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# **Comic Book Collecting, A Starting Point**

*Jump Start  
Your Collection  
Using Internet Resources*

**By Dave Gieber and Johnny Blue Star**



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## **A Gentle Warning to the Reader: Preface**

Comic book collecting is not the same as comic book reading. When you read comic books, you soar into the sky with your favorite comic book hero and fight outrageous battles against Doc Ock or Lex Luthor. When you collect comics, you may not only have to spend a whole lot more money than you did when you were a happy little reader, but you also will surrender a lot of valuable comic reading time to your new hobby. And where will your money go? Not just to the comic books themselves, anymore! No, you will be spending your precious funds on price books, acid-free cardboard backs, Mylar covers, specially constructed storage boxes, money for hotels and airfare or just plain gas when you visit conventions. Instead of going on joyous adventures in your own mind or laughing at your favorite characters parading around on newsprint before your enchanted eyes, you will be spending a lot of time counting, stuffing, grading, pricing, buying and selling the stuff you used to love. What was purely a joyous fantasy now will become partially a numbers game. If you are a collector, you are somewhat between a book reader and a bookkeeper, between an art collector and an art dealer. You have to love this sort of thing and be prepared for it if you are going to be happy as a collector.

So, collecting isn't just a simple, fun thing. It is a serious, focused, often money-centered activity. And, furthermore, it's you and your art conservation techniques against the clock. Because comic books, although they are the grand purveyors of your wildest dreams, are, in fact, just fragile things, made with self-consuming ink and paper. Love them, treasure them, but always be aware- they don't last forever!

Dave Gieber  
Webmaster and Operator of  
<http://www.comic-book-collection-made-easy.com/ebook>

## **Introduction: The Purpose of this Book**

The purpose of this book is to rapidly bring the reader into a knowledge of the methodology of collecting comic books. This book focuses on the way the Internet has allowed the Collector to move into levels of access to the marketplace and to essential resources. To be found are high levels of information and discussion, as well as information on pricing and cataloging of an individual's own collection. After reading this book, the reader will know where to go and what to do if they want to start a comic book collection and, also some of the flavors and sensibilities of the hobby. This book isn't meant to do everything for you, but it is meant to get you started- fast!

The Internet has really affected the collecting of comic books as it has everything else. It allows you to buy and sell, price, organize your collection, examine the history of comic books, get in touch with experts and fans, etc. I have decided to emphasize the tools and resources of the Internet so to best help the reader jumpstart their collection using the most contemporary tools.

There is no doubt that history is what drives comic book collecting, particularly in the loftier areas of pricing. Specific comics have a certain place in this history and so they can command a higher price. In our little e-book, we will point out elements of this history, as an illustration of how a collector needs to think, but the actual development of a real understanding of the market and its history may take decades. That is what a hobby or a long-term investment-collecting scenario is all about - time, patience and the acquisition of profit through intelligence, knowledge and strategic planning.

Although we list many resources on the Internet, we cannot be responsible for the demeanor, efficiency or integrity of all the companies, vendors and persons we address in this book. This book is a guide to the use of the Internet

and other resources for comic book collecting. It shows you how to research, buy, sell, organize and communicate, but leaves the rest to you. As in everything else, you must do your own background research, if appropriate, before you spend your money or your time. We are here to give you an overview and approach to what you are doing. Spend your money wisely and research yourself before you actually spend your hard-earned capital.

## The Origin of Comic Books, Chapter One

The origin of comic books is somewhat a controversy. Perhaps the jury is still out. Since the reader is probably interested in how the product he longs to collect got started, I shall try to touch on this mystery.

Perhaps we could go back to the cartoonish broadsheets of the Middle Ages, parchment products created by anonymous woodcutters. As mass circulation of these broadsheets became possible, they soon developed a market—particularly at public executions, popular events for centuries which drew thousands of happy spectators. Many of which, came to invest in an artist's rendering of a hanging or burning, making a very lucky day for the sheet seller. Below is a type of woodcut indicative of the “look” or “style” of this art.



The broadsheet evolved into higher-level content as humor was introduced. Eventually, all types of broadsheets emerged, which were eventually bound in collections, the prototype of the modern magazine. Magazines formatted like the popular Punch, an elegant British creation, became the primary focus of documentary accounts of news and events, fiction and humor. One can see in Punch, the sophisticated evolution of a comic style, particularly in respect of the evolution of comics in Great Britain. Still and all, from an historical standpoint, the comic strip stood in the alley, waiting to be born.

Some say England's Ally Sloper's Half Alley was the first comic book, an 1884 black and white tabloid that had panels of cartoons mixed with a sliver of news. Sloper led to an abundance of halfpenny titles, led by Comic Cuts and then with Illustrated Press in 1880. These were pioneered by the Amalgamated Press, whose Alfred Harmsworth made his mark on the marketplace by cutting prices in half. The halfpenny roared to popularity, again in England, where a lot of the action was.



Now while all this was going on in Great Britain- this inching towards the comic book- the United States had its own brand of evolution. Instead of magazines, US newspapers took the lead in creating the comic book industry. Newspapers took the first steps as their single image gags evolved into multi-paneled comic strips.

It was during this period that William Randolph Hearst scored a knockout with the Yellow Kid, which was actually printed in yellow ink.



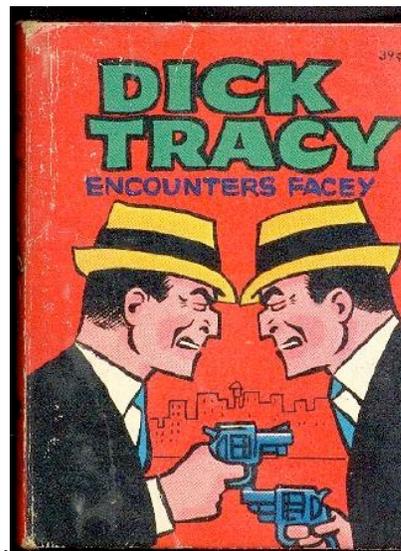
By 1905, “Little Nemo in Slumberland,” created by Winsor McCay, with its more urbane middle-class story of an affluent child’s dream excursions, became very popular. George Heriman’s “The Dingbat Family” was another great success, which eventually evolved into “Krazy Kat,” the comic that gave him his historical place in the industry.



So where did the actual comic book begin? Some say with reprints of Carl Schultz’ Foxy Grandpa- from 1901 to 1905. Remember though, that other say it was Great Britain’s Ally Sloper’s Half Alley. Then there was Little Nemo, transformed into a 10” x 14” book in 1906. In 1902, Hearst published the Katzenjammer Kids and Happy Hooligans in books with cardboard covers. Bud Fisher’s popular “Mutt and Jeff” found themselves in a 5” x 15” book in 1910. For a time, the Yellow Kid himself was a top contender. But, you see it depends how rigid you are in your description of a comic book. But, for sure, there were predecessors to the modern comic book, which exploded in the 1930’s.

Many of these were reprints and, indeed, the likes of Charlie Chaplin in 1917, Tarzan in 1929 and Mickey Mouse in 1931 found themselves in some type of book format, all before the comic book industry began to define everything in an explosion for original content. The closest contender, a book with appearance of the modern comic book, may have been the ten cents Comic Monthly.

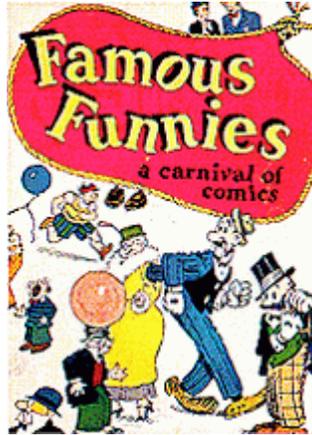
Just before the industry grabbed America by the throat and shook it for all its dimes and nickels, an alternative contender emerged, the still collectible BLB's or Big Little Books, which essentially featured a page of text followed by a comic book panel without the balloon.



Buck Rogers, Tarzan and Little Orphan Annie found their way into BLB's with Dick Tracy leading the pack in 1932. But BLB's were not to last. The modern comic book was on its way.

The Whitman Publishing Company, which launched the BLB'S in 1932, also became one of the pre-launchers for the modern comic book. In 1934, it published forty issues of Famous Comics, which was a black and white hardcover reprint.

The first regularly published comic in the recognizable modern format was Famous Funnies. It featured such greats as Joe Palooka, Buck Rogers and Mutt and Jeff.



Harry L. Wilderberg, sales manager at the Eastern Color Printing Company of Connecticut, created famous Funnies. His motivation was to develop a really good giveaway program. He got Gulf Oil to buy into the concept, giving the impetus to 64-page, cola comic books.

Further enlisting the aid of the legendary Max C. Gaines, color comics were produced for Proctor and Gamble, Wheatena and Canada Dry, with high printing runs, some as high as one million copies.

Gaines made his industry mark when he worked for the McClure Syndicate. There, Gaines used its color presses to produce Dell Comics. Advised by his friend, Shelton Myers, he passed on one bit of advice to Dell: Publish Superman! Gaines went on to launch All-American Comics, Flash Comics, and Sensation Comics before he founded his own company, EC (Educational Comics), which specialized in Bible Stories. When he died, his son made history by developing some of the most renowned and notorious horror and mystery comics as well as Mad Magazine. The former "Educational Comics" had now become Entertainment Comics, or EC Comics.

It was Max C. Gaines, the father, who brought “Superman” to Dell’s publisher, Harry Donenfield. Donenfield scored the comic coup of the century when he published a story written by two teenagers, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster- and so “Superman of Metropolis” (the title of their short story they wrote in their own fanzine) was born. Superman was to set a standard for comic book heroes that persists to this day.

People speculate what influenced Shuster and Siegel. Many attributed a major influence to be Hugo Danner, the hero of Philip Wylie’s novel, Gladiator. Like Batman, Superman had a dual identity, reminiscent of characters of film and radio like Zorro and the Shadow.

Although the first editions did not do well, there was a buying spree on the fourth edition. Donenfeld rightly deduced that this Superman fellow might be something else- a potential Blockbuster. Circulation, syndication and eventually radio led to amazing notoriety for Superman and created soaring circulation figures. The comic book grossing almost a million dollars in 1940.

## **Comic Book Collecting-for Fun and Profit, Chapter Three**

When you go for advice about collecting comics, be sure and go to an expert. We did. We went to James F Payette, a rare books and comic book dealer, operating out of Bethlehem, New Hampshire. With over eighteen years of advising the Overstreet Guide, the most prestigious comic book price guide in the world and over ten years on the Grading Committee at Sotheby's. Mr. Payette brings a very personalized knowledge to the business of collecting. He also puts his money where his mouth is by buying thousands and thousands of dollars worth of collections, having often successfully bid on the top collections in the world. At times he will pay up to 100% or more of your comic book price guide for comics of special interest.

Mr. Payette at first made clear to us that not all collectors have the same objectives. "There are really three types of collectors- those who collect for pure enjoyment, those who invest purely for monetary gain and those who do a little of both."

"Knowing the cost of comic books these days, I certainly would prefer that people invest in the long term, for themselves or for their heirs, rather than waste their money on the huge number of comics that just cannot hold their value. Among these comics, are one's that were published in the late 70's to the present. These comics are published in the millions and have little or no true resale value, although here and there, as in any era, there are some moments of interest."

"So we want to pick our investments carefully- thinking, someday I want to have something for all my trouble. "

"To do this, first, we must focus on higher grade books. These books should also be highly collectible. They must be the right titles or be published by

the right companies. It might be best to invest in comics published before 1965, VG (Very Good) or better. If you are going to buy something from 1965 to the mid 70's, it ought to be 9.2 or better (that's Near Mint or better, according to Overstreet). If I were to invest, I would certainly look at Timely Comics, which fostered such masterful titles as the Sub-Mariner, the Human Torch and Captain America. Most collectible are 1-75 of Captain America and 1-92 of Marvel Mystery. 1-34 of the Human Torch is a nice, lucrative set of collectibles. Young Allies is also a very nice title, whose early numbers have moved exceptionally well. Timely evolved into Atlas and eventually into Marvel. There were probably 400-500 books put out by Timely. I would also look at Atlas products, who put out a lot of Horror, War and Romantic comics before they morphed into Marvel."

"Of course, there are the mainline DC investments, like Superman or Batman. Be sure these are VG or better. Take a look at More Fun from DC. From 1-51, More Fun was kind of oriented to Adventure. But 52-100 brought in some great Superheroes, like the first appearance of AquaMan and Doctor Fate."

"Relatively scarce, Centaur comics, another company, are very collectible- as long as they are a very solid VG or better."

"In general, you always do good with #1's. You do well with originals. You do well with certain companies. Certain themes sometimes do better at one time to another. Right now, classic horror comics- like weird Mysteries or Weird Horror- have somewhat leveled out after a fairly recent peak. Be wary of media splashes- like buying Daredevil because of the movie. These things don't usually last."

"Perhaps the most remarkable example of media splashing was the Death of Superman fiasco, where DC published something like 5.2 million copies to the point that it would be easier these days to find a Near Mint "Death of Superman" than one in "Good" or "Fine" shape. I remember, shortly after the publication, how one woman bought two copies so she could put her daughter through college."

That kind of fantasy thinking doesn't work well. There is a basic economics to collecting. If there is no scarcity, there is not going to be much of a market. Of course, even with scarcity, there must be demand. If there is no demand, there is no value whatsoever."

If you are reading this and have a real good comic collection you wish to sell (maybe you inherited it or are working on cataloging your uncle's favorite comics), feel free to contact Mr. Payette at 603-869-2097 or email him at [jimpayette@msn.com](mailto:jimpayette@msn.com).

## The Different Ages of Comic Books, Chapter Four

Gemstone Publishing, which publishes the Overstreet Price Guide has been leading the debate in trying to classify the ages of comic books, which formerly were Platinum, Golden, Silver and Modern- with Bronze sometimes thrown in.

DATES	NAME OF AGE	TRIGGER
1828-1882	Victorian Age	
1883-1938	Platinum Age	
1938-1945	Golden Age	Action #1
1946-1956	Atom Age	
1956-1973	Silver Age	Showcase #4
1973-1985	Bronze Age	Amazing #121 featuring Death of Gwen Stacy
1986-1992	Copper Age	DC's Crisis
1992- ???		

The purpose of this chapter is to allow the reader to get the sense of this discussion and how this effects the value and goals of his collection. In our first little discussion, we lump together the Bronze Age and the Modern Age into one category.

### Platinum Age

1897-1932

These comics were described in detail in the first chapter. They were developed prior to the real comic book industry Very popular titles included the Yellow Kid in McFadden Park, the Mickey Mouse Book, Buster Brown and his Resolutions, Little Nemo. These are not necessarily all extremely hot items, but even at Very Fine, they are pricey. And, as they deteriorate- and as comic book historians continue to piece together the early history of the industry, they may get more important.

Because of their priciness, the lack of public awareness of the titles (because a lot of people who read them are now passed away) and their rarity,

they are not going to be candidates for the usual comic book collection. This is not to say they are not fine for the sophisticated, knowledgeable collector- particularly for those who wish to take their part in archiving comic book history.

### **The Golden Age** 1933-1955

Spanning the 1930's and 1940's, the Golden Age of Comics not only features a whole new cast of characters, artists and publishers but really represents the beginning of the comic book industry.

The stars of this industry are "The Big Two," DC (Detective Comics) and Marvel, beginning in 1937 and 1938 respectively. As to titles, there are enduring superheroes like Superman, Superboy, Batman, Captain America, Captain Marvel, Green Lantern, Sub-Mariner; great kid comics like Little Lulu, Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, Archie; and others that once potent, are now obscure- like Plastic Man, the Rawhide Kid and Tom Mix. The Golden Age set the stage for everything else.

These items, depending upon the title, are very sellable- but, of course, the condition is very important to get a good price. For this reason, you may not be able to afford some of the better comics in the very highest grades. You need to develop a reasonable perspective as to what you can and cannot collect from the Golden Age.

### **The Silver Age** 1956-1973

As Mitchell Brown notes in our Chapter on the Top Ten Comics of the Century, the Silver Age begins with DC Showcase #4, which was released in September 1956 with the reintroduction of the Flash. From 10 cents to \$49,400, as priced by our online price guide, well, that's what I would call appreciation.

The new Flash followed on the heels of a Senate Investigating committee having been spurred on by the wide-ranging criticisms of comics, voiced by Dr. Fredric Wertham. Actually, although many people did not appreciate Wertham's excesses, magazines like "Tales of the Crypt Comics," which was ultimately banned New York State, were filled with hellish, disgusting gruesome images that quite possibly had no redeeming value. There may have been some good that came from Dr. Wertham's criticisms.

Great new titles began to come center stage- like the Amazing Spider Man, Daredevil, the Incredible Hulk, X-Men, the Fantastic Four- many of which have danced in other venues- like television and film. These characters were more human, more real than the former superheroes and had more foibles and eccentricities and soap-opera type problems than their predecessors.

### **The Modern Age** 1974- Present

In 1971, the Official Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide was introduced and set new standards for the Marketplace. New independents began to appear like ElfQuest and Cerebus the Aardvark.

One of the weird fun things of the Modern Age was Eastern and Laird's self-deprecating Teenage Ninja Turtles. This 3000 copy, self-published bonanza roared to mainstream multimedia and toydom star status in a way that proved that home brew still worked in America.

I am ambivalent about the Modern Age. Many reading this book won't have that luxury because they weren't born until the Modern Age began. They therefore won't know the pleasures of comic books being sold, hawked and traded everywhere. Now, I admit that albatrosses like the "candy store" or the "drug store" where they sold a variety of items besides candy or drugs and had a required soda fountain- were not always as elegant as a comic specialty-shop.

Specialty-shops are now a mainstay of the comic business- but comics were not so much art then as they are now. They were a part of fantasy and exuberance and the joys of trading with your friends. I am saying they were part of life and not so much a collectible treasure.

On the other hand, specialty comic book stores bring a certain professionalism to the realm of collecting even if they are a product of a change in the mass media atmosphere. So, in a sense, for the serious collector, they are a kind of treasure in themselves, a newcomer to the industry that is now firmly planted in the realities of distribution.