

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL

THE past six months have been of unusual activity in the library of the American Antiquarian Society. During the summer the influx of students and scholars from every section of the country has been greater than ever before, and their lines of research more varied. As historians and writers of monographs, finding important topics already covered, venture into lesser known fields, they uncover a greatly enlarged scope of inquiry. Professors of literature in the colleges assign for theses the life and works of lesser known, but highly important, authors; and historical researches descend to the interpretation of local rather than national data, and take up social and economic ideas that were scarcely even discussed a quarter century ago. The result of all this is that a comprehensive library such as ours, collecting in every phase of American thought, is able to provide material in many unusual and little studied fields.

The staff of the library, or those allied with its interests, have conducted considerable bibliographical work. The Cotton Mather Bibliography, begun last April by Mr. Thomas J. Holmes, has progressed well during the summer, aided at all times by whatever help the staff of the library could provide. The sudden death last May of Tracy W. McGregor, the donor of the \$5000 fund which made this Bibliography possible, saddened his friends and co-workers, and has made this important undertaking a tribute to his memory. Had he lived, he would have provided not only the means for the compilation of the Bibliography, but would have seen to it that the completed work was properly and notably published. In the meanwhile,

Mr. William G. Mather, the original founder of the Mather library and a good friend and member of the Society, has generously donated the sum of \$2500 for necessary expenses in connection with the work of compilation, such as cost of plates, travelling expenses and clerical assistance. With the sinews of war provided, Mr. Holmes has girded himself to the task and hopes to finish the work of compilation late next spring. It is fortunate that so experienced and able a scholar was available for this important undertaking. The American Antiquarian Society has long been considered the Mather shrine of America. Here are the largest collections of Mather manuscripts, the Mather family portraits, the Mather libraries, a fine collection of the Mather printed writings and an almost complete collection of contemporaneous literature, in thousands of volumes and pamphlets, necessary to study adequately the influence of this representative New England family.

The spare time of Mr. Vail has been taken up during the late spring and all of the summer in finishing the copy for Sabin's Dictionary of Books relating to America. After the final appropriation for this vast undertaking expired on June 30th, with the letter W about half finished, Mr. Vail gave all of his time, week-ends and long midnight hours, to completing the alphabet, preparing and locating the titles—mostly foreign for the last three letters of the alphabet—and making ready the material for the printer. At last this great and nationally important task, begun sixty-eight years ago by Joseph Sabin and continued by three different editors, has been finished. To all those who have had a part in this greatest of all American bibliographies, the congratulations of a grateful public are extended. That which seemed an insuperable performance a decade ago has at length been honorably completed.

To the Government organization, the Works Progress Administration, the Society is much indebted for

assistance during the year. Through the ERA, and its successor, the WPA, four indexers were assigned to catalogue our vast collection of newspapers from 1820 to the present time. Previous to 1820 the collection had been catalogued already. This great undertaking, so long desired by the Society but beyond our resources, has now provided us with a checklist of over a million newspapers, and will also enable the Society to be represented properly in the forthcoming Union List of Newspapers soon to be published under Government auspices.

Another project which we have long contemplated and only partially carried out, is an index to newspaper biographies and obituaries from 1875 to date. Several years ago we began such an index, covering the files of the *Boston Transcript* since it included obituary sketches for the entire country, but our lack of funds caused us to stop with the year 1890. Now four indexers working under the supervision of the local WPA Historical Records Survey have carried the index to 1900. The names are yet to be arranged alphabetically and typewritten. When completed, the index from 1875 to 1900 will include about ninety thousand names and will form a biographical register of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a record available in no other form.

Other work sponsored by the WPA is the indexing of births, marriages and deaths of the First Unitarian Church of Worcester from 1785 to 1916, providing us with a Worcester statistical record of much biographical value; and the indexing of Franklin P. Rice's voluminous historical and biographical notes from Worcester newspapers from 1780 to 1848. Both of these catalogues will be of constant help in solving local queries. Assistance has also been furnished to the Society in re-covering and shelving its newspaper collection and in classifying and arranging recent accessions of manuscripts—the latter a service of especial usefulness. All of the work done by the local Historical Records

Survey has been on a high level. Their listing of the records of the towns in Worcester County, performed under the supervision of Robert L. Morton, has set a standard for the entire State, and when finished will be of much historical value to this Society and to all researchers in Worcester County history.

To the Junior League of Worcester we have been indebted during the year for much valued assistance given to the library by some of its members, thus enabling us to classify and file considerable material which would otherwise remain unarranged.

There have been six deaths of members since the April meeting. Tracy W. McGregor, patron of American libraries and a helpful friend to this Society, elected in 1935, died May 6, 1936. Charles S. Hale, for many years curator of our manuscript collection, elected in 1927, died May 24, 1936. George Francis Dow, noted New England antiquarian, elected in 1910, died June 5, 1936. George A. Plimpton, scholar and collector of educational books, elected in 1914, died July 1, 1936. Charles H. Hull, professor of American history at Cornell, elected in 1908, died July 15, 1936. Edwin A. Grosvenor, for nearly half a century on the faculty of Amherst College, elected in 1896, died September 15, 1936. Obituary sketches of these members will appear in the printed proceedings of this meeting. The Proceedings are slightly in arrears, although the issue for October 1935 is nearly through the press and should be issued shortly. The delay is somewhat compensated for by the issue in preprint form immediately after the meeting of the reports read at the annual meeting.

Work on a new Handbook of the Society, to describe in extended form the resources of the Library, the publication of which had been made possible through a gift of \$2000 from a generous friend in Worcester, has progressed during the summer. Mr. Vail, who has had this in charge, has found it no easy task to examine anew and describe the varied collec-

tions in this library, but the book should come out before winter. It is our hope that this Handbook, showing as it will the value of our collections, the importance of the Society for a century and a quarter and the unfailing aid which it continues to give to all scholars and writers, will bring to the Society the financial help which it has long sought. We need a greatly enlarged book stack, we need new rooms for cataloguing, research and exhibition space and, above all, we need a real endowment for publication, for additions to the staff and for book income. From a fairly wide knowledge of library conditions throughout the country, I know of no library giving so great a service to history and literature which has so little financial support. It would seem as if persons of wealth who were philanthropically inclined, if we could only be allowed to plead our cause before them, would endow this Society for the purpose of aiding American scholarship, so that our work could be continued and enlarged.

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For the Council

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