

*Antiquarians and Archaeologists:
The American Antiquarian Society
1812-1912*

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IN OCTOBER 1912 the American Antiquarian Society commemorated its centennial anniversary with a day of gala festivities. The celebration was highlighted by the appearance of the president of the United States, William Howard Taft, who was featured speaker at a dinner that concluded the day's events. A local newspaper, the *Worcester Telegram*, noted proudly that the Society was 'rounding out 100 years of activity that have placed it in the foremost rank of the world's institutions.'¹

By 1912, the Society had become a vastly different institution from that founded by Isaiah Thomas and his colleagues a century before. At the time of its founding in 1812, AAS had no permanent facility and was based in the home of its founder. Moreover, it had no collections until Thomas donated his library a year later. Thomas and his colleagues planned not only to acquire literary collections, but to maintain a cabinet—or museum—as well.

The desiderata of the Society were initially described by Thomas in 1813:

The chief objects of the enquiries and researches of this society will be American Antiquities, natural, artificial and literary; not, however, excluding those of other countries. . . .

Among the articles of deposit, books of every description, in-

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¹ *Worcester Telegram*, October 27, 1912, p. 1.

cluding pamphlets and magazines, especially those which were early printed either in South or North America; files of Newspapers of former times, or of the present day, are particularly desirable—as are specimens, with written accounts respecting them, of fossils, handicrafts of the Aborigines, &c. Manuscripts, ancient and modern, on interesting subjects, particularly those which give accounts of remarkable events, discoveries, or the description of any part of the continent.²

The purposes of AAS included not only the collection of literary documents, but also 'specimens' such as fossils and 'aborigine handicrafts.' Indeed, a major function of collected literary documents was to describe specimens, the circumstances under which they were found, and what their significance might have been. In any case, the Society soon began collecting both library materials and a comprehensive 'cabinet.' The study of the ancient Indian nations of the American continent also soon attracted the attention of AAS members, and the Society also became an important sponsor and disseminator of American archaeological research.³

By the occasion of its centennial, however, the chief activity of AAS had become the support and management of a research library specializing in early American printed documents. The Society's library contained over 100,000 volumes, in addition to newspapers, countless pamphlets, and some 35,000 manuscripts. The collection of early American newspapers was rivaled only by those of the Library of Congress and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, while the collection of pre-1820 American imprints was judged to be preeminent. The Society also maintained collections of almanacs, annual reports of voluntary associations, printed railroad and canal documents,

² *An Account of the American Antiquarian Society* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1813), reprinted in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1912), pp. 17-18 (hereafter *Proceedings of AAS 1812-1849*).

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 33. The first expression of this interest in Indians was stated by William Jenks in his address to the Society on the occasion of its first annual meeting. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-38.

and 'dozens of other reports which no other library in the country attempts to preserve in a comprehensive way.'⁴ In his first librarian's report, written in 1909, Clarence Saunders Brigham (who was to remain as librarian, then director, until his retirement in 1959) stressed development of the early American imprints collection. He also observed that the Society's new building (the third—and present—Antiquarian Hall had been occupied in early 1910) would permit AAS to expand its collection of manuscripts.⁵ But the cabinet had been dispersed, and the sponsorship of archaeological expeditions had ceased. AAS had become essentially a research library.

What accounted for this remarkably expansive initial perception of the purposes and objects of the Society? How and why did the Society's goals come to be more sharply focused by the time of the Society's centennial celebration? Why did the Society choose to close its museum and disperse its artifacts? What kinds of source materials were collected? Why? What can the history of a repository such as AAS tell us about the evolution of American culture in the nineteenth century? The answers to these questions may help to begin to provide us with greater understanding of the origins and development in the nineteenth century not only of AAS, but of other repositories as well. This essay outlines in preliminary fashion how the changes at AAS may also reflect patterns of change that influenced other American learned societies and scholarly activities throughout much of the nineteenth century.

As the AAS petitioners stated to the Massachusetts General Court when they applied for incorporation, the Society's 'immediate and peculiar design is to discover the antiquities of our own Continent, and by providing a fixed, and permanent place of deposit, to preserve such relics of American Antiquity as are

⁴ *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (hereafter *Proceedings of AAS*) 23(1913):6.

⁵ *Proceedings of AAS* 20(1909-10):40-52.

portable, as well as to collect and preserve those of other parts of the Globe.'⁶ 'Antiquities,' vaguely defined as ancient relics or remains of unspecified age, were regarded less as source materials than as surviving historical remnants. By reason of their very survival, however, such antiquities were thought to have something valuable to contribute to the knowledge of citizens of the nation.

Most early American learned societies—as diverse as they were—were dedicated to supporting a social order that stemmed from a religious faith linking knowledge of nature with adherence to God's will. They did so primarily by collecting literary documents, maintaining museums, and publishing reports of the latest discoveries. Knowledge of the natural order was eagerly sought after and natural phenomena were closely observed in the effort to discern laws. Members of America's learned societies supported one another in their effort to collect and classify flora and fauna, to map the terrain, to describe and measure the climate and its effect on human health. Natural history specimens served as nonverbal transmitters of information, and, collectively, formed a memory bank for the expeditions that gathered them. Interested Americans corresponded with knowledgeable members of European societies who endowed the American activities with intellectual meaning.⁷

Members of early American learned societies were in fact actively involved in the intellectual controversy that had raged unabated on both sides of the Atlantic for 150 years. The debate, skillfully recounted by the Italian historian Antonello

⁶ Isaiah Thomas et al., 'Petition to the Legislature of Massachusetts,' December 3, 1812, reprinted in *Proceedings of AAS 1812-1849*, p. 2.

⁷ A. Hunter Dupree, 'The National Pattern of American Learned Societies, 1769-1863,' in *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the Early American Republic: American Learned and Scientific Societies from Colonial Times to the Civil War*, ed. Sanborn C. Brown and Alexandra Oleson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 25; Barbara Gutman Rosenkrantz, 'Early American Learned Societies as Informants on Our Past: Some Conclusions and Suggestions for further Research,' *ibid.*, p. 345. See also Alexandra Oleson, 'Introduction: To Build a New Intellectual Order,' *ibid.*, p. xvii.

Gerbi, centered around the 'notion of the presumed inferiority of the nature of America, and especially its fauna, including man, in comparison with the Old World's, and the resulting unavoidable decadence and corruption to which the whole Western Hemisphere found itself condemned.'⁸ From its original comprehensive statement by Buffon in the middle of the eighteenth century, the idea was advanced by various European thinkers, refuted, and recast with different emphases by DePauw, Hegel, and others until the debate was trivialized in the late nineteenth century and its arguments shown to contain serious deficiencies.⁹ Until its demise, however, this debate shaped the activity of learned societies on both sides of the Atlantic. It was a factor in the growth and development of the American Antiquarian Society.

Americans participated enthusiastically in the progress of an argument that was marked by observations regarding the diversity and size of American flora and fauna, by reports measuring the American climate and its effects on humans, and, most especially, by investigations into the size, strength, and physical and cultural accomplishments of Amerindians. The major means by which this knowledge was generated and reported in America was the reports and observations of early American learned societies. Such observations were congenial with the Linnaean system of classification, based upon easily observed physical characteristics and agreement on principles of nomenclature. These straightforward procedures enabled many Americans to refer to themselves as 'natural historians' because such knowledge was readily accessible through observation.¹⁰ Moreover, the learned societies functioned as

⁸ Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*, rev. ed., trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), p. xi.

⁹ Gerbi, *Dispute of the New World*, pp. xv-xviii and passim.

¹⁰ George H. Daniels, *American Science in the Age of Jackson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 38. In the early nineteenth century, the term 'natural history' included the contemporary disciplines of botany, zoology, mineralogy, geology, and paleontology. *Ibid.*, p. 238 n. 35.

information networks and museums; they supported the communications structures that compensated for the lack of a national center of learning by promoting the dissemination of knowledge.

Americans also believed they were pursuing information important for the conduct of life. Certainly, Charles Willson Peale founded his museum in 1786 not only for scientists of the period, but also for the great majority of his countrymen, as he attempted a visual recreation of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* and placed his specimens in their natural habitats rather than against plain white paper.¹¹ Even the early statements of the Massachusetts Historical Society discuss observations and descriptions in natural history and topography as well as the display of specimens of natural and artificial relics.¹² These activities were designed not only to report the results of research, but also to educate the public and provide knowledge about the advanced development of New World flora and fauna. Such development demonstrated the benign environment of the New World and predicted glorious results for the American republican experiment.

The American emphasis on the value of learning led early AAS members to collect a bewildering array of materials for its library and cabinet. These 'antiquities' were thought to be valuable manifestations of New World vitality and fecundity and included literary materials (such as books, pamphlets, newspapers, broadsides, almanacs, and manuscripts) and museum objects (such as coins, fossils, palm leaves, arrowheads and other Indian artifacts, including the 'iron hatchets' found near a burial place of Onondaga Indians). Later, the Society's

¹¹ Rosenkrantz, 'Early American Learned Societies as Informants,' pp. 347-48; Charles Coleman Sellers, 'Peale's Museum and "The New Museum Idea,"' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124(1980):25, 27.

¹² Walter Muir Whitehill, 'Early Learned Societies in Boston and Vicinity,' in *Pursuit of Knowledge in Early America*, pp. 163-64.

museum acquired art objects, notably statuary, including an enormous reproduction of Michelangelo's *Moses*.¹³

Except for *Moses*, these objects helped elucidate issues argued over by participants in Gerbi's 'New World Dispute.' An incorporator of AAS, the Rev. William Jenks, observed in 1813 in the first anniversary address: 'Wedded to systems, and not always disposed to undergo the labour necessary to ascertain their truth, European writers have contented themselves too frequently with vague reports and slight resemblances. Hence their reasoning has been deceptive, and their results false. Yet the misrepresentations, which have been made by DePauw and Buffon . . . have happily excited able replies, from mature examination of facts.'¹⁴

Jenks believed that the Society should undertake three fields of inquiry: the ancient Indian nations; the 'Western Mounds' of Indians in the Ohio Valley (this was later extended to the Mississippi Valley and, still later, to Central America, especially the Yucatan); and the early European settlements.¹⁵ These investigations, he reasoned, would belie the claims of the New World's European detractors.

The Society actively sponsored research and published reports pertaining to 'aboriginal history.' Because of its support of the work of Caleb Atwater on Indian mounds in Ohio, and that of Increase Allen Lapham on mounds in Wisconsin, and that of Ephraim George Squier and Edwin Hamilton Davis on Indian monuments in the Mississippi Valley, the Society was a major sponsor of American archaeological and ethnological research. Moreover, additional research on Indian languages and other aspects of Indian culture was reported in AAS publica-

¹³ *Proceedings of AAS 1812-1849*, p. 490; Clifford K. Shipton, 'The Museum of the American Antiquarian Society,' in Whitfield J. Bell et al., *A Cabinet of Curiosities: Five Episodes in the Evolution of American Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), pp. 37-38.

¹⁴ 'Address by Rev. William Jenks,' in *Proceedings of AAS 1812-1849*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-38; Rosenkrantz, 'Early American Learned Societies as Informants,' p. 348; Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies* (Boston: Boston Athenæum, 1962), pp. 68-70.

tions.¹⁶ Indeed, as late as 1903–4, the Society's *Proceedings* included only four articles, all of which dealt with aspects of American Indian civilization: 'The Contributions of the American Indian to Civilization,' 'Algonquian Language and Literature—Report by the Committee of Publication,' 'Myths and Superstitions of the Oregon Indians,' and 'Aboriginal Languages of North America,' by then AAS Vice-President Edward Everett Hale, a Worcester minister better known as the author of *The Man without a Country*.

In addition to a 'respectable cabinet to consist chiefly of aboriginal curiosities,' it was the Society's purpose to 'secure sufficient aid and patronage from a liberal public to establish a useful library.'¹⁷ By donating the library with which he wrote in 1810 his acclaimed—and still useful—*History of Printing in America*, Isaiah Thomas provided the Society with the base upon which his successors have built the remarkable research library that has become the principal work of AAS.

Unlike the relatively specialized collections that now constitute the Society's holdings, however, the early efforts at collection development were quite diffuse. In addition to the Society's early American source materials, there were also a large number of English and European books, serials, and pamphlets donated to the Society, as well as prints of European luminaries, and manuscripts such as an illuminated leaf of a fourteenth-century French book of hours.

In collecting source materials, Society officials reflected little understanding of the distinction between research institutions and collectors. After favoring the Society with gifts of the John Bradstreet Papers, the Joseph Lancaster Papers, the Philip John Schuyler letterbook, and other valuable books, pamphlets, and manuscripts, the Rev. William Buell Sprague pres-

¹⁶ *Proceedings of AAS* (October 1849):7–8. Indeed, not until 1850 did AAS publish anything regarding research on European settlements in the New World. See Marcus A. McCorison, 'Humanistic Societies in Early America,' in *Pursuit of Knowledge in the Early American Republic*, p. 258.

¹⁷ *AAS Proceedings, 1812–1849*, p. 526.

sured Librarian Samuel Foster Haven for autographs in exchange: 'Will you allow me to make one suggestion to you *in confidence*? When [it] occurred to me that if I could have the privilege of *looking thro'* Mr. Thomas' correspondence, so far as mainly to look at the name and nothing more, I should find many things probably which you might be willing to spare and which would be very important to my purpose.'¹⁸ Haven evidently agreed to accommodate Sprague's request because Sprague wrote Haven again a few weeks later: 'I need not say how much I feel obliged to you for your kind efforts to gratify me in respect to pamphlets and autographs and especially for the permission which your letter contains for my looking over some time hence the papers of Mr. Thomas. I am quite sure that I should find there many things which I should consider of great value which yet would be of little or no importance to the objects of your Institution.'¹⁹

There was also little awareness of the distinction between private and public records, and the appropriate repository for each. As early as 1816, the Society wrote to the Worcester District Court to ask if an 'old book respecting land titles' could be transferred to AAS, now that 'it was no longer useful to the court.'²⁰ The Society also acquired a letterbook of Jonathan Belcher while he was colonial governor of New Jersey; the volume contained both private and official correspondence, but was transferred to the Massachusetts Historical Society 'to restore the volume to the original series.' Evidently no thought was given to directing the volume to the custody of the state of New Jersey.²¹

In collecting such materials, moreover, there was a poorly developed link between developing collections and serving scholarship. Before the first Antiquarian Hall was opened in

¹⁸ William Buell Sprague to Samuel Foster Haven, May 26, 1846, AAS Records.

¹⁹ William Buell Sprague to Samuel Foster Haven, June 18, 1846, AAS Records.

²⁰ *Proceedings of AAS 1812-1849*, pp. 99-100 n. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 353 n. 1.

1820, the Society's collections were housed in the home of Isaiah Thomas. Arrangements to use the collections were, of course, made with Thomas. After the hall was opened, the Society's Councillors took turns staffing the facility to provide tours for those who wanted them. Finally, in the early 1820s, the cabinet was closed and the library was also made unavailable to all but 'literary characters' because the burden was too great for local Councillors to bear. When Christopher Columbus Baldwin was hired in 1826, the library was opened from 10 to 1 and from 2 to 5 p.m. which, by the standards of the period, was generous access indeed.²²

Physical access for readers only highlighted, however, the lack of intellectual access to the Society's holdings. Printed catalogues were the rule before the late nineteenth century, and the Society's only catalogue was published in 1837. Location symbols were added in 1841.²³ Publication of the catalogue did not resolve the question of control of manuscripts or of other difficult-to-manage materials such as pamphlets, broadsides, and prints. Indeed, by the 1850s, Society Councillor Ira Moore Barton noted that the library had doubled in size and that another catalogue was needed. Moreover, the systematic arrangement, preservation, and cataloguing of pamphlets, newspapers, broadsides, and rare books was regularly praised as a goal, even if progress towards its fulfillment was uncertain. The needs of the Society's readers also began to find their way into the pages of the *Proceedings*.²⁴

Though actively engaged for more than a half century in the collection of materials for the study of early American history and culture, and indeed that of archaeological investigation as well, the Society, like its colleague institutions of the period,

²² Shipton, 'Museum of AAS,' p. 39.

²³ *Proceedings of AAS 1812-1849*, p. 422.

²⁴ *Proceedings of AAS* (April 1855):2; *ibid.* (April 1857):5-6; *ibid.* (October 1859):20-24; *ibid.* (October 1872):12-17. The first substantial description that provides an overview of the Society's holdings appeared *ibid.* (April 1873):14-56. The descriptive categories were 'manuscripts,' 'books,' 'Bibles,' 'newspapers,' and 'Cabinet.'

had developed neither adequate policies nor procedures for the management of its collections.

It was not until later in the nineteenth century, in the years after 1880, that the mission of the Society became more specialized, following a trend that affected the development of American society and culture generally. In brief, American culture in the second half of the nineteenth century was transformed from an emphasis on spontaneity to one on order, from diffusion and vagueness to integration and concentration, from celebration of the self-made individual to recognition of the reality of institutional constraints. In the convergence of industrialization and urbanization during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, there was a dramatic shift in cultural emphasis 'from boundlessness to consolidation.'²⁵

This growing emphasis on formal structures, definitions, and limits had a profound effect on the organization of knowledge. Basically, late nineteenth-century custodians of knowledge shaped their 'competences into scholarly professions' as the multiplication and differentiation of organizations of specialized knowledge abounded. Effective resistance to specialization crumbled as scholars encouraged greater clarity of standards and internal sanctions within disciplines that formed boundaries within which new scholarly information circulated.²⁶

The growth and professionalization of the scholarly disciplines, especially that of history, affected the development of

²⁵ The clearest statement of this general shift in cultural attributes is in John Higham, 'From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860' (Ann Arbor: Clements Library, 1969). See also George Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Alan Nevins, *The War for the Union; The Organized War, 1863-1864* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 271-331; Richard D. Brown, 'Modernization: A Victorian Climax,' *American Quarterly* 27 (1975):533-48.

²⁶ John Higham, 'The Matrix of Specialization,' in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, ed. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 3-18. See also Dupree, 'The National Pattern of Learned Societies, 1769-1863.'

research institutions such as AAS. The elaboration of reference apparatus to facilitate use of source materials in historical research encouraged research institutions—especially libraries—to improve their procedures in managing collections and the methods they employed to gain intellectual control over them.²⁷

The formation of the American Library Association in 1876 was a direct response to this rising need among the academic disciplines for access to knowledge contained in library source materials. Access to collections was improved by new emphases on bibliographic information, the emergence of the more flexible format of the card catalogue as a replacement to the appearance of the published library catalogue volume, extended hours, open shelves, and speedy delivery of library materials to readers.²⁸

After the death of Samuel Foster Haven in 1881, the Society's activities were gradually redefined so that its resources might be more nearly in proportion to its collections and the growing demands made upon them. In April 1883, the Rev. George E. Ellis, a member of the AAS Council, noted the tendency of libraries, 'through the very fact of their multitude, to become fragmentary and incomplete in character.' Ellis envisioned a 'system of exchange which should recognize the specialties of each library, to the end that in each of the great libraries some one or more departments should be substantially complete.'²⁹ And to that end, the same report noted that the Society 'cannot probably long maintain its ancient prestige in the broad field of American Archaeology.' Accordingly, it was

²⁷ John Higham et al., *History: The Development of Historical Studies in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 28–31; John Y. Cole, 'Storehouses and Workshops: American Libraries and the Uses of Knowledge,' in *Organization of Knowledge in Modern America*, pp. 370–74; William F. Birdsall, 'Archivists, Librarians, and Issues during the Pioneering Era of the American Archival Movement,' *Journal of Library History* 14(1979):459–60, 463.

²⁸ Cole, 'Storehouses and Workshops,' p. 373.

²⁹ 'Report of the Council,' *Proceedings of AAS* 2(1882–83):248. This statement contains the basic principle of research library activity: to build carefully focused comprehensive collections.

proposed to send in a 'fair exchange' material 'particularly liable to decay' to the 'great National Museum in Washington, or to the hardly less celebrated Peabody Museum in Cambridge.' It was observed in this context that geological and other specimens were transferred 'many years ago' (in 1854) to the Worcester Lyceum and Natural History Association and that in 1877 a mummy that Isaiah Thomas disliked had been dispatched to the Smithsonian.³⁰

A few years after the initial proposal, the Society began in 1885 to transfer its archaeological holdings by sending its 'perishable specimens' to the Peabody Museum. Several years later, a special committee of Councillors recommended that the great majority of the Society's cabinet should also be transferred to the Peabody Museum, with the balance of the artifacts going to the Worcester Society of Antiquity.³¹ In July 1896, the balance of the Society's collection of minerals was transferred to Worcester Polytechnic Institute, with the understanding that any unwanted pieces would be given to the Worcester Natural History Society.³² Only four glass cases exhibiting the Society's Central American artifacts remained to document the involvement of AAS in the collection of ethnological and archaeological artifacts. In 1905, the Council authorized the library committee to dispose of those objects as well.³³ Shortly before moving in 1910 into its current facility, the Society formally concluded operation of its museum.

In October 1909, Clarence Brigham, the new librarian, presented a report remarkable for its foresight and the manner in which it anticipated—indeed guided—the growth of the Society in the twentieth century. Brigham observed that 'the guiding spirit in the acquirement of additions to the library has been that of specialization. To strengthen those departments of the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 258; 'Report on the Library,' *Proceedings of AAS* 2(1882-83):280.

³¹ *Proceedings of AAS* 10(1894-95):71-73.

³² *Proceedings of AAS* 11(1896-97):217.

³³ *Proceedings of AAS* 19(1908-9):192-93; *ibid.*, 20(1909-10):191-92.

library which are already strong, to obtain material for which the Society is a proper custodian and to reject that which does not come within our scope—are all parts of this program.³⁴ Brigham then quoted approvingly from a letter from Harvard Librarian George Parker Winship in which Winship urged the Society to develop its library by acquiring “‘dead books,’” which are almost never used by anyone—but which, when called for, are in most cases wanted by students of exceptional erudition, engaged in researches of real consequence into the regions beyond the limits of the usual academic range. It is peculiarly the province of the American Antiquarian Society to be prepared to assist in the work of scholars of this character.³⁵

Brigham shared Winship's interest in developing the Society's library holdings of 'dead books' and succeeded remarkably in an endeavor that stretched over a fifty-year period. If the Society's museum function was gradually phased out under the guidance of Librarian Edmund Mills Barton, the library function was nurtured by Brigham, who identified early American source materials, especially those published before 1820, as the principal area of interest for the Society.³⁶ Brigham also identified the manuscript collections as a 'valuable portion of our library' that he hoped could be further developed.³⁷

Emphasizing growth of the Society's research collections, however, meant little without improved access by readers. As the quantity of accessions began to rise late in the nineteenth century, the concern over lack of access had also begun to rise.³⁸

³⁴ *Proceedings of AAS* 20(1909-10):40.

³⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁶ Upon his arrival in 1909, Brigham found a library of 100,000 volumes, many of which were not pertinent to the Society's purpose. By the end of his tenure, the library contained 600,000 titles, in addition to collections of manuscripts, maps, broadsides, and prints. See Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies*, pp. 78-79.

³⁷ *Proceedings of AAS* 20(1909-10):51. For general information on the pattern of AAS manuscripts accessions, see William L. Joyce, 'The Manuscript Collections of the American Antiquarian Society,' *Proceedings of AAS* 89(1979):124-34.

³⁸ This theme is also echoed in Theodore R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 5-6.

This interest found primary expression in the project to catalogue all the Society's research holdings. The cataloguing of rare books and pamphlets was completed in the early 1880s and rules for the reading room were codified about the same time. Those rules assisted AAS in providing access to the growing number of readers.³⁹

As early as 1866, the AAS Council had also suggested that measures be taken to classify, arrange, and catalogue the 'very valuable manuscripts and autograph letters now in the library of this Society.' Such documents might be valuable and rare, the report stated, but they were not in an available condition for study and reference.⁴⁰ A few years later, the Society's Treasurer was said to be 'selecting and collecting letters . . . and giving them order, association, and illustration.'⁴¹ A few years after that, a Council report conceded that the 'variety, as well as the quantity, of written material in our library, is not revealed except by inconvenient, personal investigation . . . and that some means should be devised to render our manuscripts more accessible.' The recommendation was that a catalogue be prepared of all complete works, published or not, diaries, essays, and sermons, as well as autograph letters and 'such other manuscript matters as may seem expedient.'⁴²

By 1880, the rising amount of manuscript accessions heightened still further concern for providing access to scholars. After the death of Librarian Samuel Foster Haven, the historian John Gorham Palfrey paid tribute to Haven's helpfulness, while John Bach McMaster sent the first volume of his *History of the United States* in gratitude for the help given him by the staff of the Society, where he had spent several weeks doing research.

³⁹ *Proceedings of AAS* 1(1880-81):131-32; *ibid.*, 3(1883-85):315-16; *ibid.*, 4(1887-88):57, 60, 365-67.

⁴⁰ *Proceedings of AAS* (April 1866):25.

⁴¹ *Proceedings of AAS* (April 1868):28.

⁴² *Proceedings of AAS* (April 1873):18-19. This report contains the first reference to manuscripts being mounted. In 1880, this was formally proposed, together with indexing them in a brief catalogue. See, *ibid.*, 1(1880-81):132-33.

Moreover, the hours were expanded from 9 to 12 and 2 to 5, as they had been since the days of Christopher Columbus Baldwin, to 9 to 5.⁴³

As the card catalogue for books and bound pamphlets neared completion, a similar venture was organized for the manuscript collections and, in 1885, Eleanore Webb was hired for the purpose. Within a few years, she had very nearly completed her assignment, bringing to fruition the proposal made nearly twenty years earlier by Nathaniel Paine, first a treasurer of AAS and then a member of the Society's library committee.⁴⁴

By the early years of the twentieth century, however, the rudimentary catalogue prepared by Eleanore Webb was already proving inadequate to the demands of the 'marked increase in the number of university teachers and pupils . . . who have enjoyed the privileges of the library.'⁴⁵ After the large bequest of Stephen Salisbury III (1835-1905), the Council of the Society, encouraged by J. Franklin Jameson, decided to employ someone qualified by experience to 'arrange, classify, and catalogue' the Society's manuscripts. Charles Henry Lincoln, formerly on the staff of the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress, was engaged.⁴⁶

The work of Lincoln marked the culmination of a process that had gradually transformed AAS into a specialized institution catering to the needs of a group of scholars dependent on research collections for the study of early American history and culture. Letters and documents were arranged in well-defined groups or arranged in a general alphabetical series. Over 8,000

⁴³ *Proceedings of AAS* 1(1880-81):131-32, 315; *ibid.*, 2(1882-83):276, 281.

⁴⁴ *Proceedings of AAS* 3(1831-85):315-16, 381. Society Librarian Edmund Mills Barton emphasized whenever he had the opportunity the usefulness of the Society's collections to scholars. *See, ibid.*, 4(1885-87):134; *ibid.*, 5(1887-88):57, 365-67; 7(1891-92):6-8; 10(1895):266.

⁴⁵ *Proceedings of AAS* 14(1900-1901): 397. *See also, ibid.*, 15(1902-3):290-315.

⁴⁶ *Proceedings of AAS* 17(1905-6):269-70; *ibid.*, 18(1906-7):5, 128, 297.

cards were prepared for a card catalogue, while calendars, several of which were published, were also prepared.⁴⁷

Lincoln's work represented an amalgam of archival practice and techniques traditionally employed by curators of manuscripts. He made use of archival principles in identifying organic collections, organizing them into series, and making use of the principle of collective description in finding aids. By the same token, however, he also adopted the manuscript techniques of organizing artificial collections, and providing access to them by means of a detailed calendar. Lincoln borrowed freely from the two approaches, unaware that their increasingly tense relation in the twentieth century would influence so much of the growth and development of the archival profession.⁴⁸ The important fact, however, is that Lincoln's selective borrowing enabled AAS for the first time to promote reasonably effective access to its unpublished collections. The accomplishment also underscored the Society's commitment to provide access to all research collections found in the AAS library.

The Society had progressed a long way indeed from its early days when books, newspapers, and manuscripts existed in close proximity to Indian arrowheads, pottery, mummies, and other relics. The growth of the Society reflected the process of specialization that pervaded late nineteenth-century American culture. As a result, the Society focused and refined its area of collecting interest and adopted new techniques that allowed readier access to its collections. The accomplishment of AAS members and staff in developing and maintaining a research library with a sharply defined sense of purpose was certainly sufficient occasion in itself for a centennial celebration in 1912.

⁴⁷ Charles Henry Lincoln, 'Report on Manuscripts,' *Proceedings of AAS* 20(1910): 393-94.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 394-96. See also Birdsall, 'Archivists, Librarians, and Issues,' pp. 457-79; Schellenberg, *Management of Archives*, pp. 3-60.

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