

# Protecting Rare Government Documents: Lessons From A Theft

Western Washington University  
Bellingham, WA

## WWU

- Bellingham, WA
- State School
- Regional university
- Undergraduate and masters degrees
- 12,000 FTE

## Western Libraries

- Wilson Library (Haggard & Wilson)
- NOT Archives, Map Library, etc.
- Half a million government publications
- US., Washington and Canadian depository

## U.S. Congressional Serial Set

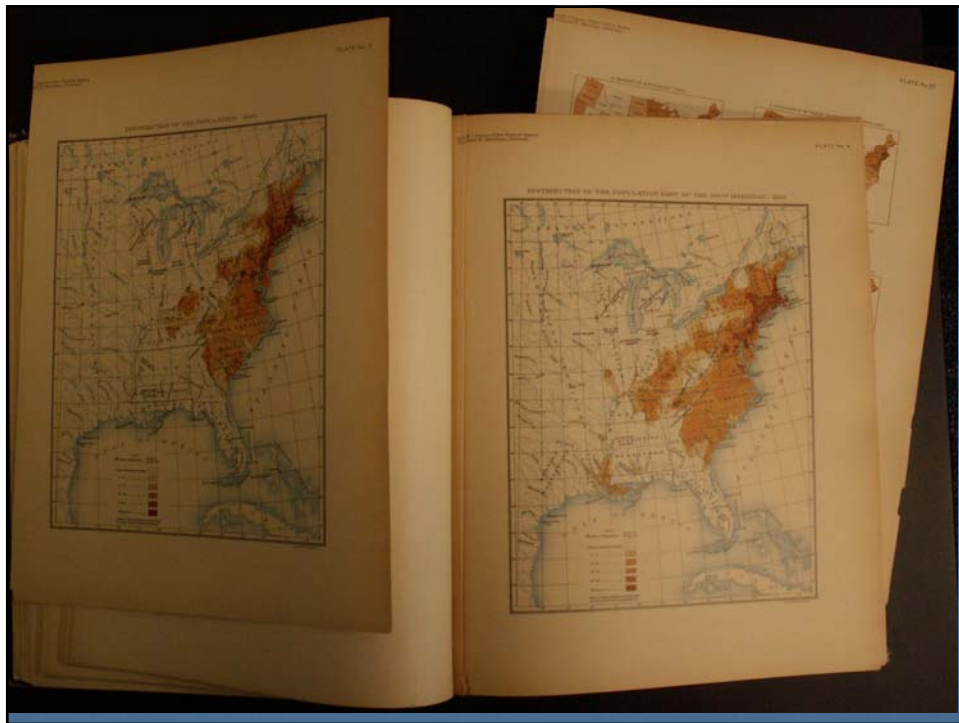
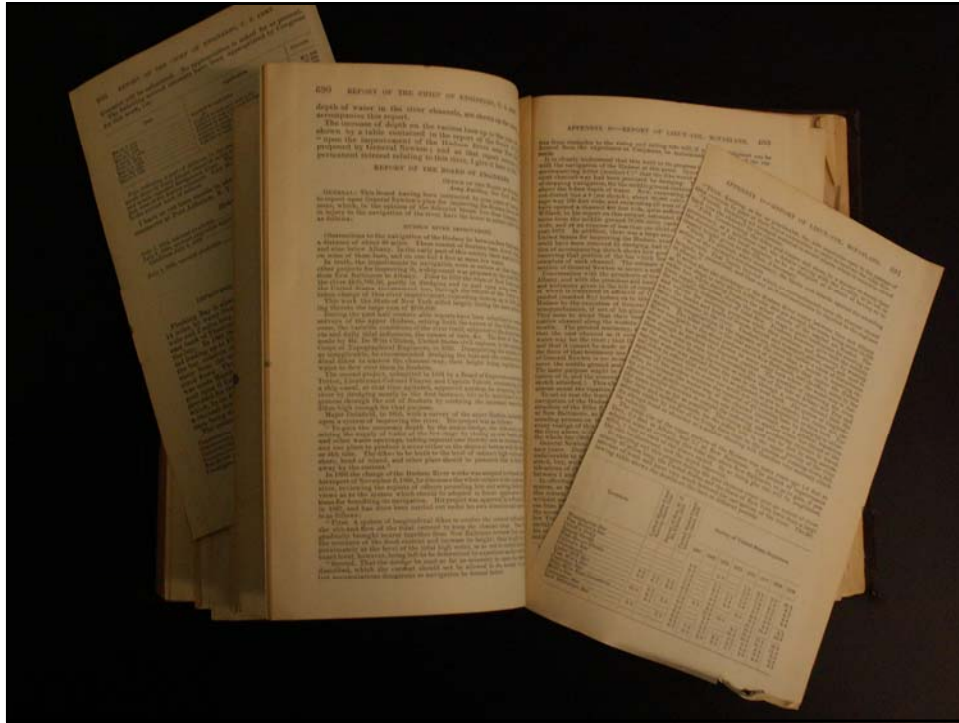
- Approximately 2,500 volumes in the Government Documents Collection
- Approximately 700 USGS volumes in the main (LC) collection.

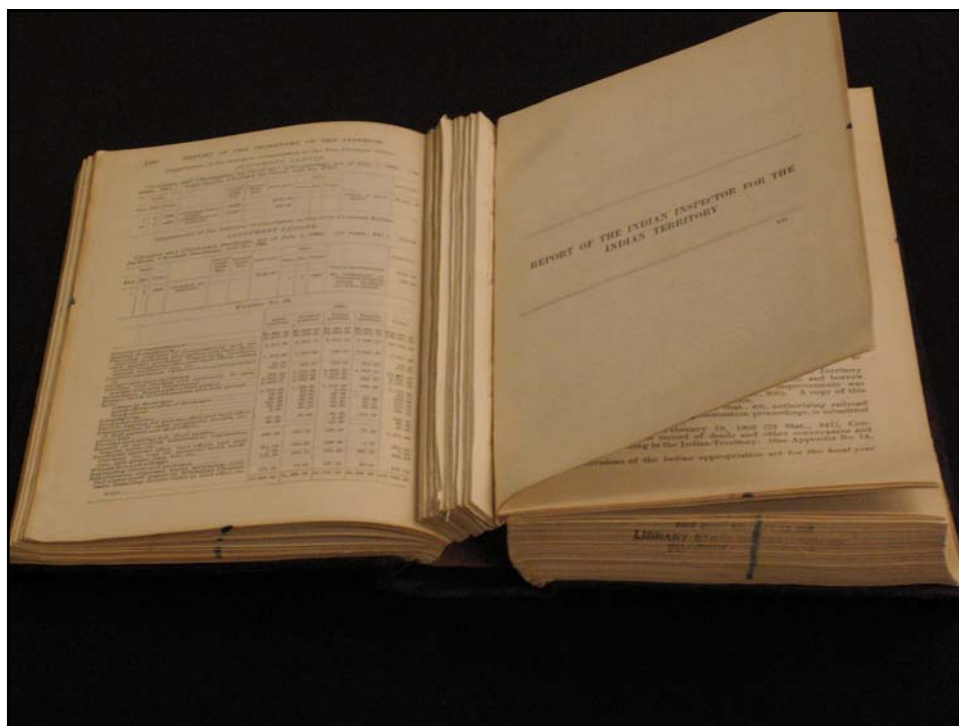
## February 2006

- President's Day weekend
- Suspicious behavior
- FOLLOW UP
- Books out of order, upside down, etc.
- Books clearly damaged (pages sliced out)

## WARNING

- The next few slides may not be suitable for all audiences.





## The Damage

- At least 102 volumes vandalized
- At least 648 pages missing
- More books may be damaged

## The Damage

- 74% of the stolen pages were maps
- 22% were prints, photos, or tables
- 4% cannot be identified

## Sample titles

- Prints of drawings and maps for the building of the Erie Canal, 1835.
- Map of the seat of war in Florida, 1837.
- Chart of Koos Bay, Oregon, 1888.
- View looking south into the Grand Canon of the Colorado River, from Sheavwitz Crossing, 1889.

## More Samples

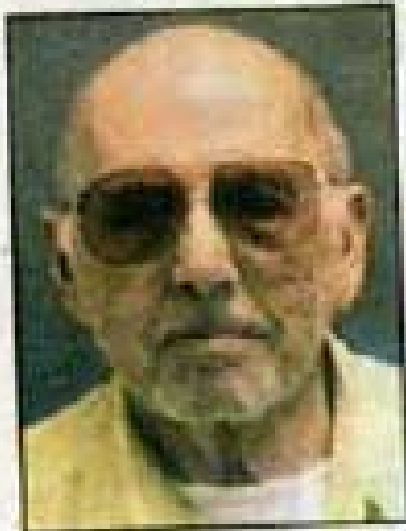
- Right crushing claw of female lobster, 1895.
- Map showing progress of allotment in the Seminole Nation, 1901.
- Pleasant Porter, principal chief Creek Nation, 1902.
- Density of Negro population to total population, 1903.

## What happened next?

- Notified the police.
- Scene examined for evidence.
- Books assessed for damage.
- Notified other libraries on campus & in county.
- Compiled "complete lists."
- Notified book dealers and e-lists

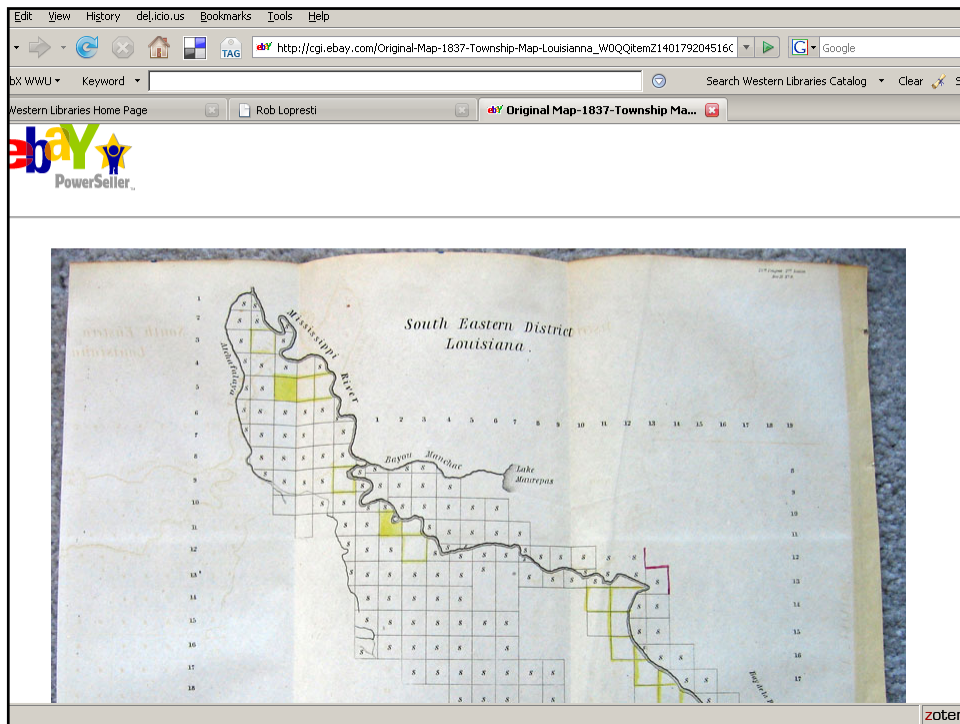
## About the Investigation

- Permanent searches on eBay
- March 21, 2006: possible culprit
- Montanasilver
- James L. Brubaker



**Brubaker**





## The Investigation Continued

- May 2006: We purchase two maps
- September 2006: Crime Lab Results
- Searching for a white knight
- Fall 2007: WWU Police contact Great Falls, MT Police

## December 12, 2007

- Department of Homeland Security (Immigration and Customs Enforcement)
- and local police serve search warrant in Great Falls, MT.

## They seized:

- 20,000+ maps, prints, lithographs
- 800+ books with stamps from 100+ libraries
- 1000+ Indian artifacts

## They also found

- Self-addressed stamped USPS boxes
- Rare earth magnets
- Cutting devices
- Sander
- Coloring agents

## Brubaker

- Pled guilty
- Sentenced to 30 months in federal prison
- Ordered to pay \$23,000 in fines, mostly to Western.
- Western has received no money.
- Why so light a sentence?

## Field Trip

- Great Falls, MT
- Help from local librarians and FBI personnel
- Found 168 pages missing from WWU collection



Dozens of boxes and cabinets of rare books, maps and illustrations are among the stolen treasures recovered by the FBI.

TRIBUNE PHOTOS/STUART S. WHITE

### Library: Brubaker pleaded guilty





## What to do BEFORE the theft

- Inventory – what's already missing
- Move valuable material to closed shelves or watched spaces
- Keep important material in a busy area
- Security audit by police
- Policy on suspicious behavior
- Police walkthroughs
- Motion Detector

## Rare Book Room

- ID
- Permanent record of who used what
- Observation
- Glass tables
- Stamps

## What to do AFTER the theft...

- Call the police
- Document the loss: photos, lists
- Inventory
- Tell librarians
- Tell book dealers
- eBay
- And most important...

## Please, DON'T keep it quiet.

- There is power in solidarity.
- The “only victim” syndrome.
- If you believe your material has been vandalized or victimized at least tell your fellow librarians.

## A toolbox for you...

- <http://libguides.wvu.edu/doctheft>



GOOD LUCK!

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