

## *Report of the Council*

WHEN we met in this room last year I suggested that you take a last fond look at these vintage 1909 lighting fixtures under which mountains of research have been done. The fixtures are still with us, and the promised report on the problem of air conditioning is not forthcoming today because one of the senior members of the staff had a protracted illness during the busiest part of the year, causing work to accumulate and increase the burden on the other employees. In such an institution as this, there is an immense amount of work which has to be done on something like a schedule. The most exacting of these tasks is the revision of Evans and preparation of the copy for the Early American Imprints project, which has to flow in a fairly regular stream to the microcard plant and thence to the subscribers.

This undertaking has, incredibly, reached the point from which we can see its conclusion approaching. After the camera work in this building has become much less than a full-time operation, there will be a long period of coaxing film out of other libraries. Foreseeing the need of employment for the camera, we have entered into an agreement with the Readex Corporation gradually to begin another microprint publication which has been for a long time close to our heart.

Harriette Merrifield Forbes, the mother of our member Esther Forbes, worked for years in the Forbes Alcove preparing her invaluable bibliography of *New England Diaries, 1602-1800*, which was printed in 1923. We inherited this work, and keeping it up to date has been one of the first duties of our librarian. The great utility of Mrs. Forbes' work inspired Professor William Matthews of the University

of California to prepare his *Annotated Bibliography of American Diaries Written Prior to the Year 1861*. Invaluable as this tool is, most of its would-be users are frustrated by the fact that perhaps a majority of the documents which it lists are printed in obscure periodicals such as newspapers and the publications of genealogical and local historical societies. Of this kind of material, respectable collections are to be found only in this library, the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library. We have apparently the strongest collection of this kind of source material, and what we propose to do is to publish the text of these diaries, numbering in the thousands, in microprint form. We shall base our publication strictly on the Matthews bibliography, which can therefore be used as a guide and index.

Another major project which is nearing completion is Alden Johnson's great chronological catalogue of American type ornaments used in the colonial period. When done this will be an invaluable tool to assist in the dating and identification of American printing.

Although the past year saw the necessary work on our physical plant postponed, our bibliographical progress reached points which twenty years ago were entirely over the horizon. For example, the books and pamphlets in our collection of State and local history, apparently the largest of its kind, had no individual call numbers. Several years ago I asked our assistant, Miss Louise Trowbridge, to use her odd moments to assign call numbers, placing them on the catalogue cards and in these volumes; by spending a part of each day at this task she has completed it and made one of our largest collections much more accessible.

Like many other libraries, we had never catalogued individually the monographs published by historical and other learned societies, but had simply shelved them with the serial publications of these organizations, although a great

mass of rich source material and authoritative secondary works was thus lost sight of. This year Mrs. Bastian and Mrs. Hazel Robbins, in addition to their regular duties, catalogued and classified this material. The works of the Mathers had hitherto been left out of our imprint catalogue because one could use the Holmes bibliographies, but this year Miss Clarke gave them a thorough cataloguing. She has now turned her attention to the songsters and other volumes of music, a particularly interesting field bibliographically because no library with a sizable collection has ever faced up to the problem of cataloguing it thoroughly.

For more than two decades we have had boxed in our basement rather more than a ton's weight of foreign hymnals which we this year gave to the Harvard Divinity School in acknowledgement of the nineteenth century newspapers turned over to us by the University. This transfer turned out to be much more profitable to us than we had expected, because John Langdon Sibley, when Harvard librarian, thought it more important to acquire and preserve than to describe his accessions. Thus he had bound up in runs of fairly common California newspapers many odd numbers of rare papers. The Harvard holdings were given only by a general description in the *Union List of Newspapers*, so our cataloguing is bringing to light much hitherto unreported material.

Several libraries have taken advantage of our offer of a home for their short runs of pre-woodpulp newspapers. The University of Illinois has this month sent us thirty-five volumes of newspapers of the 1830's. Professor Karl Arndt of Clark University, having completed his vast bibliography of German-language papers printed in the United States, has given us the collection which he built up in the process; scores if not hundreds of the pieces are recorded in the bibliography as unique. These huge newspaper accessions were

promptly processed, recorded, and shelved by the use of temporary help.

Our staff has suffered the resignation of Mrs. Marcia Kerst, a sad blow. We have lost two members of the Society, Lawrence Waters Jenkins, who was elected in 1915, died on April 20, and Wilbur Henry Siebert, elected in 1925, who died on September 2. Our membership for many years has been limited to two hundred, a figure more suitable to our limited activities of a century ago, and to the general public indifference to history which then prevailed. In those days there was not a single college course in American colonial history, and only a small handful of people engaged in research in any part of the field of American history beyond the horizon of local history. Today, thanks to such publications as Mr. Brigham's *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers* and our *Early American Imprints*, the activities of the American Antiquarian Society are of importance to thousands of individuals. We must decide whether our membership is to remain something like the "Friends of the Library" which support such excellent sister research institutions as the John Carter Brown Library, or whether it is truly a national society reflecting in its membership the swiftly growing ranks of the professional historians and the great development of popular interest in the field.

Twenty years of discussing membership problems with the executive officers of other constituent societies in the American Council of Learned Societies has convinced us that a rapid expansion of our membership would cost so much in money and staff time as to cripple our library and publication functions. A slow and moderate expansion is another matter, and a committee of the Council will perhaps have changes in the by-laws to recommend at the next meeting. It is an exhilarating experience to be playing a significant part in the present wave of activity to rediscover and interpret the past

of our nation, but it is not enough to be swept along by the current. We must plan our part in the future, for when the centennial of the Civil War is past and the bicentennial of the Revolution approaches, we shall be one of the busiest institutions in the country.

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