

## *Report of the Council*

OCTOBER 21, 1992

'GOD BE THANKED FOR BOOKS; they are the voices of the distant and the dead, and make us heirs of the spiritual life of past ages.' A few days ago, while clearing out the detritus of my life, I found those words of William Ellery Channing printed on a slip of paper amongst the papers of my father, whose own life of scholarship I gratefully acknowledge. As I read Channing's blessing I agreed with the intent of it, but, thought I, 'Not only do books make us heirs of the past, also they make us participants in the present and donors to the future.' Surely, capturing the essence of time is the work of the American Antiquarian Society. Willard Thorp of Princeton once wrote that by collecting and preserving the sources of our history the American Antiquarian Society had 'given us [the American nation] our past.' As great a challenge as these fundamental responsibilities may be, however, they are only a part of our responsibilities, which demand that the portion of our past residing on the shelves of our great library is made into a living intellectual and spiritual resource for the present generation, as well as forming the basis of learning, inspiration, and delight to those who come after us. What follows is a brief report on how well, during the past year, the members, the Council, and the professional staff served our stewardship.

The year 1991-1992 was one of preparation for the changing of the Society's leadership, a regime which in some ways can be thought to go back almost to the turn of this century when Clarence S. Brigham arrived in 1908. In many respects a continuity exists from Brigham to Shipton to McCorison, the latter two of us having served with our predecessors for some time before becoming the principal executive officer of the Society. In view of that, the Council devoted three of their meetings, marked by intense discussion, to establish directions for the Society during the

next several years, and we fervently debated the nature of the opportunities and challenges facing AAS in order to identify the talents needed by our new president to meet them successfully. The Council's deliberations produced a set of instructions to the committee appointed by the chairman to find and select a nominee for the office of president of the Society. The committee, made up of Harold T. Miller, chairman, Henry B. Dewey, secretary, and Bernard Bailyn, Robert Baron, Frederick Bauer, Mary Kelley, Warren Haas, William Pettit, Roderick Stinehour, and Peter Williams, labored assiduously before recommending to the Council the election of Ellen Smith Dunlap of Philadelphia as the next president of the American Antiquarian Society.

The Council continues to be worried about our financial situation in a stagnant national economy. The Committee on Finance has been concerned for some time that the instructions given to our investment advisors, which traditionally have called for modest appreciation of the portfolio coupled to a healthy income yield, are not prudent in present economic circumstances. The discussions of the Council and of the committee have resulted in instructions to staff to strictly manage the budget, as well as in setting new policies on investment of the portfolio. On the one hand, the staff closed out the fiscal year with an operating surplus of \$19,296, despite the inclusion of \$40,000 of extraordinary, unbudgeted expenses within that account. Capital gains on unrestricted funds acting as endowment totaled \$68,097. These two factors resulted in a cash surplus of \$88,496 for fiscal 1991-92. On the other hand, the Committee on Finance has decreed that the distribution to the operating budget of income earned by invested funds be reduced over the next few years to not more than five percent and that a study be made of our investment policies. Clearly, husbanding the Society's financial resources is absolutely necessary, and careful management of them will be a long-term benefit to our operations.

The importance of these same financial matters to the future of AAS were brought into stark focus during conversations with William Bowen, president, and Richard Ekman, secretary, of The An-

drew W. Mellon Foundation. The discussions led to awards of challenge grants to five independent research libraries—AAS, the Folger, the Huntington, the Newberry, and the Pierpont Morgan—each in the amount of \$1,500,000. The officers of the foundation, convinced as they are of the central place in the humanities held by these libraries, are deeply troubled by the fragility of fiscal resources. The purpose of the foundation's grants is to shore up significantly the recipients' ability to underwrite the basic functions upon which scholars depend for library service. The awards were made only after each institution charted, through intense analyses of our financial futures, sound fiscal plans that met the expectations of the foundation's officers and trustees. At AAS, bringing those plans into reality is no mean task and will take all of the ingenuity, determination, and devotion of the Council, staff, and all members.

Another vital appointment was made when Nancy Hall Burkett, formerly our associate librarian, was named by the president the thirteenth librarian of the Society, in the succession of Isaiah Thomas, Christopher Columbus Baldwin, Samuel Foster Haven, Clarence S. Brigham, and Clifford K. Shipton—each a great librarian during his own time. Ms. Burkett's appointment was effective on the first of September 1991. During this past year she and I have worked together in an effort to make the transition in acquisitions and management of all aspects of the library's operations as effective as possible.

That the transition was successful is marked by the smooth workings of our excellent staff as they dealt with a nine percent increase in readership (4,538 vs. 4,115 'reader days') and responded to 27,200 calls for research materials. Beyond the superb service offered to scholars by our staff (which we seem to take for granted, but ought not) the major achievement of the year was the installation of the Society's online public access catalogue, MaRK (*Machine-Readable Katalog*). This is a development that has been underway since 1974 when AAS first began cataloguing its research materials through computerized means. At present we have loaded

nearly 140,000 machine-readable records of printed matter and 17,000 records of the Catalogue of American Engravings into this complex and innovative system, which uniquely provides access to our highly detailed cataloguing of books, pamphlets, broadsides, and engravings with already computerized records to newspapers, periodicals, and manuscripts, and much more yet to come. Both staff and readers have found MaRK to be a very effective research tool.

Ms. Burkett and her staff have accomplished other tasks as well. Not the least among them is an award from the National Endowment for the Humanities of \$240,000 that will enable AAS to push forward our North American Imprints Program by including machine-readable records of 7,800 broadsides printed between 1831 and 1877. Because of financial constraints as well as the change in the identity of the chief acquirer, the number (if not the quality) of additions to the collections fell off quite dramatically this past year. Nonetheless, 2,250 items (ranging in size from a single sheet to a file of several volumes of a nineteenth-century newspaper) were purchased. Gifts of research materials from very generous donors numbered 5,400 and were valued at just under a quarter of a million dollars. Of the latter, the most important was a superb copy of *Les Voyages de Champlain*, published in Paris in 1613. As my readers will know, the volume documents Samuel de Champlain's adventures in North America in 1604, 1610, 1611, and 1613. Given by Henry S. Streeter, our secretary for foreign correspondence, the book came from the famed collection of Americana formed by his late father and our past president, Thomas W. Streeter.

This past year was one of accomplishment within the Department of Research and Publication as well. In addition to the publication of the one hundred and first volume of the *Proceedings*, a second edition of the guide to the Society's collections and programs was issued under the title *Under Its Generous Dome: The Collections and Programs of the American Antiquarian Society*. Two sets of papers delivered at Society functions were published as sub-

stantial separates: *Writing the History of the American West* (which included the catalogue of George Miles's exhibition of highlights of AAS holdings of Western Americana) and *The Republican Synthesis Revisited*, a collection of essays derived from the Clark University-AAS symposium held to honor George A. Billias upon his retirement from the Clark faculty.

The principal event of the Society's educational activities was a series of two seminars held over two weeks in June. Michael Winship proved to be an exceptionally effective leader of both, which were entitled 'Critical Methods in the History of the Book in American Culture' and 'Bibliographical Approaches to the Nineteenth-Century Book in the United States.' Both sessions were fully subscribed and one featured excellent lectures by Mary Kelley, David Paul Nord, William J. Gilmore-Lehne, and Philip F. Gura. Nina Baym, the Jubilee professor of liberal arts and sciences and professor of English at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, delivered the ninth James Russell Wiggins Lecture on October 18, 1991, which was entitled 'At Home with History: History Books and Women's Sphere Before the Civil War.'

The National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded the Society \$33,000 to defray the cost of two editorial conferences and two meetings of the Editorial Board of a collaborative history of the book in America. The preparation of this multivolume work is a principal effort of our Program in the History of the Book in American Culture. David D. Hall, chairman of the Program, is also editor-in-chief of the history, which has been extended to cover the twentieth century. Editors of each volume have been appointed and prospecti to the volumes are being prepared. Thus long-awaited work on this project is now in train.

A full calendar of scholarly events was scheduled with six meetings of the New England Seminar in American History (AAS having been joined in its sponsorship by the history departments of Clark University and the University of Connecticut), two sessions of the AAS Seminar in American Literary History, two

gatherings of the AAS Seminar in American Bibliography and Book Trade History, a meeting of the new Seminar in American Art History, and, finally, twenty-one sessions of our informal lunchtime colloquia—a very full calendar indeed!

Other activities included programs to celebrate the centennial of the birth of our late member Esther Forbes, the Worcester novelist and author of *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In*. Our first venture to provide services and enrichment opportunities for schoolteachers in the secondary and elementary grades, a program sponsored with the local Alliance for Education, was enthusiastically received by a large group of teachers, and we look forward to extending it with a series of more formal presentations and activities in the future.

Although scholars who are awarded fellowships under our several competitions continue to be highly enthusiastic and complimentary over their tenures spent in Antiquarian Hall and as tenants at the Goddard-Daniels House, the number of applicants for AAS-NEH fellowships fell again this past year. Nonetheless, our application to the National Endowment for a renewed grant for fellowships under its Program of Fellowships at Centers of Advanced Study was enthusiastically awarded.

The Council is pleased to acknowledge their very great gratitude to myriad members and friends of the Society, foundations, and corporations for continuing and extraordinary generosity. Contributions to the Society's 1992 Annual Fund and to other sources for current operating expenses amounted to nearly \$272,000. Cash gifts amounting to \$198,170 were given to increase the Society's endowment funds. An additional \$227,750 has been pledged toward meeting the challenge grant awarded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a sum that includes \$175,000 from the late Gaylord Donnelley of Chicago to establish a fund in memory of his father, Thomas Elliott Donnelley, Mr. Donnelley having paid \$75,000 toward a pledge of \$250,000 prior to his death. Also, the Society received notice of a forthcoming bequest of \$50,000 from the estate of our good friend Marion S. Fletcher.

The above has been a recital of the accomplishments of the Council and our staff within the well-tried bounds of programs that have been developed over the past generation. Now, the Society, under the leadership of a new chief executive, is about to embark upon new means of sustaining our effectiveness under changing social and economic circumstances. Thus, it may not be inappropriate to close this my twenty-fifth and final report of the Council with an admonition to the Society. I beseech you to remain committed to principles that have sustained us since our founding on October 24, 1812. The American Antiquarian Society was established to build, to maintain, and to support a library. Its collections and staff would be used to explicate the histories of the inhabitants of the North American continent. This is a noble enterprise because the attainment of knowledge and achievement of learning and understanding in such matters abolishes parochialism and prejudice. Isaiah Thomas wrote that an institution to promote the study of literature and the useful and fine arts is 'truly beneficial, not only to the present, but particularly to future generations—[an organization] not confined by local purposes—not intended for the particular advantage of any one state or section of the union, or for the benefit of a few individuals. . . .' In fulfilling our stated purposes, the Society is exceptional in American society because it has created an independent research institution, dominated by no narrow political or social preconceptions. It is free of the ever-changing disciplinary constraints of academia. No single point of view is sufficient to express the nature of human 'reality' of any time or place and by attempting to cover all facets of the American experience, AAS collections hold the evidences by which scholars can discover congruences and incongruities within and between varying perceptions of our true conditions. Intimations of reality possess no validity without historical dimensions. By sustaining a library of record, our collections, as interpreted by our staff, influence the outcome of research through the presence or absence of access to the sources for defining and redefining what we accept as historical realities. It is upon those

perceptions that we, citizens of a democracy, face the choices that we each make for the nation's good or ill.

Few other independent institutions in this country (or of any other country for that matter) have held to such purposes so faithfully or for so long as this Society. Our great collections are irreplaceable and our methods of making them useful have been pioneering, in ways appropriate to each generation. We and our predecessors have kept the faith, believing that knowledge and wisdom are emancipating. I urge you to go forward into the next generation holding to that faith, because in the words of our founder, "the events that befall human beings, have more powerful influence than any other objects to engage and fix [our] attention." We cannot obtain a knowledge of those, who come after us, nor are we certain what will be the events of future times; as it is in our power, so it should be our duty, to bestow on posterity that, which they cannot give to us, but which they may enlarge and improve, and transmit to those, who shall succeed them. — It is but a debt we owe to our forefathers.' And to the God of all generations.

Marcus A. McCorison

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