

## *Report of the Council*

**S**TRICTLY speaking, the Council of the Society should at this time render to the other members an account of its stewardship during the preceding months. It is, therefore hardly proper, although irresistible, to quote from an article which Professor Willard Thorp contributed to the *Princeton University Quarterly* last winter:

Special mention should be made of the American Antiquarian Society. It is not well known and its name looks suspiciously frivolous. At the time of the Society's founding the word antiquary was in high repute though it now suggests an amiable pedant who doddles among his old books. It then meant a collector of antiquities and (a still earlier meaning) a student of history. What the members of the American Antiquarian Society undertook was to collect documents of American history, preserve them, and study them. It has attempted to assemble every item printed in this country before 1820 and so well has it succeeded that three-fourths of its library of 500,000 entries is in this chronological range. We may safely say that if the American Antiquarian Society had not come into existence, our knowledge of the origins of this nation would for a long time have been composed of myths and legends. In a sense the American Antiquarian Society gave us our past.

As we modestly hang our heads, we might murmur that our cut-off date is rather 1876 than 1820, and that our library is half again as large as the figure which he gives, but we'll gladly accept such praise any time.

Antiquarian though our materials may be, we have been pioneers in meeting the demand for historical information by the creation of new tools. For example, twenty years ago the bibliographical problem in our library was like that of a person facing a jigsaw puzzle of many thousand pieces. In

those days only the eye of faith could see that we were making any progress at all, but now our bibliographical task is complete, except for odds and ends in the corners, and now the pieces of the puzzle leap into place as rapidly as we can pick them up. It is a poor day in which we do not solve two dozen problems in the latest bibliographies, many of them because of our examination of peripheral material which has never before been carefully described.

Our work has been hindered by the fact that the list of items omitted by Charles Evans from his *American Bibliography* which was scheduled to have been completed two years ago, through no fault of ours will be delayed at least another two years. Between then and now the list of omissions will take a great part of the time of our staff.

One bibliographical labor completed several years ago is now bearing fruit. Research Publications, Inc., of New Haven, has undertaken to reproduce in microfiche the full text of all the volumes listed in Dorothea Spear's *Bibliography of American Directories through 1860*. Our policy is to stay out of all publication projects which a commercial concern will undertake, and in the case of the directories our participation will amount only to making the material available to the publishers; the editing will be their problem.

Our sister institution, the Massachusetts Historical Society, is undertaking a campaign to obtain funds for a large increase in their present quarters and endowment, and as steps toward the proposed service, they propose to establish closer relationships with neighbouring educational institutions, and to attempt to obtain more publicity for their work. How do these plans compare with the present policy of the American Antiquarian Society? We are not under like pressures for space or service because we are not trying to collect materials for the writing of American history since the Civil War, and,

particularly, we are not faced with the problem of the vast bulk of modern manuscript collections. It is proper that a State society should collect on this scale, but no organization could gather an effective collection of the modern source materials for all fifty States, and we do not attempt it. The American Antiquarian Society could very well use a new bookstack and an increase in endowment which would permit it to afford more service, but these problems are not pressing, because we are not expanding our collection in the modern field. We have made only a beginning of the proper study and utilization of our present collections.

Some of those now present may live to see our completion of the bibliographical study of American printing before 1820; but when this is done, the period between 1820 and 1876 still will lie ahead, and our Society is the only organization which can make it.

The proposal of the Massachusetts Historical Society further to cultivate relations with colleges and universities is also one which diverges from our policy. The swiftly growing enrollment of educational institutions far exceeds the ability of their libraries to care for their simplest needs; for reference works and for the materials for practice research, the students must go to older, established, libraries. Our Council several years ago decided that these student demands had reached the point where we must refuse to perform this essentially educational function for other institutions, or else give up the bibliographical work which has always been our chief function, and which we can perform better than anyone else. The Council judged the future correctly; the chief change in the demands for service from us during the past year has been the great increase in the number of requests of high school, college, and university students to "do research" in our collections. Every day we have telephone calls from students in colleges in the

eastern part of the country asking whether they may come to Worcester to do their term papers or honors theses, and every day we have several interviews in which we try, gently, to explain our policy.

The Massachusetts Historical Society has always followed the policy of opening wide its arms to all students, and now it proposes to cultivate this connection with educational institutions. This is possible for them because nine-tenths of the students wish to use printed material, for which they come to us, while relatively few of them would want to use the manuscripts of the Historical Society. If the amount of demand were the same, however, we would, so far as our policy is concerned, question the desirability of submitting rare or unique materials to the wear and tear of practice use.

The Massachusetts Historical Society also proposes to obtain more publicity; should we do the same? Our experience has been that newspaper publicity and magazine articles bring only a spate of letters of inquiry, all of which have to be answered and few of which result in profit to the writers or to ourselves. We have certainly profited more by the notice we have received as a result of our publishing activities.

The Historical Society policy is, we think, the right one for a State Historical Society; we wish them well. Our needs, purposes, and goals are different.

There has been one notable change in our physical plant this year. When the building was air conditioned, the windows in the bookstacks were double glazed, but at the time no one could find a satisfactory way of putting double sashes on the thirty-five large windows in the reading room and offices. This has now been accomplished, at a very reasonable cost, and the improvement in temperature, cleanliness, and quiet is marked.

In the course of the slow, inevitable change in our mem-

bership, we have lost Arthur Meier Schlesinger, who died on October 30, 1965, Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor, on February 4, 1966, Carl Custer Cutler, and Dard Hunter, on February 20, and Frederick Lewis Weis on April 11. We have coöperated with these men in their work, and the silencing of their typewriters will mean some shift in our activities. An obituary of Mr. Schlesinger by Samuel Eliot Morison will appear in a later issue.

On the list of nominations which the Council will lay before you now, are the names of three Worcester men carefully chosen to redress the grievous losses in that geographical category during the past two years. Because our membership is limited, we must elect only people who are really interested in our work. To fill our rolls with individuals whose chief qualifications are that they are our personal friends, or that they might become interested in the Society, or simply that they are distinguished historians, would be to dilute our membership with a social or purely honorary element which would defeat the purpose of the Society. We were founded in order to focus and coöperate the study of American history, and that, the experience of our 150 years proves, is, for us, the effective way to achieve the ends which Professor Thorp described.

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*For the Council*

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