

FIRST PERSON

Free book appraisals: Do you have something valuable?

Through his frequent lectures, Ken Gloss, owner of Boston's Brattle Book Shop and an "Antiques Roadshow" appraiser, separates trash from real treasures.



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

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Colleagues and competitors think I go to these library talks and drive away with a truckload of rare books. That never happens. Probably 95 percent of what shows up is not valuable. One of the things that was so surprising was that people were thrilled to find out their books weren't worth anything. It sounds counterintuitive. But they can give an old book to their grandchildren or donate it to the library book sale; they don't have to worry about it anymore. If you say it's worth \$30,000 to 40,000, that's a whole different story.

I did a talk recently in Dover, New Hampshire, at the library. A man had one of those album books that you sign. The first signature was Abraham Lincoln's. Then his complete Cabinet and the Senate and Congress at the time. It was probably a \$10,000-plus item.

In Dover, Massachusetts, more than 20 years ago, a lady had a box of old papers and stuff that she said had been in her attic for a long time. She hadn't looked in the box at all. There were broad-sized documents, a few \$100 bills. Then I pulled out a paper and it said "A Declaration of Independence." It wasn't the first edition, but a week later. It was worth three-quarters of a million dollars.

I have to be careful that I don't get cocky. Once, in a library, I saw a person coming up with *The Catcher in the Rye* in terrible condition. Even a first edition in terrible condition isn't worth anything. They opened it up and there was a long inscription from J.D. Salinger to the people's grandparents. It was worth thousands of dollars.

That's the fun part. Never knowing whom you're going to see or meet. There are still a lot of things out there.

— *As told to Kathy Shiels Tully (Interview has been edited and condensed.)*

CHECK HIM OUT Gloss visits libraries throughout the region; his next appearance is on Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Wilmington Memorial Library. 617-542-0210; brattlebookshop.com

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