Barnes & Noble posted a smaller quarterly loss, helped by sales and e-books and surging sales of the "Fifty Shades of Grey" book.

NEW YORK (AP) -- The Standard & Poor's 500 index touched its highest point in more than four years Tuesday, helped by more talk that the European Central Bank may buy struggling countries' bonds. But a morning rally faded, and stocks ended lower.

The S&P 500 lost 4.96 points to close at 1,413.17, with bank stocks the only group to record a gain. Earlier in the day, the S&P climbed to 1,426, its highest since May 19, 2008.

Clark Yingst, chief market analyst at the securities firm Joseph Gunnar, said he thought traders were swayed by reports that the ECB may buy bonds to bring down the borrowing costs of Spain, Italy and other countries.

Yingst pointed to currency moves and bank stocks as evidence. JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley and other companies with ties to Europe rose more than the overall market. The euro surged 1 percent to $1.246.

"It's very much a news- and rumor-driven market," Yingst said.

In other trading, the Dow Jones industrial average fell 68.06 points to 13,203.58, and the Nasdaq composite index lost 8.95 points to 3,067.26. Crude oil hit its highest price in three months, rising $1.32 to $97.58.

Sean Clark, chief investment officer at Clark Capital Management Group, an investment advisory firm, saw no major news driving the market. Trading volume has been light in recent days.

Clark said that part of the explanation for the stock market's steady climb this month is that money managers are afraid of missing out on the rally.

"A lot of fund managers have underperformed this year, and I think they're feeling pressure," he said. "There may have been some panic buying over the last couple of weeks."

Facebook's stock lost 85 cents to $19.16 after one of its earliest backers, venture capitalist Peter Thiel, sold the bulk of his stake in the social network. Last week was the first time some insiders could sell their shares. Facebook went public in May at twice the current price, $38.

Major European markets edged up amid hints of progress in calming the debt crisis there. Spain managed to raise $5.4 billion from bond investors at sharply lower interest rates than at the last auction.

Germany's DAX gained 0.8 percent, and France's CAC-40 rose 0.9 percent.

Markets have been calm this month. Monday was one of the quietest days of the year, with 2.7 billion shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Tuesday was heavier, 3.2 billion shares, but still below this year's average of 3.8 billion.

Among other stocks making moves:

- Urban Outfitters jumped 18 percent. The clothing retailer reported earnings late Monday that beat analysts' forecasts, thanks to stronger sales. The stock surged $5.70 to $36.98.

- Best Buy fell 1 percent. The country's largest consumer electronics retailer reported a 90 percent drop in net income during the second quarter, dragged down by restructuring charges and weak sales. The chain is waging a public fight with its co-founder Richard Schulze, who wants to take the company private. Best Buy's stock dropped 25 cents to $17.91 and has lost 12 percent this week.

- Barnes & Noble posted a smaller quarterly loss, helped by sales and e-books and surging sales of the "Fifty Shades of Grey" book. The largest traditional bookstore chain still fell 46 cents to $11.88.