

# *The Report of the Council*

*October 16, 1968*

THE American Antiquarian Society exists to assure the preservation of the printed record of the American experience through the year 1876. Secondly, but as importantly, it exists to make those materials available, consistent with the prime purpose, to persons who are able to make intelligent use of them.

The Society was founded in 1812 by men who had participated in the American Revolution who were convinced that the record of their experience was significant for the future of all mankind and who were determined that it be preserved. Today the Society is an active 'researching library' as well as a repository of materials for research scholars. During the last twenty-five years the staff prepared forty volumes in letterpress including a bibliography which locates every surviving copy of every American newspaper published before 1821, a volume reproducing all of the engravings of Paul Revere, and a list of all materials published in Vermont before 1821. In addition during the past decade we have republished in microform fifty thousand books, pamphlets, and broadsides originally issued between the years 1640 and 1807. This activity now allows study in American history and culture which, only a few years ago, could not have been carried on in any one library. Because of our publications two hundred and fifty libraries from Stockholm to Sydney have purchased, for a sum they might have spent for one book, an entire research library in American history. In short through our collections and publications the Society is now serving thousands of scholars and students, whereas a decade ago it could serve but hundreds.

Capable and dedicated members and staff have gathered here incomparable collections of American printed matter dated before 1821, and have built large and representative collections of a similar nature which fall between the years 1820 and 1877. There is no doubt that the Society has, in its library of nearly three quarters of a million volumes and an equal number of manuscripts, one of the truly great accumulations of Americana.

The very size of the collections and the problems of preserving and servicing such an immense body of material have raised difficulties which were unforeseen in 1908 when the present building (the third) was constructed, or in 1940, when the great effort was mounted to organize for the first time many of its collections. In addition to these internal pressures, most research libraries across the nation have been hard put to maintain adequate standards of service due to the rapidly increasing demands placed upon them by ever larger numbers of graduate students and by ever larger numbers of scholars who have been freed for study by the receipt of research grants. This library is no exception and in fact, like its privately supported sisters, has been placed at a disadvantage because of the unavailability of government funds for research institutions which do not have a faculty and student body in residence.

Certainly no other historical organization with a budget as limited as ours can approach the quality of our collections, our record of productivity, and our usefulness. But the flourishing condition of the academic world today has created competition in matters of professional salaries and book prices with which we at present cannot cope. When our professional employees retire, it is after having achieved salaries which are inadequate to obtain good replacements, and it will be impossible to maintain a competent professional staff at such levels in the future.

The Society has always been noted for its personal approach to librarianship. Time and again scholars have commented upon the friendly and thorough assistance which they receive

here. It would be unfortunate to alter this happy condition, but growth and changing circumstances may cause this to occur. Except for two staff members, one of whom will retire within the next year or two, the staff has been at AAS less than ten years. Therefore it is plain that, with a comparatively new staff, service will deteriorate unless appropriate action is taken. In the past the Society was held together by remarkable personalities and individual knowledge of our collections. The needs of today and tomorrow require that the library's services be placed on a different basis.

In addition to the salaries of our staff which are inadequate by today's standards the Society provides a payment equal to ten per cent of salary to the Teachers' Insurance and Annuity retirement program for staff members with three years' service, payment of Blue Cross-Blue Shield policies for all staff members (but not their families), and Social Security payments. Paid vacations are allowed in the amount of four weeks a year. Although these are generous additional benefits academic institutions provide considerably higher salaries, greater participation in TIAA, in Blue Cross, and tuition aid for the offspring of faculty members. Thus there is much to be done in the area of remuneration for the present staff.

Of equal importance to the future of the Society is the adequate staffing of the various departments in the library. There has never been a professionally trained person in charge of the manuscript collection, and there is no one located there at the present time. Thus a great body of colonial documents lies fallow, without a catalogue and in some disorder.

An excellent part-time person (replacing two full-time people) is now working with newspapers, periodicals, and sheet music. While the early newspapers are thoroughly catalogued, there is no accurate guide to periodicals or later newspapers. The sheet music collection, third best in the nation, is in some disarray. We have need for a second person, full-time, in that department.

The head cataloguer, after forty years of outstanding service, will retire soon. Her successor can command a salary in excess of the amount we are presently paying her. In addition we will require a trained cataloguer to handle, in the same manner that our earlier books are catalogued, the materials dated between 1821 and 1876. We have thousands of uncatalogued pamphlets, almanacs, hymnals, broadsides, children's books, etc., which need processing for their proper care and for the efficient servicing of our readers.

The director and librarian needs the additional help of an assistant librarian to supervise the technical matters of librarianship, and the services of a bibliographer would be of inestimable value in surveying our holdings, constructing lists of desiderata, and in providing bibliographical services to staff and readers.

The custodian, good as he is, does not have enough time to clean the building, care for the grounds, make repairs, and do the many other jobs that he is asked to perform. He needs more help. We could go on, citing one case after another.

To hold, against the competition of other institutions, an adequate and competent professional staff (*including both salary increases and staff additions*) will require the income from approximately \$2,325,000 of new endowment. To have our work brought to naught by an inadequate staff would be tragic. We all know of once-important libraries which have in this way fallen into hands unable to manage them, and so have been lost to the world of scholarship.

This new endowment is essential merely to keep us in our present condition. In order to advance constructively we need several million more. For example, we now spend about \$50,000 a year for books, a sum gathered from endowed funds, from the sale of unwanted materials, and from special gifts. Endowments specified for this purpose now provide just over \$30,000 a year. Happily, most of these funds are not restricted as to the type of book which must be purchased. Thus

we have great freedom in the selection of materials. Nevertheless we have many opportunities to buy desirable books during the course of a year which must be passed because of insufficient funds. Although our holdings are rich beyond measure, we frequently lack the capstone book in a particular collection, and our annotated copy of Evans's *American Bibliography* is full of notations of rare eighteenth-century items, many as inexpensive as forty dollars, which earlier librarians did not buy because they did not have the money. Now, these same titles may sell for as much as two hundred dollars or more. Considering that AAS holdings in our area of specialization are already so strong, indeed the best in existence, it is incumbent upon the Society to add all that we possibly can in order to provide scholars with as large a selection of materials as possible in one location.

In the area of nineteenth-century books we have a very long way to go before we can approach the comprehensiveness of our collections of earlier materials. If we are to provide a bibliographical record for the period of 1821-1876, we must be about our business before it is too late. Our responsibilities have also increased by the fact that other libraries have abandoned certain areas to AAS; newspapers, for example. Harvard, Dartmouth, the Essex Institute, New England Historic Genealogical Society, and the Boston Athenaeum have recently turned over to us large quantities of pamphlets and newspapers, with the understanding that AAS will serve as the national center for the preservation of such materials.

It must be borne in mind that the present administration of the Society has no intention of altering past policies of collecting, i.e. the practice of building upon strength. For the foreseeable future, the primary emphasis will continue to be placed upon the acquisition of materials printed before 1821. Purchases of materials printed from 1821 to 1850 will receive the next priority, but these acquisitions will be selected to add to already outstanding collections. For the period from

1851 through 1876, only materials which come as gifts or as bargains, or which significantly add strength to strength will be acquired. It is our belief that budgeted funds for the purchase of books should be at least doubled. With an annual budget of \$75,000 we would be in a position to make a serious effort of filling in desiderata. This figure represents an increase of \$45,000 in the annual budget, the income from \$1,125,000 added endowment. With such an increase we would be in a position to buy whole collections which would bring into the library materials at a lower unit cost and at much less cost in staff time in searching out individual titles from catalogues.

As our staff and activities expand, the building must also. The need for increased work space for staff and facilities for readers is pressing, as the available room for those activities is now at a premium. At the present time we have only a few secluded places for study where scholars may spend an extended period of time. Unfortunately those are in the book stacks from which non-staff members should be excluded.

The present work space for the staff is approaching inadequacy. We now have staff offices in areas shelved for books about the rotunda. The noise of typewriters must be distracting to readers, and readers' frequent sorties after books into the offices is equally distracting to the staff. Staff members who work with the public also perform library tasks which do not involve the public. Yet there is no place to execute these functions except in public areas. In this manner, at least one of our reading-room tables is usually covered with books and is thereby unavailable for the seating of visitors. As the cataloguing program is expanded, space will be needed for an efficient flow of work in that department. In any case, if but a portion of the growth which has been suggested takes place, the Society's living space will need expanding. A rough estimate of the cost of this addition is put at \$455,000 including endowment for its maintenance. The Council has voted to retain a competent architect to design this addition.

It is twenty years since the last book stack was built, a period during which a research library is supposed to double in size. We have kept within our walls by keeping strictly to our fields of specialization, and by discarding irrelevant materials given a home by other generations. Our rate of growth is slow because we are selective, but grow we must or limit still more our resources.

The newspaper stacks are now full and the book areas are filling up. We can take certain measures to slow down that process. For example, there are many feet of shelving taken up with very bulky volumes of twentieth-century newspapers. Similarly, in the collection of directories there are many large volumes of recent date. In other book collections there are substantial numbers of volumes which fall outside the scope of our collecting policies. We can postpone the need for increased book stacks for a time by eliminating extraneous volumes, but within ten years serious consideration will have to be given to new construction. Here the estimated cost of construction, plus endowment for upkeep, is \$550,000.

The library can very well support extended research in any area of American history and culture through the year 1876. Indeed, many scholars have proved it through the books which they have written here. A host of names comes quickly to mind. Great bibliographical projects have been accomplished using our resources as the base: Evans, Shaw-Shoemaker, Welch, Vail, Sabin, etc. But, because of the limited number of scholars residing in the immediate area, few men and women are able to spend extended periods of time working in our collections. The largest amount of serious work done here comes from scholars who stop off for a day or for a week to consult materials which are nowhere else available. It is quite possible that fellowships (similar to those offered by the John Carter Brown Library, the Newberry Library, or the Henry E. Huntington Library) would attract and make it possible for scholars from a distance to come to AAS to per-

form the major portion of their research here. This would assist in spreading among the scholarly community the word of the riches of our holdings and would also help us improve our collections, for when a body of material is scrutinized by a knowledgeable scholar nothing becomes more quickly apparent than previously-unrecognized weaknesses.

A sum of \$22,000 a year would enable us to offer stipends of sufficient size to three qualified scholars or graduate students to permit them to spend one or two semesters in residence working on research based primarily upon our collections. It is possible that foundation support for such a program can be found.

The Worcester Consortium for Higher Education is developing out of closer relationships among Clark University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and the College of the Holy Cross. Various comments lead one to believe that the several libraries would be included in this cooperative venture, and when the matter is mentioned, reference is usually made to AAS as well. There may very well be a place for a combined program with institutions offering graduate work in American studies. Under such a plan, degrees might be offered in the history of American culture which would make use of the faculties of the colleges, and the staffs and resources of neighboring institutions. A conversation has been held among AAS, Clark University, Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts Historical Society, and Old Sturbridge Village on this possibility.

Another area in which the Society could concern itself is the presentation of a public lecture twice a year. In addition to providing an interesting and informative talk on an appropriate subject, such a program could very well serve as a means of relating the Society to the people of the region to whom we wish to make application for support.

Finally, attention is called to the matter of housing for the director. Many institutions provide a home for the executive officer suitable for entertaining. Such a plan may have financial advantages to the Society as well as to the director.

Our present financial limitations are essentially due to the fact that the Society is under-capitalized, despite the generous response of the membership to appeals for funds to defray current expenses. The Council of the Society has always been prudent in the husbanding of its funds. Capital has never been invaded to underwrite current expenses, and the Treasurers have unfailingly used sound judgment in the investment of our funds, which have steadily increased in value.

The American Antiquarian Society occupies a unique position in American life, and is today far more influential and useful than ever before. It has no government support nor subsidy, and it has no alumni body from which to draw assistance. A creation of American individualism, indeed originally established in order to further the nation by preserving the record of it, the Society now hopefully turns to all Americans for the means to carry on its work.

To accomplish these ends, the President has appointed a Development Committee, chaired by Frank L. Harrington, Sr. Mr. Harrington has been at work and has already made a significant beginning in accumulating a nucleus fund to launch our long-range development program whose objective will be to raise something over \$5,000,000 for endowment and construction needs. From the Development Committee, subgroups are in the process of being formed to provide opportunities for all interested persons to assist in the work of the Society. You, the present Members, as the inheritors of the Society, have especially important responsibilities to insure the future and continued growth of your venerable institution. The Council calls upon you to accept this duty enthusiastically.

In reporting on fiscal matters, the Council cannot pass this opportunity to express its gratitude to the ninety-four members of the Society who contributed \$20,396 for the current, general expenses of the Society. Without this generous help, the budget would founder. You have noted that nearly half of the membership assisted in the work of the Society in this

way. We earnestly invite the other half to join in this annual enterprise which will be continued as a means of expanding our resources.

All of the standing committees of the Council have been at work and have considered problems which fall within their purview. Your reporter is grateful to the various members of these committees for time and thought spent in strengthening the program of the Society.

In July the staff was augmented by Elliott B. Knowlton who now serves as Development Officer of the Society. He has the responsibility of implementing the Development Program upon which the Council has embarked. Formerly Mr. Knowlton was in charge of public relations at Norton Company and more recently was vice-president of the Barre Publishing Company. He has been and is very active in community matters.

Richard N. Anders has joined the staff as an assistant cataloguer. He has had several years' experience in various excellent libraries, most recently at Dartmouth College where he was a cataloguer of special collections.

The other members of the staff, as is their wont, are hard at work attempting to keep abreast of the rising tide of work, and they look forward to the fulfilment of the hopes set forth in the Development Program. The Council is proud of their loyalty and diligence and expresses to each member of the staff the gratitude of the Members and Council of the Society.

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