

Report of the Council

APRIL 19, 1967

SINCE the last meeting of the Society, you have all received notice of the capital fund drive which the Council had decided to undertake, and you have been asked for advice as to methods and means. As the result of that advice, the committee headed by Mr. Harrington has engaged a New York concern to survey the Society and its activities, and to advise, as a result of that survey, the next step.

Several faithful members have been doing useful exploring on our behalf, and one of them gave as his findings the fact that the American Antiquarian Society had "fallen on evil days." That is not quite the way in which I would word it.

When I became the librarian of this Society twenty-seven years ago, I made a survey of its collecting policy, and determined that we would then need five million dollars in fresh endowment if we were to do effectively all that we were trying to do. The practical alternative was to surrender to better situated libraries those fields in which our collections were not superlatively good, and to funnel our funds and efforts into those areas in which our superiority was unquestioned. As a result of this policy, we are now unique in our collecting, our collections, and our bibliographical utilization of the printed source materials of American history before 1876. The result is that we are far more active than we used to be. Our yearly contribution to the sum of human knowledge is many times what it was a generation ago, and so are our other services. Our growth over the last quarter century has been impressive. Our endowment and our income from it have increased four-fold, and our salaries

three-fold. We have air conditioned the building, modernized the lighting, and introduced a staff pension plan.

The most revolutionary changes which have been effected are apparent to the public only in the character of the service we perform. Twenty-five years ago most of our books had no individual call numbers, but were shelved, hopefully in alphabetical order, in vague subject classifications. To find a particular volume one had often to go to that class and take thirty or forty from the shelf and look at the title pages. In addition, there were some forty collections, some of them containing thousands of volumes, which were entirely uncatalogued. Mr. Vail, my predecessor as librarian, used to say that nothing could be done to improve the situation without an army of cataloguers. Today every volume is under full bibliographical control, and Miss Clarke's imprint catalogue this year absorbed the United States government documents through 1800—the first time that any library has ever put this difficult material under control.

Unfortunately we have no record of the number of frustrated researchers whom we used to turn away twenty-five years ago, but we are reminded of the situation today when we write for microfilm and find that some of the major libraries in the United States, over a period of years, can locate on their shelves only one third of the rare books attributed to them in the standard bibliographies. It is much easier to give service with a smile when you can find the books. Today some courteous readers ask whether, if they leave a short list of books, we shall be able to have them out the next day; the answer is that now our finding time averages one minute a volume.

A quarter century ago on our shelves thousands of unbound pamphlets were rubbing their covers off against sturdier neighbors, and dozens of fifty-dollar broadsides

stood on their edges between folio volumes. Today the pamphlets are all in protective envelopes or properly lettered bindings, and the broadsides are properly catalogued and placed in individual, acid-free folders.

This year a tremendous shifting of newspapers has convinced us that our stacks designed for material of that kind are full. We can make some space by giving short and broken files to libraries which have better runs, but we shall delay as long as possible, because those short runs are recorded as being here, and people come to see them without writing ahead.

The short-title revision of Evans' *American Bibliography* with the not-in-Evans items entered in their proper alphabetical places will be finished this year. Hopefully the printed volume will be out and in the hands of the public in another year. The microprinting of the Shaw-Shoemaker material will be completed through the year 1805. Other major bibliographical tasks are coming to a head. Obviously, a full-time editor is a necessity, so the Council today announces the appointment of James Eugene Mooney, one of the graduates of our course in The Methods and Materials of Research in Early American History, and now an instructor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He takes on his duties on the first of July.

So the American Antiquarian Society is far from being in a bad way. The goals, the horizons, which a quarter of a century ago appeared to be mirages impossible of achievement, have been attained and passed. In perspective, we are now knee deep in the Elysian fields. But most of us long ago decided that personally we had no interest in going to Heaven unless there are problems there for us to work upon. This society now has pleasant problems.

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For the Council

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