

Response and Comment

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TO BEGIN WITH, I thank Patricia Cline Cohen, William W. Freehling, Kay Seymour House, and Roger E. Stoddard for their kindness in participating in this symposium, which is intended to celebrate the collections of the Society and to describe how they have used the library's holdings. Their remarks have been stimulating and provocative, and illuminate the context in which books and people interact when put together in a library.

As for my own comments, I shall start by endorsing and emphasizing the import of Roger Stoddard's eloquent remarks. Books and manuscripts must be in place in a library before the scholars arrive, whatever difficulties may exist thereafter for the uninitiated in finding the research materials they need. If the books are here, all else falls into place. The tradition that Roger celebrates and in which he generously and flatteringly places me is one that holds that if we get the books into the place, scholarship can take care of itself.

Stoddard asked us how the natural imbalance between common and rare books, between the known and the unknown, had been redressed; who had found the lost book and uncovered the hidden document; who will collect the books that no library has; or who will build resonant collections that are stronger than any other. These are the inclinations and skills that the Council of the Society must enable and financially support by encouraging our librarian

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to go out to hunt for the materials that have made and will sustain AAS as the uniquely potent research center that it is. In fact, every other speaker today gives testimony to the incomparable value of AAS collections (and attendant services) to their own work.

On to the matter of how scholars use the Society's materials. Pat Cohen's talk was particularly apt in demonstrating how the vigorous use of her historical imagination led her to materials that she at first believed did not impinge upon her area of research. In this activity I am pleased to acknowledge the contributions of our staff, whose knowledge of our collections, as well as their understanding of the nature of historical research, manages to nullify the still extant shortcomings of our ancient cataloguing; not only that, they headed her toward materials that expanded her understanding of her project, extending its historical implications as well. It is gratifying to learn that the services of our staff and the collections around which we have built those services are of such quality as to engender in our readers a sense of the highest level of accomplishment.

Bill Freehling, on the other hand, perhaps more accustomed than Pat Cohen to a library system in which nothing is left to chance or the imagination, managed to stumble into our huge hoard of material dealing with the American practice of slavery and the mid-nineteenth-century controversy over its abolition. Thus his experience, which began roughly enough, also developed into one of accomplishment. Freehling's puzzlement over the state of library economy at AAS illustrates certain aspects of a library whose collections are as old, as focused in scope, and as deep as those of AAS. Because various of our practices were begun here years before most university libraries were established, and because AAS has collected what used to be considered by some librarians uncollectible, our cataloguing and our so-called backlogs are daunting to the uninitiated. But this situation may not necessarily be a bad thing; collections at AAS are such that they must be explored, and the reader needs to be started on the right paths through them by staff members who know their complex-

ities. Standard library cataloguing of all AAS collections, even if all were so handled, still could not reveal all their riches.

It may be worth noting that the AAS card catalogue constitutes a history of such finding aids. It goes from small, handwritten cards, 5 x 2½ inches, to the most recent cards produced by a computer at Stanford University. Do not forget human minds exist behind each entry. We had a marvelous cataloguer on our staff for forty years. Her name was Avis G. Clarke; Mary Brown knew her well. She had an excellent mind and was indefatigable. The entries in our so-called new catalogue, which contains the records of early American imprints, the collection of first editions of American literature, and the genealogical works, were of her making. She would have nothing to do with the 'old' catalogue; it was beneath contempt, as failing to meet her criteria. In any case, she was a wonder and set the standards for our scholarly cataloguing that we are slowly but surely spreading into all our collections.

Nonetheless, as you may know, AAS has undertaken the task of providing the finest means of catalogued access to our collections that we can devise. For example, the original slavery collection of some 2,500 to 3,000 catalogued items that Bill Freehling found to be so rich, has recently been recatalogued in machine-readable form, and the records to it are now in MaRK, our on-line system. But then we thought, what about the collection of 'Miscellaneous Pamphlets,' some 40,000 nineteenth-century pamphlets filed by author only? Staff is now working away, a few pamphlets at a time, to catalogue for the first time an additional 3,000 items on the subject. Thus it ever was and probably always will be. Librarians prefer to believe that once organized, a collection is organized for all time. Such is not the case: what suffices for one generation of scholars may not be adequate for another. One cheering aspect of research collections is their viability. They never become obsolete because each generation requires that history be rewritten to illuminate the concerns and interests of the time. Therefore, the means of access to collections, like their use, is ever changing. So, Bill Freehling, when you are ready again to attack your subject at

AAS, probably you will find our slavery and antislavery pamphlets neatly lined up on the shelves and as quickly available to you as are megabytes on a cathode-ray screen. However, then your questions will be different ones, and we can only hope that we have had enough wit to anticipate a few of them—but do not count on it!

The collection of the works of James Fenimore Cooper, which Kay House discussed so enthusiastically, was begun early in this century by Clarence Brigham as an integral part of our collection of American fiction. Brigham attempted to collect texts of all novels written by American authors in any edition published in the United States through the year 1850. For the years 1851 through 1876, his goal was to obtain copies of the first editions of all such novels published during that period. He failed of completeness, of course, but succeeded well enough so that scholars using the AAS holdings and similar, equally strong collections at Yale University and the Huntington Library will find at their disposal the full corpus of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American fiction. Before Brigham died in 1963, I asked him what area of collecting for AAS had given him the greatest pleasure. To my surprise, he said that collecting American literature filled that role, and I will note here that many of the books in our American literature collections were given by Clarence Brigham to AAS. Our efforts to obtain lacunæ in this field go on, but only intermittently, so scarce have available examples of the genre become. Following my arrival at AAS, I noted that Brigham had not collected American published examples of other literatures, other than an excellent collection of Charles Dickens. Therefore, I began to expand our collections of literature in that direction and then, in 1967, a major shift took place.

James Franklin Beard, professor of American literature at Clark University, the leading (almost only) scholar working on Fenimore Cooper, proposed that Clark and AAS co-sponsor the standard edition of the works of this critically important, but neglected, American author. Clifton Waller Barrett, whose great collection of American literature is now at the University of Virginia, was

president of the Society at the time and he enthusiastically endorsed the idea. In order to call attention to AAS's own excellent literary collections, I was eager that AAS become involved in one of the major editorial projects that were then capturing the imaginations of literary scholars. Our collection of Fenimore Cooper was very strong in American editions, lacking only a few of the most scarce, but was weak in English and European editions, all of which are essential to Cooper's publishing history. So, beginning in 1967 (before we drove up the prices), we obtained a Hinman Collator and I went after Fenimore Cooper with a vengeance, building what surely is now the most comprehensive collection of his printed works, 1820 through 1865 (or thereabout), numbering some 600 different editions and printings and gathering all the great rarities that Brigham had not obtained. Thus, we established the bibliographical base from which the editors of *The Collected Works of James Fenimore Cooper* might establish their textual histories.

These activities resulted in two major gifts of materials; both, unfortunately, brought about by the deaths of the donors. Paul Fenimore Cooper, Jr., of Cooperstown, New York, bequeathed to the Society the portion of James Fenimore Cooper's manuscripts that had descended to him. His bequest, which came to AAS too early, consisted of several hundred letters to and from Fenimore Cooper, full or partial manuscripts of several of Cooper's novels, and business records. Similarly, Jim Beard and his family gave to the Society, prior to and after his death, his large collection of printed books by Fenimore Cooper, thereby extending the AAS collection and establishing at AAS the collection of books used by the editors of the Cooper edition.

Our speakers have touched upon a number of other topics pertaining to their experiences here: relationships between scholars and lay people, a community of scholars, the stuffiness of AAS or the opposite, a problem with our policy of closed book stacks. Listening to all this, at one point, I jotted down the word 'tensions.' That competing expectations and interests, with the tensions that

those differences cause, exist at AAS should not surprise me, even though I liked to think that our priorities were clear and the manner in which we conducted our business pleased everyone.

I have observed a significant change at the Society during the past thirty years that warrants mention here. Over the past generation an AAS institutional tradition has been eroded. The American Antiquarian Society was formed as a community of scholars and lay people. From 1812 until well into the twentieth century, writers of history often were amateurs of history. Historical writers and their readers met to learn about and to discuss the nature of our world, becoming better citizens and perhaps more interesting people as well. The latter is always desirable in a person, I think. As the historical profession has changed, turning ever more in upon itself, I have observed a real diminution in that kind of interchange between lay people and scholars. Still, there are notable exemplars of laymen who possess great historical knowledge and sensibilities. I think of James Russell Wiggins, our former president, here with us today, I am proud to say. How is it that amateurs like Russell Wiggins and historians like Bernard Bailyn no longer gather regularly at Antiquarian Society meetings as they once did a generation ago? Have we nothing to say to one another anymore? As one who remains convinced of the usefulness of history as an essential factor and civilizing influence in private and public life, I deeply regret and am even more troubled by this widening chasm between professional historians and the general public.

At a different point, tensions exist also between my two responsibilities: one to care for the research collections and the other to promulgate their use. The former is the debt I owe to those who formed the collections for the benefit of all generations who follow them, even unto the present day and beyond. The latter is the debt I owe to this generation of citizens who need or wish to avail themselves of the riches held in trust by the Society that lead to historical knowledge. But, frankly, that tension, although unpleasant to experience, is not intolerable. One always must make deci-

sions, based on one's sense of the best of conflicting demands, and then must live with them. Still, the tension is always present, as well as the regret that we must place inhibitions on the use of the materials.

Finally, as Roger Stoddard made clear, the product of the printing press remains a vibrant guardian of the liberties of our minds and spirits. At bottom, the functions of the American Antiquarian Society are to collect, preserve, and make useful the written records of mankind upon this continent. Those records exist to set the minds of people free, to give people the opportunity to learn and to write works that reach out to keep alive our traditions of the inestimable value of human life and of our democracy.

In this noble effort, I thank each of you—members of my staff, the Council, and personal and professional friends—for the contributions that you have so freely given to our great Society and myself in the past. I am confident that our mission is sound and that the American Antiquarian Society will continue into the future as an irreplaceable agent for learning and pleasure.

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