

# Unusual Suspects: The Case of Insider Theft in Research Libraries and Special Collections

Todd Samuelson, Laura Sare, and Catherine Coker

The widespread theft of collection materials, including rare and unique items, continues to be an issue of great concern to libraries of all types. The potential loss of such items threatens not only an institution's operations but, in many cases, global cultural heritage. Despite an increasingly open attitude among institutions regarding sharing information about lost items and suspected perpetrators, little scholarship has examined such thefts quantitatively in an effort to draw conclusions about how such incidents occur and how best to prevent them. This paper describes a project that examines data from over twenty years of reported library theft cases in libraries and special collections to determine how frequently such losses are perpetrated by library insiders.



Over the past three decades, and the last several years in particular, research libraries and their allied special collections have seen a notable shift in attitudes and practices regarding thefts from their collections. Not only have institutions begun to acknowledge the threat of theft more actively, but greater resources have been dedicated to establishing and maintaining security procedures. The stigma associated with publicly acknowledging theft has also decreased; rather than reacting in embarrassment or with fear about the potential disapproval of donors or administrators, many institutions now respond to the unfortunate reality of theft with openness and transparency. This climate of disclosure frequently extends

to the active pursuit of thieves, including the willingness among libraries to press charges or to publicize the loss in an effort to recover the stolen artifact.<sup>1</sup> Libraries have begun to engage in collaboration among themselves and with other groups, such as associations of book dealers, in producing databases and lists that are commonly disseminated online in an effort to lead to the identification of stolen material and to ensure its return.<sup>2</sup>

Though library theft is being discussed more frequently as a major issue in the discipline, many elements related to theft remain poorly understood. Echoing an evaluation he first made in 1994,<sup>3</sup> Sydney C. Van Nort argued in *The Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* (2010) that "there is no good statistical information

---

Todd Samuelson is Rare Books and Manuscripts Curator in Cushing Memorial Library & Archives, Laura Sare is Government Information Librarian in Sterling C. Evans Library, and Catherine Coker is Coordinator of Research Services in Cushing Memorial Library & Archives, all at Texas A&M University; e-mail: tsamuels@library.tamu.edu, lsare@library.tamu.edu, ccoker@library.tamu.edu. © 2012 Todd Samuelson, Laura Sare, and Catherine Coker

on items reported missing from libraries available at this time."<sup>4</sup> The lack of quantifiable detail about library theft extends from information regarding the items that are reported missing (leaving aside the volumes and artifacts that are never discovered or publicized as stolen) to information about other aspects of the theft. Even such fundamental details as the most commonly targeted institutions or types of material and the profile of a likely thief are not adequately understood.

Much of the discussion about the problem of library theft is limited to rehearsals of notorious cases of theft (or accounts of theft written by those who have experienced it in their own institutions). While these narratives are valuable and provide an opening to the larger conversation about theft prevention and response, they provide only a limited glimpse of the full scope of book theft faced by American and international institutions.<sup>5</sup> Many of the attempts to draw conclusions about library theft on the whole are based on speculation extrapolated from a scattering of individual cases, rather than on a systematic effort to chart known instances of the issue.

One element of library theft that has been acknowledged as particularly difficult to confront is the issue of insider theft. These cases, perpetrated by those with privileged relationships with an institution, are known to have been committed by library directors and other administrators, permanent faculty and staff, and part-time or temporary workers. Such thefts have also been accomplished by those with temporary access, from janitors and subcontractors to volunteers, docents, and interns. Theft from within an institution has long been recognized as a threat, but one for which solutions are particularly unforthcoming. Daniel Traister suggested that insider theft bedevils the profession because it involves the collections at the moment when they are "vulnerable to their most dangerous potential predators: ourselves."<sup>6</sup>

Because of their knowledge of collections and security, those with institutional

familiarity are capable of finding weaknesses in security, often by targeting uncatalogued materials or destroying physical or electronic records. Due to their intimacy with the institution's procedures and precautions (having sometimes been involved in their creation), insiders are familiar with points of vulnerability that may be impossible to protect. It is difficult to imagine lengths to which a library could go that could not be circumvented by a committed insider. Though library and security professionals have debated the extent of insider theft relative to all library losses, these authorities agree that the issue of the looting of collections by library associates is both extremely difficult to prevent and poorly understood. One recent appraisal of the professional literature regarding insider theft acknowledged that "the lack of research and study on the topic represents a significant gap in professional knowledge."<sup>7</sup>

But how prevalent is insider theft in American libraries, both measured as a percentage of total incidents and by the total value stolen? Without attempting to quantify the problem, is it possible to gauge the extent of insider theft or to determine the security resources that should be devoted to its prevention? Due to the privileged position of these thieves—many of whom have successfully prevented any detection of their efforts to pillage the collections for which they are responsible—it is likely that a wholly accurate depiction of the problem may never be possible. Yet a partial answer to the question, drawn from data gathered from known cases of library theft, will provide a far better opening to debate than one based upon speculation extrapolated from discrete occurrences.

### The Prevalence of Insider Theft

In a groundbreaking essay published in *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship*, David S. Zeidberg, then Head of Special Collections at UCLA and now Avery Director of the Huntington Library, diagnosed the problem of library theft

by pointing to figures associated, either professionally or academically, with the library.<sup>8</sup> Zeidberg's article, published in 1987, provided both a description of the problem and a prompt leading to many of the changes to library security seen in recent decades. In addition to describing the greater efforts of institutions to coordinate their responses to theft (both between libraries and libraries with booksellers) and the growth of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Security Committee, he also details the effects of an Association of Research Libraries SPEC Kit survey he wrote in 1983, which explored security policies among 118 libraries with particular attention to procedures in special collections.<sup>9</sup>

Despite its influence, however, the article balks at detailing the scope of the problem. At one point, Zeidberg estimates the scope of the problem by reporting upon a special conference at Oberlin College in 1983 dedicated to library theft, which "confirmed much of what we suspected about a library environment conducive to theft: the failure to share information about losses, open access to valuable collections, poor library designs, failure to prosecute thieves, and so forth." He notes that a participant at the conference, unnamed in his narrative, "suggested that 25–35% of the thefts were 'inside jobs.'"<sup>10</sup> This is apparently a reference to Terry Belanger, who, according to a *Library Journal* report of the Oberlin conference, gave a presentation that estimated "25 percent of the thefts are inside jobs, committed by students, professors, librarians, staff members, and janitors rather than professional criminals."<sup>11</sup>

More recently, other claims have been made regarding the prevalence of insider theft in world libraries. Rather than providing more certainty about the problem of theft from within, however, these estimations mainly show the great variance between different experts' assessments. At the higher end of the spectrum, "Ton Cremers, the voluble and forthright former head of security at the Rijksmuseum and founder of the Museum Security

Network ... believes that 'inside jobs' account for upwards of 70 per cent of all library theft in Europe and 80 per cent in the US."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in a recent survey of insider theft literature, Ross Griffiths and Andrew Krol argue that "75 percent of thefts from libraries" are perpetrated by insiders.<sup>13</sup> A closer examination, however, suggests that this statistic may have no basis in research. The percentage was drawn from Sydney Van Nort's 1994 article, though the citation appears garbled.<sup>14</sup> Apparently, the statistic is the result of a transcription error: in Van Nort's article, the *Library Journal* review of the Oberlin Conference is quoted as "all but 25 percent of the thefts are inside jobs"<sup>15</sup> (emphasis added), inverting the percentage. That such a vast discrepancy could go repeated and unchallenged merely shows how unstable our estimates of the scope of insider theft are.

### **The Library Theft Database: A Methodology**

The Library Theft Database (LTD) project was established as a response to the lack of data from which to draw conclusions about this pressing issue. Beginning with online resources that publicize cases of library theft (including listservs such as EXLIBRIS, as well as the RBMS Security Committee's "Listings of Missing and Stolen Library Materials" and "Incidents of Theft") and extending to wider exploration, including extensive LexisNexis searches, the LTD team compiled information about publicized incidents of library theft for the years 1987–2010. While a later phase of the project may involve contacting institutions directly for more information about these cases, the database is currently limited to the details that have appeared in news reports announcing the loss of material or the arrest of suspects. This information is admittedly partial, particularly where conviction and sentencing of thieves are concerned, because the reports were often written before the conclusion of a trial or before a fuller picture of the theft could be gathered.

The Library Theft Database, which currently contains over three hundred records, was designed in the attempt to produce a qualitative picture of the state of library theft. The database itself includes fields centered on information about the suspect, the institution from which the objects were stolen, and specific details about the objects taken, including description and value. The database also includes information about the sale or distribution and the recovery of stolen items, as well as the apprehension of suspects. Drop-down menus for several fields such as type of institution (examples: Research Library, Government Archive) were created for ease of data entry and as a way to limit the categories into manageable blocks of data. Additionally, where specific dates were not provided, if the month was known, the first day of that month was used, and where only the year was known, the first day of the first month of the year served as a data placeholder. A sample record from the database can be seen in figure 1.

Attention was paid to the suspect's relationship (if any) with the institution.

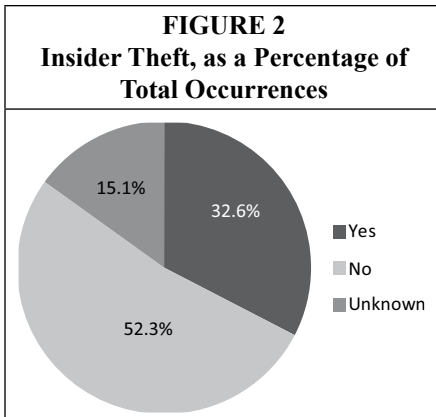
For repeat offenders, a new record was created for unrelated incidents of theft, except in rare cases of ongoing theft over a period of time and large number of separate institutions. The project excludes instances of embezzlement or theft from personal libraries; the effort has been to detail artifact theft from institutional libraries. Despite the acknowledged incompleteness of the data represented by the project, the Library Theft Database provides a tool by which information related to these incidents—including the most notorious cases of library theft, but extending well beyond them—can be compared and enumerated. Examination of the data will offer a glimpse of the fluid state of library losses over the past twenty-three years, a period of significant change in precautions and responses to theft among the included institutions.

The present article attempts to illuminate some of the issues surrounding insider theft by examining relevant cases from the Database. To limit the data to those records that contain the most complete information, the statistics will

**FIGURE 1**  
**Sample Record**

Library Theft Database						
Record Number	200602	Reflecting date of discovery year-number, e.g., 1999-07	Record Created	11/5/2008	"Curl ." for current date	
			Record Updated	10/11/2011		
Suspect	E. Forbes Smiley		Previous History	<input type="text" value="No"/>	Occupation	antiquarian dealer
Institution	Yale University, Harvard University, and the		Type of Institution	<input type="text" value="University Special Collections"/>		
Objects of Theft	97 maps		Type of Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Book <input type="checkbox"/> Plate <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture/Ceramic <input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript <input type="checkbox"/> Artwork on Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Antiquity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map <input type="checkbox"/> Artwork on Canvas <input type="checkbox"/> Other...		
Date of Theft	6/01/2005	Value of Theft	2.3 million			
Recovery	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>	Date of Recovery	06/01/2006	Recovery by	<input type="text" value="Institutional Agents"/>	
Sold	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>	Date of Sale	01/01/1999	Sold to	<input type="text" value="Individual Collector"/>	
Inside Job	<input type="text" value="No"/>		Relationship	<input type="text" value="Known/Familiar Patron"/>		
Charges Filed	<input type="text" value="Yes"/>	Flea	<input type="text" value="Guilty"/>	Conviction	<input type="text" value="Guilty"/>	
Sentence	42 month imprisonment, pay restitution		Sentencing Date	9/27/2006		
Notes	Smiley was a map collector and dealer who was caught removing maps from rare books at numerous institutions. After pleading guilty, he led agents to the 97 maps he admitted to taking; all but 11 were recovered. This cooperation accounts for the relatively light sentence. Many institutions believe that Smiley stole other maps than he admitted to. Smiley was apprehended attempting to steal a map at Yale in June 2005. Smiley acknowledged that he had been stealing maps for 8 years. By June 2006, the maps had been recovered.					
Apprehension	<input type="text" value="Caught in the Act of Theft"/>		Accomplice	<input type="text" value="Unknown"/>		
Source	<i>American Libraries</i> <i>Boston Globe</i> 11/16/2006 <i>New York Times</i> 9/28/2006		Date	September 2006	Text saved	<input type="text" value="No"/>
			URL	<a href="http://www.maphistory.info/smileynews.html">http://www.maphistory.info/smileynews.html</a>		

be confined to the 179 occurrences that include named suspects, from the total 326 total records in the LTD. (The remaining 45 percent of publicized cases represented in the Database include initial announcements of theft, the discovery of the sale or mutilation of volumes, and even the recovery of books or plates that had not been previously discovered as missing—in short, those instances in which insufficient evidence can be gathered to draw conclusions about the nature of the theft and particularly the identity of the perpetrator.) Our examination of these named allegations will provide statistical detail about the characteristics of the thief (including the percentage of occasions that can be shown to be insider theft), the nature of the institution, and the value of the thefts for each category. This initial attempt at providing statistical detail,<sup>16</sup> though it may represent only a small portion of library thefts overall, provides a foundation for further analysis and action.



From the data gathered in the Library Theft Database, as displayed in figure 2, only one third of known library thefts perpetrated by identifiable suspects can be shown to be insider thefts. For the purposes of this study, we determined that the following factors effectively determine the status of an “insider” in a theft: an intimate knowledge of the physical layout of the facility where materials are stored

and a position of formalized trust within the institution, either as an employee or recurring visitor known to regular staff and with access to areas in which collection materials are housed (such as a maintenance or security contractor). The elements of our working definition are more restrictive than may be encountered in other studies, which may include faculty or scholars who have a specialized and intimate knowledge of the material but who would have no direct or unsupervised access to collections. A recent article focused its attention upon all those with a close relationship with the institution, a group that extended to “trusted vendors, ... board and committee members, and esteemed affiliates such as former staff, frequent patrons, and donors.”<sup>17</sup> Our definition has been limited, rather, by the practical issues of access and opportunity: a potential insider would be in possession of detailed item information (material location and storage practices, for example) and the occasion to successfully steal an object or objects from the institution.

We also determined that the location of the theft (that is to say, the institution) should be formally designated as a place of public access whose primary goal is research. This stipulation thus removed antiquarian dealers and private collectors from our general survey, though it is true that some individuals do allow free access to their collections for scholarly purposes.<sup>18</sup> Further, various types of institutions have several degrees of public traffic, access, and circulation restrictions, as well as different visiting audiences.

To take into account these diverse factors, we differentiated seven types of institutions. In those cases where the same offender targeted multiple institutions, a “lead” or prosecuting institution was designated to be the representative “type.” Thus our final select groups are these: University Special Collections; Independent Special Collections; Government Archives; Historical Society/Nonprofit; Research Libraries; City/County Libraries; and Museums.

Type of Institution	Number of Thefts	Total Value Estimate	Value Average
University Special Collections	8	\$26,357,753	\$3,294,718
Independent Special Collections	1	\$500,000	500,000
Government Archives	5	\$891,071	\$178,214
Historical Society/Nonprofit	3	\$2,102,000	\$700,667
Research Library	9	\$2,011,194	\$223,466
City/County Library	11	\$563,239	\$51,204
Museum	2	\$117,500	\$58,750
TOTAL	39	\$32,542,757	

As table 1 makes clear, the wide differences between institution types extends beyond audience and institutional procedures to the type of material targeted by thieves. This table shows the occasions of insider theft and the value estimates attached to those instances, both as a total value and an average per theft. As might be expected, the institutions with the highest-value items were generally those who lost the most, both in terms of aggregate loss and by individual theft. These institutions were not the most frequently targeted, however; the number of lower-value thefts from research and city or county libraries suggest that book theft is frequently an opportunistic crime, while the less-frequent but higher-value thefts from special collections, archives, and historical repositories, in many

cases, would have required more effort to achieve. It should be noted that the thefts included in this table do not represent the entire number represented in the Library Theft Database, but only the cases that included estimated values of the loss as part of the publicly released information.

Table 2 displays similar information for thefts demonstrated to have been perpetrated by noninsiders. As might be expected, a great discrepancy in average loss value can be seen between special collections/archival institutions (which hold comparatively high-value artifacts) in comparison with general research or county libraries. In the case of the latter, the Database indicates that greater-value thefts are nearly always accompanied by a high volume of theft or length of time stealing library material such as textbooks

Type of Institution	Number of Thefts	Total Value Estimate	Value Average
University Special Collections	10	\$23,535,000	\$2,353,500
Independent Special Collections	1	\$548,352	\$548,352
Government Archives	8	\$20,532,500	\$2,566,562
Historical Society/Nonprofit	5	\$193,000	\$38,600
Research Library	11	\$1,825,377	\$163,943
City/County Library	18	\$630,968	\$35,053
TOTAL	53	\$47,265,197	

or bestsellers. While the amounts of loss vary wildly between types of institutions, however, the value averages are relatively similar for insider and noninsider thefts (table 1 compared to table 2), suggesting that both insiders and outsiders have been successful in targeting these repositories, despite their greater security precautions.

This equivalence is displayed quite starkly in table 3, which shows the average total of thefts with value estimates across all institution types, compared between insider and outsider categories.

One caveat that must be stated is that these numbers have been distorted to some degree by three outlier cases, which were each estimated, coincidentally, to value \$20 million. In one of the three instances, the extreme high-value theft was shown to have been perpetrated by an insider. In 1992, Stephen Crawford, a former security guard at Stanford University, was arrested for the theft of sculpture and artifacts belonging to the university, including more than 280 rare books dating from the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Though the thefts occurred in the mid-1970s, the discovery and arrest of Crawford and recovery of the items occurred within the scope of the LTD team’s investigation.

The other two extreme high-value thefts were committed by institutional outsiders. One of these cases is the famous account of Stephen Blumberg, which was narrated most thoroughly by Nicholas Basbanes in *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books*.<sup>20</sup> Blumberg’s spree took him to at least 154 institutions over numerous years; the list of books and manuscripts that he stole numbers more than 21,000. Though he stole from a wide variety of institutions, the decision was made to

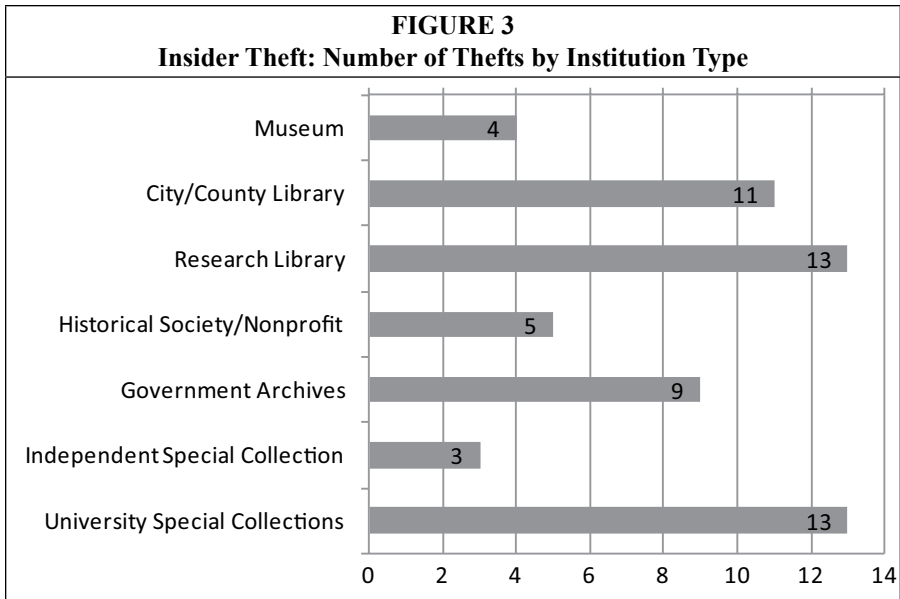
classify his theft in the “University Special Collections” category.

The final theft estimated at \$20 million relates to an original engrossed copy of the United States’ Bill of Rights stolen from the North Carolina statehouse during the Civil War. A Union soldier apparently looted the document in 1865 then sold it the following year. Though its “owner” made overtures to the state of North Carolina in 1925 and 1995, it was not recovered until 2003, when a broker attempted to sell it. The FBI was involved in the operation to recover the Bill of Rights and to restore it to its rightful place of honor.

The removal of these high-value thefts changes the complexion of the data, both in terms of institutional averages and the insider theft totals. It may be instructive to examine the numbers without these outliers; if we were to disregard these three cases, the Insider Theft value estimate for University Special Collections drops to \$6,357,753, or an average of \$908,250; the Noninsider Theft value estimate for University Special Collections drops to \$3,535,000, or an average of \$392,778; and the Noninsider Theft value for Government Archives falls to \$532,500, or an average of \$76,071. Ultimately, the Insider Theft Value Averages Total would also change drastically, to an average of \$330,073 for Insider Thefts with value estimates, and to an average of \$142,455 for Noninsider Thefts. The wide variances that these outliers represent provide a testament to the difficulty of establishing conclusive quantitative statements about insider theft: if such extreme high-value thefts are not discovered (or go unpublicized), the effects upon the final data can be dynamic.

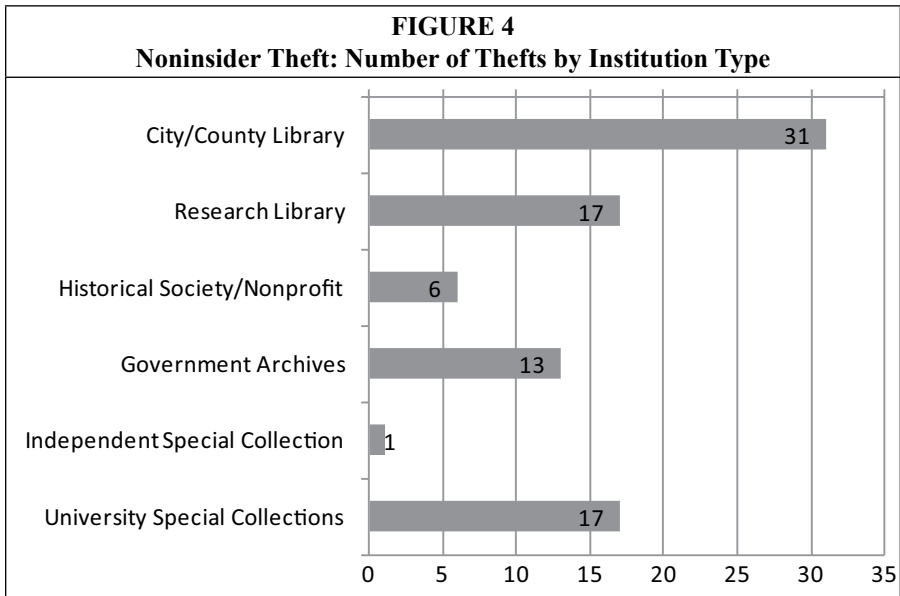
In figure 3, Research Libraries and University Special Collections are followed closely by City/County Libraries in number of thefts at 13, 13, and 11 respectively, out of a total of 58. In both Research Libraries and University Special Collections, most stolen items were sold, with eight records showing

Insider Theft	Insider	\$834,429	39 thefts with value estimates
	Noninsider	\$891,796	53 thefts with value estimates



as items sold for University Special Collections and Research Libraries also with eight records, most by nonprofessional employees such as student workers or security guards, while City/County thefts had three records where the library director was the insider thief. Figure 5 shows the complete breakdown of job positions by insiders in general.

In figure 4, Noninsider Theft by Institution Type, City/County Libraries show the highest incidents of theft at 31 (36%) of a total 85 cases for this time period, followed by Research Libraries (17), University Special Collections (17), and Government Archives (13). While the data are limited to occasions reported by the media, some of the more complete news





articles show distinct trends. The City/County thefts are interesting in that, while they do not house rare books, they are frequently targeted for their popular titles. At least nine accounts in the database include material stolen specifically for immediate sale, generally at small online outfits, eBay, or at flea markets and local book resellers. The value represented by these thefts is substantial because large numbers of books and CD/DVDs—frequently in the hundreds—would be stolen, with theft values ranging from \$8,000 to \$87,000. In a similar case, a ring of thieves targeted high-priced textbooks.<sup>21</sup> At least six of the news accounts include theft by hoarders, including two cases involving the discovery of stolen books after the suspect had died. One extreme case is that of Duncan Jevons, who stole over 40,000 books valued at over 100,000 pounds over a course of thirty years.<sup>22</sup> In both motives—stealing for profit and stealing for self—many thieves use fraudulent means to obtain library cards (or use the identification of a second party, including their own child’s library card), as well as charging stolen materials to their own name.

In the category of Research Libraries, five reports involve material stolen specifically to sell; a few are linked to hoarders, including one record showing the student stole from the university library because he wanted to add to his own collection.<sup>23</sup> Four other cases appeared to involve students who stole the books

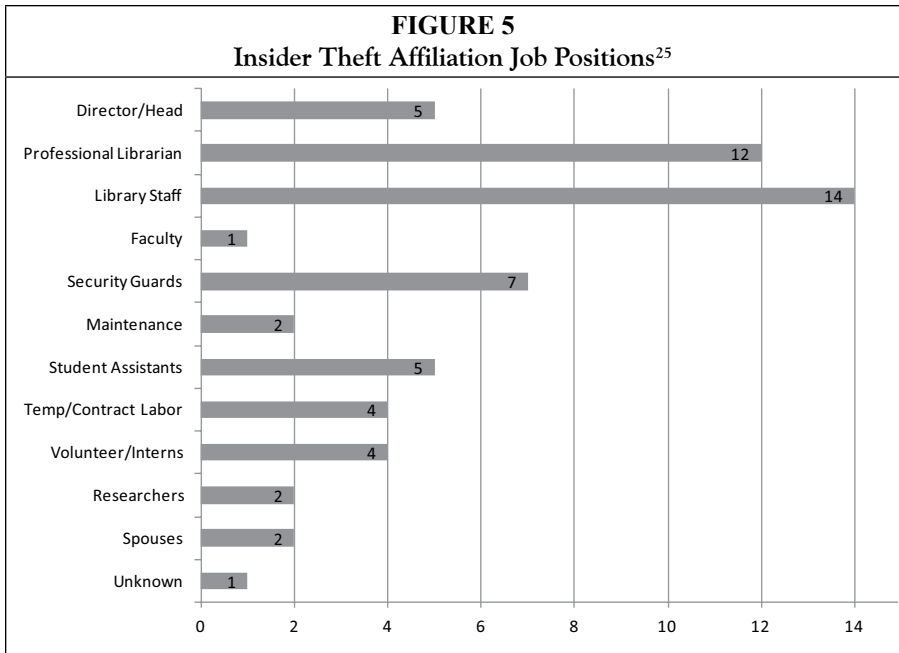
for coursework, due to the low amount of books stolen and value. University Special Collections were targeted as sources of high-value items; at least eight of the records show that material was sold to book dealers or auction houses. As for Government Archives, three records show that materials were sold. Interestingly, four instances of theft targeted the Library of Congress, and three victimized the National Archives. Prominent among these cases was Charles Merrill Mount, who stole around 200 documents from both intuitions.<sup>24</sup>

Table 4 shows the percentage of insider theft relevant to all known thefts, broken down by institution type. One conclusion suggested by the percentages included is that, as an institution’s security increases, the likelihood of insider theft does as well. Museums and Special Collections show higher percentages of insider theft because of the restricted access to materials—which makes it that much more difficult for outsiders to gain entry for the purpose of stealing. In contrast, City/County libraries show low instances of insider theft and appear to be targeted by outsiders seeking fast cash.

Figure 5 suggests that the majority of known insider thefts were made by library staff (that is to say, nonlibrarians), followed by professional librarians, then security personnel. If the positions listed in the chart are categorized as professional (in other words: faculty, directors, and librarians) and nonprofessional (that

**TABLE 4**  
**Insider Theft: Percentage of Thefts by Known Thefts by Institution**

	Insider Theft (Percentage)	Total Known Thefts
University Special Collections	13 (43.3%)	30
Independent Special Collections	3 (75%)	4
Government Archives	9 (40.9%)	22
Historical Society/Nonprofit	5 (45.4%)	11
Research Library	13 (41.9%)	31
City/County Library	11 (26.2%)	42
Museum	4 (100%)	4



is, library workers, student assistants, and guards), the cases are divided between eighteen (31%) professional to forty (69%) nonprofessional. Despite the high profile that thefts conducted by professional librarians receive, it is notable that over twice as many insider thieves are from nonprofessional, temporary, or informal members of staff (though the fact is likely of little consolation to the targeted institutions).

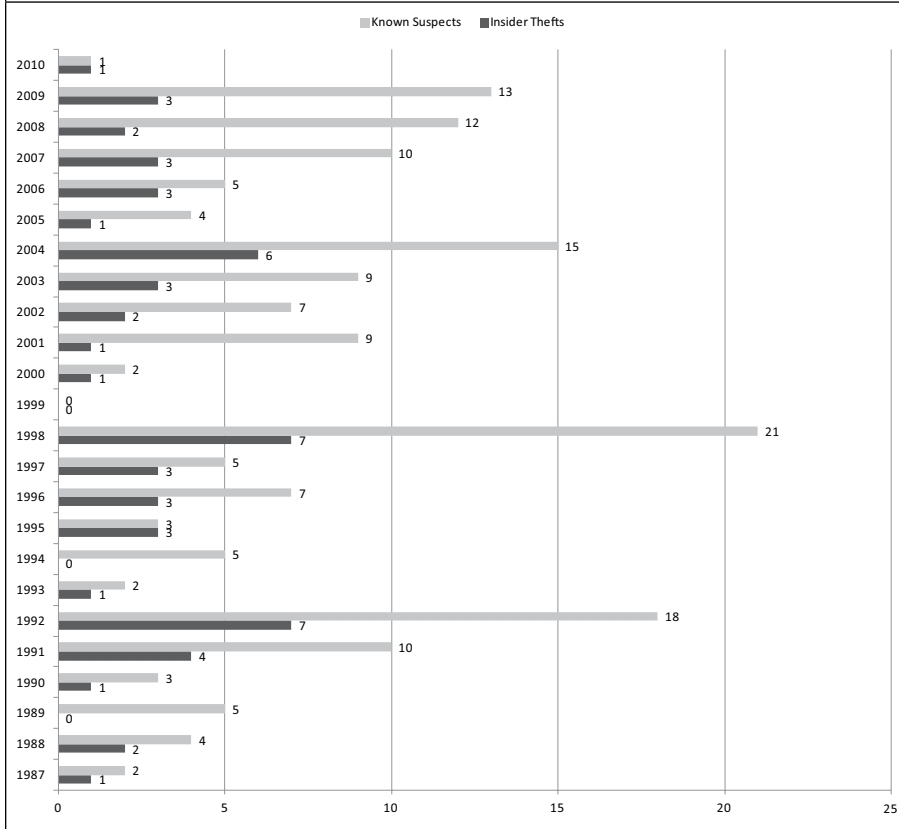
In a number of cases, figures who may seem not to qualify as insiders were categorized as such because of the unusual degree of access they were granted by institutional staff. For example, the researchers listed in figure 5 were contract specialists who gained extensive familiarity with the institutions they ultimately victimized. A notable example, Casriel Kaplin, was a rabbi who had gained admittance to the rare books collection of London's Beth Din Library; he took the opportunities afforded him as a special researcher with unusual access (he was a judge of divorce and conversion cases) to steal books from the collection and attempt to resell them.<sup>26</sup> Similarly,

spouses of library employees used their privileged position within the library or archive to obtain and then attempt to sell material later proven to be part of the collection. In one case, the theft was initially perpetrated by a husband who, seemingly motivated by a hoarder's impulse, kept 3,200 stolen books in his own collection until his death, when his wife took some one hundred volumes to auction and sold them for 1.7 million dollars.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, figure 6 shows the comparison of known suspects to insider thefts arranged ante-chronologically. These data include the period in which libraries began to approach theft more openly, showing greater willingness to publicize thefts from their institutions in an effort to recover stolen materials.

The data gathered do not yet allow us to determine whether such recent efforts at openness, along with upgrades in security technology for special collections, have made any significant difference in preventing theft. Further study with institutional data will be needed to draw firm conclusions.

**FIGURE 6**  
**Known Suspects to Insider Thefts by Year**



**Conclusions**

The data gathered in the Library Theft Database present a new picture of the “usual” suspect in cases of library theft. Though many experts have speculated that such cases have been predominantly perpetrated by institutional insiders, the LTD provides a corrective. Because of media attention and the shock value of several high-profile thefts involving professional librarians—directors, curators, and other individuals in leadership roles—undue weight has been placed upon these occurrences, leaving many with the impression that only such authoritative figures would have the knowledge and the opportunity to remove collection material from their institutions. Reported cases of theft suggest otherwise,

however, with a full two-thirds of the incidents of theft conducted by outsiders or unknown figures, and only 10 percent of total thefts (among those by known figures) being perpetrated by professional librarians. As such, it may be in the best interest of public service librarians and security personnel to reconsider the procedures their institutions have established for the prevention and prosecution of library thefts.

In upcoming studies, the Library Theft Database team will continue to analyze and gather data to determine further patterns in the occurrence and handling of library theft cases. While we acknowledge that there may be some variability in the taxonomy used by the Database, including our judgments identifying and

categorizing individuals and institutions, we feel that the conclusions drawn from the data are robust and valuable. Greater opportunities to refine the LTD by gathering additional information about represented cases, as well as records for thefts not currently described in the Database,

will give a greater understanding of the threat of library theft and provide additional means to circumvent it. Examining new quantitative data should offer a new perspective on how security guidelines for institutional research collections are written and followed.

---

### Notes

1. For example, in his meticulously researched *Texfake*, W. Thomas Taylor notes that “by 1971 the wholesale disappearance of documents from state institutions, and their dispersal at public auction with little adverse consequence, was a common occurrence” (30). In the case of the C. Dorman David auction at the Warwick Hotel, Houston, Taylor points to the fact that figures were sent “to represent the University of Texas at the David sale and to buy back many items that officials of the Texas State Library believed to be state property,” a common strategy at the time. An inventory of purchased material makes clear that the directors of the affected institutions “believed that most of the documents purchased by the university already belonged to the state” (31). W. Thomas Taylor, *Texfake: An Account of the Theft and Forgery of Early Texas Printed Documents* (Austin, Tex.: W. Thomas Taylor, 1991). Writing recently, Sydney Van Nort argues that “the prevailing attitude in the past was that a theft should not be publicized to any outside authorities. This practice is no longer seen as ethical in the professional or library world” (5207). Sydney C. Van Nort, “Theft, Vandalism and Security in Libraries and Archives,” *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, 3rd ed., eds. Marcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack (Boca Raton, Fla.: CRC Press), 5204–19.

2. The work of the RBMS Security Committee in maintaining an ongoing monthly list of thefts, investigations, and returned or reclaimed items has been a major milestone in sharing information regarding stolen objects, and a starting point for the project detailed in this paper. Independent projects from the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC Missing Book Reporting Project), the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers (the ILAB Stolen Book Database), and the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of America (the ABAA Stolen Book Database) have also led to the sharing of information in an attempt to prevent and resolve occurrences of theft.

3. In “Archival and Library Theft: The Problem That Will Not Go Away,” Van Nort quotes Ronald Lieberman, then Chair of the Security of Antiquarian Bookseller’s Association of America, that there is “no good substantial statistical information at this time” (25)—an assertion that he echoes directly in the 2010 Encyclopedia article. Sydney C. Van Nort, “Archival and Library Theft: The Problem That Will Not Go Away,” *Library & Archival Security* 12 (1994): 25–49.

4. Van Nort, “Theft, Vandalism and Security,” 5206.

5. An excellent example of this mode of essay, Daniel Traister’s account of an insider theft from the Van Pelt-Dietrich Library at the University of Pennsylvania, seems to acknowledge in its subtext the limitations of the anecdotal approach. Traister admits that “the scope of rare book theft [is] difficult to recognize” and makes several asides over the course of the article suggesting both the widespread nature of the problem and the prevailing sense of disbelief and surprise accompanying it: “because of the publicity surrounding the University of Pennsylvania’s thefts, I now know of so many that, if anyone still retains the illusion that library theft is uncommon, I’ve got very bad news.” Daniel Traister, “Seduction and Betrayal: An Insider’s View of Insider Theft of Rare Materials,” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 69 (1994): 30–33.

6. Traister, “Seduction and Betrayal,” 33.

7. Ross Griffiths and Andrew Krol, “Insider Theft: Reviews and Recommendations from the Archive and Library Professional Literature,” *Library & Archival Security* 22, no. 1 (2009): 14.

8. D.S. Zeidberg, “‘We Have Met the Enemy...’ Collection Security in Libraries,” *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* 2, no. 1 (1987): 19–26. This ellipsis elides the “and he is us” from Walt Kelly’s famous Pogo comic. What that title leaves implicit, of course, is that many of the major thefts between 1979 and 1986, the temporal scope of the article, were attributed to library insiders. While Zeidberg laments the loss of books, archival records, and other artifacts from these institutions, he notes that “my colleagues and I are more concerned, saddened, and perplexed, however, by the number of students, professors, staff members, and librarians who are implicated in these cases” (19).

9. Zeidberg notes that, at the time of his SPEC kit, fewer than fifteen percent of libraries had

a standing security policy. Zeidberg, "'We Have Met the Enemy...'," 22.

10. Zeidberg, "'We Have Met the Enemy...'," 22.

11. Terry Belanger, "Oberlin Conference on Theft Calls for Action," *Library Journal* 108, (Nov. 15, 1983): 2118.

12. Tim Richardson, "What Drives People to Steal Precious Books" *The Financial Times*, Mar. 6, 2009, available online at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d41a83d6-09dc-11de-add8-0000779fd2ac.html#axzz26wlnTf1r> [accessed 9 June 2010]. In the text of a presentation published online, Ton Cremers provides a number of narratives of book theft and gives his security solutions: "... and the curator did it," "Rogues Gallery: An Investigation into Art Theft," Annual meeting of the AXA Art Conference, London, November 1, 2005, available online at <http://www.museum-security.org/insider-theft.pdf> [accessed 9 June 2010].

13. Griffiths and Krol, "Insider Theft," 10.

14. Griffiths and Krol, "Insider Theft." The citation lists page 28 as the source of the statistic, but the only reference found in Van Nort's article appears on page 38.

15. Van Nort, "Archival and Library Theft," 38.

16. Griffiths and Krol provide a partial attempt at quantifying insider theft. Their essay contains a "review of 107 thefts reported between 2002 and 2007 [that] shows that seventeen were allegedly carried out by individuals occupying insider positions including librarians, volunteers, student workers, security staff, an intern, the head of a friends committee, and a historical society curator"; Griffiths and Krol, "Insider Theft," 9. Despite this preliminary effort to quantify instances of insider theft, the article uses the information in the mode of narrative examples rather than pursuing the implication of their data. Rather than providing the percentage of insiders convicted of theft from their sample, they reveal the names and accounts of four specific figures.

17. Griffiths and Krol, "Inside Theft," 8.

18. For example, the one exception to this guideline that we allowed to enter the data is the occurrence of David Slade's conviction of the theft of 68 books from Sir Evelyn de Rothschild. Our rationale in including this theft from a private library was partially that it represents such an unusual instance of insider theft: David Slade, a reputable dealer and a former president of the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association in the United Kingdom, was hired by Sir Evelyn de Rothschild to catalogue his extensive collection of rare books. Slade traded on his reputation in the book trade to steal over \$380,000 worth of antiquarian volumes. Because of the profile of the victim and the theft, and because of the quality of the collection itself, we opted to identify the Rothschild collection as an Independent Special Collection.

19. "Police Looking for Help in Identifying Stolen Property," available online at <http://news.stanford.edu/pr/92/920430Arc2247.html> [accessed 9 May 2011].

20. Basbanes writes that "extensive press reports had suggested that Blumberg's haul was worth up to \$20 million, a figure that had made him a minor celebrity in the criminal world"; Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books* (New York: Henry Holt), 2. Blumberg was never, however, motivated by mercenary interests; Basbanes recounts Blumberg's statement that "I never took the books to sell ... the idea was to keep them."

21. "12 Accused of Checking Out Library Books to Sell Them," available online at [www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/12-Accused-of-Checking-Library-Books-to-Sell-Them-69711687.html](http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/12-Accused-of-Checking-Library-Books-to-Sell-Them-69711687.html) [accessed 22 April 2011].

22. Catherine Milton, "'Sad Obsessive' Stole 40,000 Library Books to Impress Friends," *The Times*, June 2, 1994 [retrieved from LexisNexis Academic, 22 April 2011].

23. "\$23,000 Library Theft," *New York Times*, June 30, 1988, Late City Final Edition, Section A, Page 14, Column 3 [retrieved from LexisNexis Academic, 22 April 2011].

24. Karlyn Barker, "Letter-Theft Suspect's Serene Self-Portrait; I'm Not an Eccentric, Everyone Else Is," Charles Mount Says," *The Washington Post*, August 21, 1987, A1 [retrieved from LexisNexis Academic, 22 April 2011].

25. While the number of known insider thefts from the data amount to 58, there was one record where only an insider would have access to the repository from which books were stolen, and this is marked as "Unknown" in the chart.

26. Michael Rogers, "Removed Tomes from London's Beth Din Library; Books Recovered," *Library Journal* 123, no. 12 (July 1998): 24.

27. Associated Press, "World Briefing Europe: Denmark: Old Literary Thefts Solved," *The New York Times*, Dec. 12, 2003, Section A; Column 2; Foreign Desk; 21 [retrieved from LexisNexis Academic, 1 August 2011].