairyman from *Fiddler on the Roof*, who sings in "If I were a rich man": *When you're rich they think you really know*. The occasional foibles, peccadilloes and

quirks of those for whom money is no object – I call it the “Shark Tank” syndrome -- make for colorful reading and certainly lend credence to Tevye’s wise words.

Safeguarding History is one of the most memorable dealer memoirs ever published -- a bold assertion, but one not made lightly. These miscellaneous observations fail to do it justice and only faintly scratch the surface. A dizzying array of topics in such chapters as “Branching Into the Ancient World,” “Selling Ronald Reagan’s Papers,” “Appraising Richard Nixon’s White House Papers and Watergate Tapes,” “Pricing the Priceless: Appraising Major Archives,” “Forming the World’s Most Comprehensive World War II Collection and Museum” hint at an astonishingly productive, long and multi-faceted career.

I would not label *Safeguarding History: Trailblazing Adventures Inside the Worlds of Collecting and Forging History* a “capstone,” for at eighty years old Ken Rendell maintains a lifestyle and business presence that suggest much more to come. I would also not label *Safeguarding History* “recommended reading.” For anyone hoping to make their way in the historical document world, whether dealer, collector, archivist or whatever, I call it *required* reading.