Summer 1974

A Story with a Happy Ending

University of Richmond
A Story
with a
Happy Ending

Sophomore Marshall Bank found rare books on library shelves.

**Marshall Bank** became so unhappy with Boatwright Library's facilities for rare books that he took five of them in April to hold as hostages until the university assured him of its concern for the valuable volumes.

In the process, Bank became the century's most famous booknapper. The Associated Press picked up the story, and newspapers, radio stations, and television stations throughout the nation told of the University of Richmond student's concern for old books. And, as a result, he got an anonymous donation of $1,000 to help the library.

News stories, 28 of them in Virginia newspapers alone, told of Bank's exploits. The Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, and the Chicago Herald were among the papers across the country who ran the story. Bank received a phone call from a radio station in Houston, and UPI in New York carried a special piece on the booknapper.

Here's how the scene unfolded. Bank, a sophomore from New Rochelle, New York, became interested in Robert Frost after reading a magazine article. He checked out a Frost volume entitled *Selected Poems* and found on the title page an inscription to Westhampton College signed by Frost. Told by a librarian that the book was in general circulation by mistake, Bank double checked by going back to the library to see if other rare books were on the shelves instead of in a rare book room. He found another Frost book, a 1928 first edition of *West Running Brook*, also signed by the poet. On later trips, he found other signed books, one by John Banister Tabb, *Later Lyrics*, and a 1868 version of John Greenleaf Whittier's *Among the Hills*.

Bank wrote the library with his complaint, charging that "since the library and the university are incapable of providing an environment which is healthy for both books and people, someone else will have to assume this responsibility."

So, he kept the rare volumes in his dormitory room and gathered headlines and air time to tell of the plight of the library and the rare books. But the library conditions were already well known to Librarian Ardie Kelly and the administration. In fact, construction is to start this summer on a $3 million-plus addition, which will bring library facilities into top shape by 1976.

Assured of this, Bank returned the books to the library and presented the $1,000 check to Kelly, who responded with the comment that "the books will be put into a very suitable environment."