



American Guide Series

The State Guides

Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writers' Project (FWP)

Complete 52 Volume Set of the State Guides, including the lower 48, Alaska, Puerto Rico, Washington D. C. and New York City.

All original maps included, with map pockets.

All First Editions, except for Idaho (2nd printing).

All with original Dust Jackets, (Washington D. C. has facsimile)

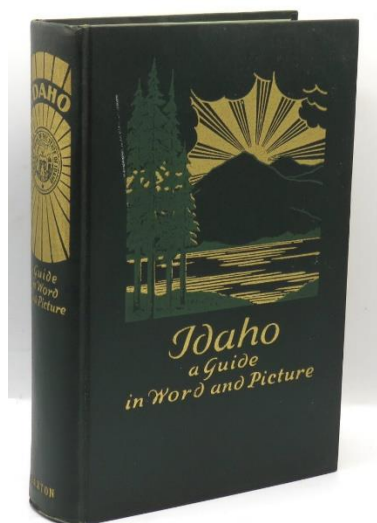
A complete description and commentary follows.

The objective of the American Guide Series was to portray the nation in such an honest and effective way that it would help create a more noble standard of social behavior. Published between January 1937 (Idaho) and January 1942 (Oklahoma), this series of books and pamphlets provided a dignified paycheck to thousands of researchers, writers, and administrators; and by extension to government employees, and publishing company workers. As WPA head Harry Hopkins commented, *"Hell, they've got to eat just like other people."*

This collection of historic Americana was assembled by a private collector over 20 years of search and upgrades. The completeness of this collection (FE / FP, maps and DJs) and the caliber of condition is rarely found. This archive deserves a more permanent home in an institution where it can be studied and preserved for the subsequent generations of those for whom it was written. **\$7,500**

The Text

All books are First Edition, First Printing, with the exception of Idaho (Second Printing). Condition ranges from VG -/+ to Fine. Less than a handful of books have a previous owner's name neatly written on the endpaper. The only writing found are previous bookseller pricing or inventory number in pencil in about 12 books, and 3 have a small bookseller's label on rear endpaper. An equal number have some humidity spotting on the top or fore edge, as this collection once resided in Washington D.C. through several summers. Typical spine bumps and edge wear and occasional edge fade, but no wear through at corners or edges. Tennessee seems to have a binding error with pp. 521-524 missing.



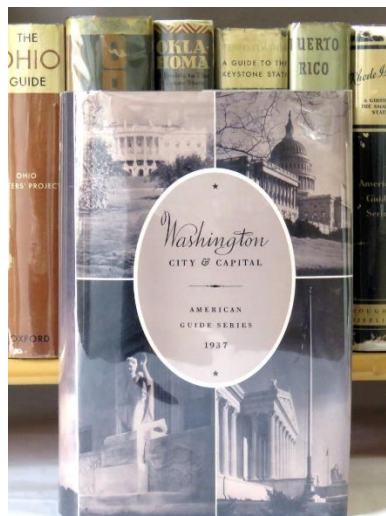
“Idaho: A Guide In Word And Picture”, through the brute intellect, energy and commitment of Vardis Fisher, who personally wrote most of the text, was the first book published on January 15, 1937. By being the first, Idaho, and Fisher embarrassed the staff of Washington D. C. writers, who thought by their birthright deserved to be the first guide published. He also scooped all of the New England states, whose organization and extensively credentialed staff were intent upon publishing leadership.

Also by being the first published, *“The book met with much praise in the review columns of the fourth estate – it was a new note in American literary history.”* The heralded reviews for the book erased many of the political and competitive challenges which Fisher experienced. Eight weeks after publication there was a fire at the publisher's, Caxton Publishing, plant in Idaho. An unknown number of first edition copies were destroyed. This is the only book in the collection which is not a First Edition / First Printing. The second printing, which then included Vardis

Fisher's name as State Director on the title page, is the only book to specify an author or editor. It also included a map in the rear pocket, which the first printing did not. *“...almost as scarce as the first [edition].”* Dykes 69.

Dust Jackets

All DJs are original and present, with the exception of Washington D. C, which is a facsimile. Most have DJ edgewear which ranges from light shelf wear to small nicks, chips or tear. Nine [9] have a chip somewhere along the edge which is 1”+. Two volumes (KS, OR) have tape applied to the DJ. Some spines sunned, none to extensively. All now preserved in mylar covers.



When Franklin D. Roosevelt was presented with his copy of *“Washington: City And Capital”* he responded, *“Where is the steamer trunk that goes with it?”* This monumental work was the largest of any of the FWP publications. The book weighs 5.5 pounds and is 3 inches thick. Original DJs are very scarce as they became unwieldy due to the heft of the book. It is really two books in one: a regular tour book of the city and a description of various government departments.

The book was intended to resolve major questions of format, scope, and emphasis, and whether the subsequent AGS books were to be reference works or actual guidebooks. As the D. C. guide shows, they could be both. This was the only guide published by the GPO. All other FWP items were published by large publishing firms or local printers. It is the only book which has two (2) maps, both of which are color, in the rear cloth

pocket. Scharf & Schoyer 119.

Maps



All forty-five (45) maps and rear map pockets are present. All of them are still folded in their pockets and seemingly never used. Seven books (AZ, AR, CO, ID, MO, TX, UT, WI) were issued without maps in their first edition, several had maps printed on the end paper. Washington D. C. has two maps. Tennessee's pocket is detached, but present. These pre-Interstate Highway System maps were essential companions to the books' text, the book after all serving as state guides to historical places, annual events and were even written in a manner to dictate the best manner for state exploration.

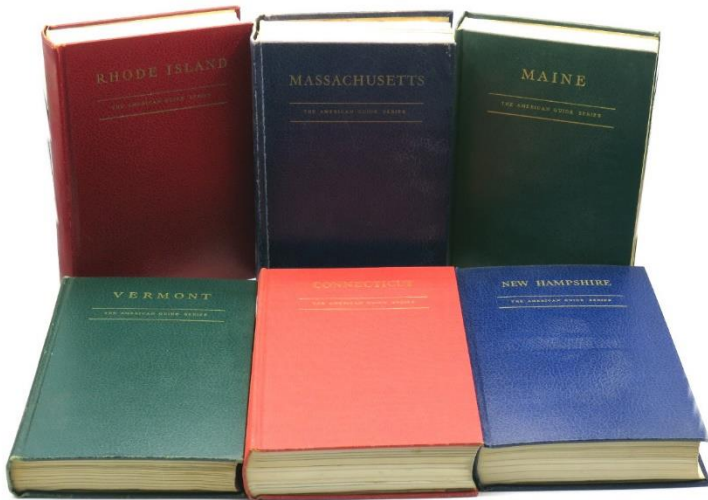
"The third main section of each volume guides the traveller up and down and across the state along carefully chosen routes...Then he may plan his trip. This is a guide for the motor age, not a flabby unreadable book on bible paper to stuff in one's pocket...now I am convinced they are the Guides of Tomorrow." – Frederick Gutheim, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, June 14, 1941

Publishers

Perhaps the finest book on the subject of The Federal Writers Project is Jerre Mangione's *"The Dream And The Deal"* (Little, Brown, 1972). Mangione worked for the project in its early years with the responsibility of identifying and lining up publishers. While he was intimately familiar with this process, he wrote very little about the American Guide publishers in his book.

In all, there were 19 publishers of the guide books. Oxford University Press led the way with 11 publications followed by Viking (9) and Hastings House (8). Three State University Presses represented their publications: North Carolina, Georgia and the last book published, Oklahoma.

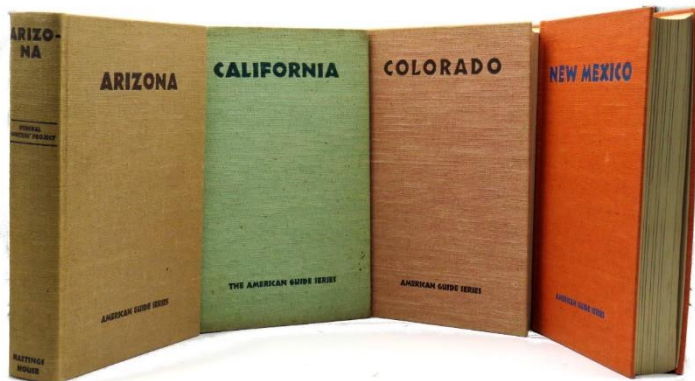
Noted regional publishers got the contract in places like Oregon (Binfords & Mort), Illinois (A. C. McClurg), and the New England States were published by the Boston powerhouse, Houghton Mifflin.



The Boston firm Houghton Mifflin produced a consistent style of staid, traditional covers. Monochrome glossy cloth, gilt titling, ruled highlights.

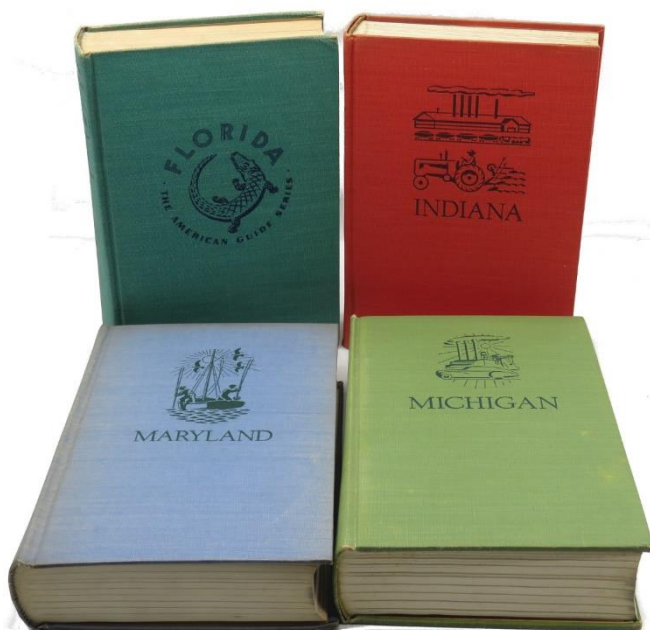
Only five states were able to turn in their publications in time for the 1937 target date. They were Idaho, and four New England States. The other 3 NE states followed shortly thereafter in 1938.

Joseph Gaer, who was in charge of the final editing for NE books, exercised his literary license and reversed direction of the state tours without consulting the Washington staff.



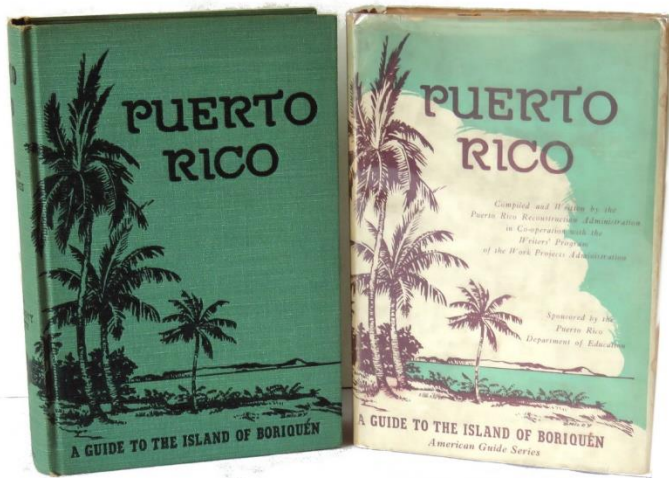
The publishing motif by Hastings House was a palette of Southwestern colors with a coarse weave cloth and simple block letter titling.

Mangione states that the poet and translator Kenneth Rexroth (dubbed by Time Magazine as the "Father of the Beats") was on the editorial staff for the California guide. He went off on field trips all over the state to collect data on flora and fauna, the topic which had been assigned to him.



Oxford Publishing used a consistent style of blind stamped covers, depicting an industry or activity which was representative of that state's reputation.

This line-up included the New York State Guide. With project responsibility decentralized from D. C. New York assigned itself both a city (originally planned to be a 3 volume set) and a state guide. NYC being a center for publishing and the arts in general, there were a great number of writers on hand, like Richard Wright and Lionel Abel. NYC also selected their own publisher, Random House.



Puerto Rico: A Guide to the Island of Boriquen, is perhaps this bibliographer's favorite printing. The idyllic beach scene on both the dust jacket and book's cover is an invitation to a place one genuinely wants to visit.

The responsibility for editing of the book was assigned to Merle Colby, who also had the territory of Alaska, which was not yet a state, and the Virgin Islands, which is not considered a core book to the collection. Dykes 294 calls the PR guide "quite scarce" and ranks it with the FE of Idaho, followed by North and South Dakota, and Indiana.

Bibliography

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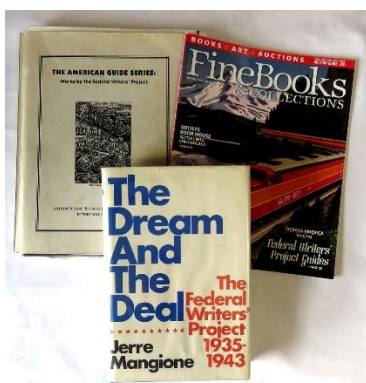
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*Included with collection



Online Purchase [HERE](#)