



# Lost Rights: The Misadventures of a Stolen American Relic

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## **Lost Rights: The Misadventures of a Stolen American Relic** David Howard

Near the close of the Civil War, as General Sherman blazed his path to the sea, an unknown infantryman rifled through the North Carolina state house. The soldier was hunting for simple Confederate mementos-- maps, flags, official correspondence--but he wound up discovering something far more valuable. He headed home to Ohio with one of the touchstones of our republic: one of the fourteen original copies of the Bill of Rights.

"Lost Rights" follows that document's singular passage over the course of 138 years, beginning with the Indiana businessman who purchased the looted parchment for five dollars, then wending its way through the exclusive and shadowy world of high-end antiquities--a world populated by obsessive archivists, oddball collectors, forgers, and thieves-- and ending dramatically with the FBI sting that brought the parchment back into the hands of the government.

For fans of "The Billionaire's Vinegar" and "The Lost Painting," "Lost Rights" is "a tour de force of antiquarian sleuthing" (Hampton Sides).

## **Lost Rights: The Misadventures of a Stolen American Relic Details**

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Author : David Howard

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# From Reader Review **Lost Rights: The Misadventures of a Stolen American Relic** for online ebook

## **Joy Wilson says**

This was a fascinating story of how an original bill of rights was stolen during the Civil War and eventually found its way home 130+ years later. The book opened my eyes to all the intrigue and egos found in the world of antiquities. I enjoyed how the author went from piece to piece of the puzzle without betraying how it all fit until the end; however, I can see where others might find that technique frustrating. Howard also did a fine job of interweaving other interesting stories of lost pieces of history into the main plot to illustrate how the trade in antiques works. I can't imagine having had a Bill of rights hanging in my house or office. I would have been scared to death for its safety. This is definitely worth a read for any history buff.

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## **Nathan Willard says**

Lost Rights tracks the purchase and trading of North Carolina's copy of the Bill of Rights. The story is vaguely interesting as a look into the world of antiques, documents, and books, but so little happens, so slowly, that it turns out not to be such an engaging read. Interesting items are raised and discarded (presumably due to limited access; I, for one, would have liked some insight into the threats made to North Carolina early on in the shopping of the manuscript), and the unreliable narratives of the main actors seem not to be reported out. I recommend listening to the We The People panel discussion on the book from 2010, instead. It gets into the issues in a much more interesting way.

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## **John Lyman says**

Howard made the story come to life. Interesting stuff, too many twists and turns to count. I am disappointed and perplexed that no further reference was made to the two letter discrepancy mentioned near the end. Sure seems like a significant topic to resolve.

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## **Thomas says**

This book has all the makings of a great thriller - a historic heist, hidden treasure, deception, skulduggery, deft legal maneuvering, guns, fortunes to be made or lost, cheap picture frames, and one very valuable piece of parchment. But despite all these, *Lost Rights: The Misadventures of a Stolen American Relic* turned out to be just OK.

Howard's work is well researched and comprehensive, but he jumps from topic to topic with too much back and forth in the timeline. The reader will learn a lot about the world of antiques, documents, and books, but a few of the side stories struck me as adding more length than nuance or new information to the main story line. Indeed, some of those side stories (the career of the undercover FBI agent who has helped recover many stolen treasures) intrigued me more than the hunt to recover North Carolina's copy of the Bill of Rights.

Yes, there are many things of interest in this story, but so little happens, so slowly, that it turns out not to be such an engaging read.

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### **Linda Marcet says**

I enjoyed this book and was fascinated by the topic. Despite a demonstration of excellent research and the inclusion of material based on interviews with the main characters involved in the story, I felt that the flow of the book was a bit choppy with too much back and forth in the timeline. Still, though, Mr. Howard is to be credited with writing on a very interesting topic, and I look forward to reading other books he has written/writes.

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### **Arnied says**

I had no idea there were 13 copies of the Bill of Rights. And I had no idea that each of the 13 states at the time got one. This is the story of a copy that falls into a private citizen's hands...actually a soldier steals it and then a family buys it for \$5. They keep it in plain sight for decades until an antique furniture broker gets wind of it. And he is a star of the Antiques Roadshow television program. The rest is a story about he and his cast of characters trying to sell it. The only problem is who it actually belongs to in the first place. And it isn't a who but a WHAT. This is a wild tale of twists, turns, revelations, skullduggery, betrayal and history. Through it all one rule wins out...TIME DOES NOT RUNNETH AGAINST THE KING.

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### **Lori says**

I thought this book would read more like a mystery novel based on the subtitle and the backpage description. There is good information in the book, but it jumped around the topics too much for me which hurt the flow for my enjoyment. Also, it seemed to almost be a biography about Wayne Pratt for large portions of the book, which I also wasn't expected based on the description. Finally, I felt a few things weren't followed up and left me hanging. Most notably was a paragraph in Chapter 22 that ended with: "Blum had stumbled onto an important find." Blum is never mentioned again and the point of the discrepancy never comes up again. I thought this was a plot twist, but apparently it wasn't. I am left to wonder if I got a reprint that left sections out.

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### **C.C. Thomas says**

The introduction to this book was so captivating, so masterful, so story-like, it's hard to believe such a tale actually happened! Who says great adventures only happen in the movies? I find the best ones are the ones from real life and this proves my point.

This is the story of one of the fourteen original Bill of Rights. There was one made for each of the thirteen colonies and one for the federal government. The one for North Carolina was apparently stolen during the sacking of Raleigh at the end of the Civil War and was discovered/revealed decades later in Indianapolis

hanging on the wall of a modest home. Let the bidding begin! But, who owns it? The homeowner from Indianapolis or the State of North Carolina? Or is it really the missing document from another state?

A cast of characters-both villains and heroes-inhabit these pages and are fit for any Hollywood screen. The convoluted workings of tracing the who/where/what and why of this is so interesting and underling it all is patriotism and greed. I love how a story such as this is so full of scandal and intrigue. So much fuss for such a tiny scrap of paper! This was a very interesting read with a very sobering ending. I have definitely never read a book like this one. If you like mysteries from history, be sure to check it out!

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### **Kevin McAllister says**

This book reminded me of that old saying "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive" I've read tons of books throughout the years but in *Lost Rights* David Howard introduced some of the most despicable and deceitful characters I've ever come across. And the frightening lesson to be learned from this book is that these characters weren't fictional. They were supposedly upstanding politicians and business men, who displayed sickening amounts of greed, and with nothing more than a few slaps on the hand for punishment, pretty much got away with their actions. Which reminds me of another old saying "Absolute power corrupts absolutely"

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### **Cheryl Gatling says**

It was an original copy of the bill of rights, one of fourteen copies, written by hand on parchment, signed by the original members of congress. What if you actually had that in your hands? You might feel awe at the history, as did some people in this book who lined up just to touch one corner with a finger, just so they could say they did. But your mind also might start racing about what you could get for it. What would it be worth? Four million? Forty million? Unless it was worth nothing because you couldn't sell it. In 1789 each of the 13 colonies had received its own copy of the bill of rights. North Carolina's copy had gone missing when General Sherman's troops looted the statehouse (as they looted everything else) during the Civil War. It ended up a family heirloom in the Shotwell family in the north. When two Shotwell ladies got old they decided to sell it. They wanted it to be in a museum where it could be properly preserved, but they hoped to sell it rather than donate it, because they thought they might get some money to pay for their medical care. Enter the antiques dealer Wayne Pratt, and a cast of many other characters. There were so many characters that I sometimes had trouble keeping them apart. The author does a very good job of humanizing all the legal experts and historical experts and potential donors who bowed in and out of this story, and in telling lively anecdotes of sidestory and backstory, but it was still sometimes too much detail. The pace picked up considerably once the FBI got involved. If there is one lesson to be learned, it is in this quote from the book: "Valuable old objects could bring out the worst in people."

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### **John says**

Awesome account of how one of our 14 original copies of the bill of rights was stolen during the civil war. Well written by David Howard! Must own for anyone interested in American history.

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## **Rose says**

Excellent book - tells the true story of North Carolina's missing Bill of Rights. Stolen during the Civil War, sold to the Shotwell family in Indiana, and put up for sale by a well-known antiques dealer, it was recovered by an FBI sting operation. A bit tedious at times, but great history and interesting players/caretakers throughout the life of the document until its return. It's a true life crime mystery solved with elements of history and modern day sleuthing.

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## **Scott Burrell says**

Nice journalistic treatment of an interesting story (particularly to me as I am pretty certain that I am the anonymous lawyer referred to on page 59).

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## **Cynthia says**

Lost Rights is an enjoyable read. When the Declaration of Independence was first proposed to the original 13 states North Carolina objected stating that it didn't go far enough to protect personal freedoms. This led to the Bill of Rights which secured those freedoms. It was adopted and one of three government clerks wrote out a copy for each state and a 14th copy for the Federal government. During the Civil War one of Sherman's soldiers stole North Carolina's copy and took it back home to Ohio. He quickly sold it and it was handed down through three generations of one family for the next 134 years. That's the Cliff Notes version but Howard provides a very detailed, sometimes almost too detailed, account of the document's journey back to North Carolina. There's a salty cast of characters who play their parts along the way. Howard gives us a behind the scenes take on the world of rare documents buying and selling. I was saddened to read that far too many state and federal documents have been lost, destroyed by accident, war, and carelessness and worst of all stolen, sometimes by the people charged with protecting them though for the most part that's an anomaly. Ironically in order to provide the provenance of this particular Bill of Rights several seemingly valueless documents were required. A careful documents clerk's distinctive markings clinched it as North Carolina's copy. Howard emphasized that though this physical object is important more important are its words and what they mean for us as a country and individuals. He includes a quote from a fellow journalist, Mark Bowden, who said, "Any nation is, at heart, an idea."

I recently read Wittman's book "Priceless" about his career in the FBI specializing in stolen art objects and his account of his part in recovering this Bill of Rights dovetails with Howard's though Howard's is far more detailed.

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## **Anam Cara says**

I had no idea that there were multiple "originals" of our founding documents. This book tells the story of one copy of the Bill of Rights that was taken from North Carolina as part of the spoils of war at the end of the

Civil War. It was sold to a man who kept it in his family for over 100 years. When descendants of the purchaser decided to sell it, problems began.

The story is of an antiques dealer who wanted to profit from selling the document and his life. It is the story of how important documents have been treated in the past and how they are now preserved. It is the story of duplicitousness and obfuscation.

It is a fascinating story where, in the end, no one wins.

I only gave the book 4 stars because there were a few times that I felt the story needed to move along without all the extra information. But in spite of that, I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in American history.

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