

Report of the Librarian

OVER the nearly a century and a half of the activity of this Society, it has with rare consistency adhered to the purposes of its founders, which they described as the "collection and Preservation of the Antiquities" in order thereby "to enlarge the sphere of human knowledge, and the progress of science, to perpetuate the history of moral and political events, and to improve and instruct posterity." This was a very limited goal compared with those of our elder sisters, the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and we can imagine how their early papers on such subjects as the trisection of an angle and the retreat of the swallow to winter quarters in pond bottoms, irked the apparently more practical men who were our founders. From that day to this our officers have cultivated thoroughly the field of the Society's work and turned their backs on the temptation to wander the meadows gathering posies. Many libraries compete with us for the rarities of early American printing which appear on the market, but no other follows our policy of collecting every scrap of material, both trivial and important, in the fields of our special interest, particularly American printing before 1821.

This unrivaled mass of printed source material serves our generation precisely as our founders intended that our collections should; but one thing which our founders did not foresee was the fact that in the twentieth century there would be universities in Texas and on the Pacific Coast, attempting to provide the means for advanced study and research in early American history. With all their book funds these new uni-

versity libraries could not possibly build up adequate research facilities in our fields. Indeed the only parts of the country in which a student can do thorough research in the colonial field are in the Boston-Worcester region, in the New York-New Haven-Philadelphia region, and in Washington, D. C.

The result has been that while there has been a vast increase in popular interest in early American history over the past two decades, there has also been a sharp falling off in the amount of attention paid to that area in academic circles. Ph.D.'s in colonial history have been loath to teach in universities outside of the three areas in which the source materials for their research are to be found, and for that reason even at the undergraduate level, the teaching of early American history has dwindled.

This situation has long distressed many of us. In one of my reports a decade ago I spoke wistfully of the day when by some means of inexpensive microreproduction our treasures could be duplicated and placed at the disposal of the thousands of scholars who need them, but who could not be served, even if they could come to Worcester, because of our relatively limited reader capacity and because of the fragility of the old books and newspapers. But even had the technique of microreproduction then been adequate to the problem, we could not ourselves have assumed the cost of reprinting even a small segment of the sources. Nor could we have financed the thorough revision of Evans' American Bibliography which must be the foundation of any such program reprinting.

To obtain the number of subscriptions necessary to support such a program of reprinting sources would require an advertising campaign which we simply would not know how to put on. The clerical and bookkeeping work involved in the publication would swamp our present staff. The photo-

graphic equipment and the necessary operators would call for expenditures far beyond our means.

This was the situation when Mr. Albert Boni of the Readex Microprint Corporation came into my office a little over a year ago and made the publication proposal which I outlined in my last report. I did not say in that report that he is a publisher of forty years' experience, that the Readex Corporation controls the only microreproduction process which can cut the costs of a project such as this low enough to attract the necessary number of subscriptions, that it is an established business which has sold millions of these microprint cards, or that it has the plant and staff necessary for a project of this size.

When I reported to you last year that we had made our agreement with the Readex Corporation, I was not at all certain that we could uphold our end of the bargain. But the opportunity was too good for us to let slip. We saw, as the Readex people had not, that the reprinting project would carry the cost of the revision of Evans and the publication of the revised bibliography. Although for years this revision and its publication have been the most crying need in American bibliography, the fantastic increase in the cost of conventional printing has made the project a hopeless one.

But could we make that revision in anything like the ten years allotted by the Readex Corporation to the Early American Imprints project? In the preparation of volume thirteen of Evans, which we brought out this year, we were obliged to spend two whole years in the laying of ghosts, those shadows of books which never existed. At this rate, how could we revise thirteen volumes in ten years, and carry on the necessary work of preparing the microprints of the text besides. It would have been a hopeless undertaking if it were not that we had behind us the years of work on our imprint catalogue and the experience of having compiled volume thirteen.

The only way to find out whether or not the job could be done was to try, so for six months I devoted practically full time to the Early American Imprints project, and left many of the Librarian's usual duties in the hands of the Director. We have found out that the project is practical, and that it can be carried on without any undue burden on our staff or any sacrifice of other significant activities.

The first year of the project has been highly successful in every way. We have eighty-six subscriptions, scattered from Liverpool, England, on the east, to Sydney, Australia, on the west. The great surprise has been the number of small western libraries which have come in. Not surprising, but most essential and gratifying, is the hearty support of the libraries which must be burdened by our requests for film of books which we do not have.

The fact that the Library has acquired this year rather fewer rare books than usual is not the result of our preoccupation with the Early American Imprints project. Our total accessions were 2,055 bound volumes, 2,210 pamphlets, and 212 other pieces, bringing the total library count to 291,638 volumes and 435,575 pamphlets. The fact is that we have been offered much less good material than usual. At the Bloch sale of Frankliniana where we had some hope of filling gaps in our collection we were outbid on all but two pieces, John Estaugh's *Call to the Unfaithful Professors of Truth* (Philadelphia, 1744), and Abel Morgan's *Anti-Paedo-Rantism* (Philadelphia, 1747).

From various sources we acquired Samuel Willard's *Heart Garrisoned*, Cambridge, 1676, Samuel Estabrook's *Connecticut Election Sermon*, New London, 1718, Thomas Robie's *Letter to Certain Gentlemen on the "wonderful meteor of December 11, 1719,"* and Samuel Davies' *Religion and Patriotism*, Philadelphia, 1755.

For the period of the Revolution we acquired a number of good items, including numbers 1-6 of the Hartford, 1775, edition of *The Crisis*, the *Proceedings of the Convention of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia, 1775, Isaac Hunt's *Political Family*, Philadelphia, 1775, Thomas Paine's *Dialogue between the Ghost of General Montgomery and an American Delegate*, Philadelphia, and the *Rules and Regulations for the Forces Raised by the Colony of Rhode Island*, Newport, 1776. For the later period an interesting addition was a complete file of the *Connecticut Republican Magazine*, published at Suffield in 1802.

We have made some accessions which are particularly important to us because of the strength to which they add. For fifty years we have done our best to complete our collection of the charming juveniles issued by Isaiah Thomas and his son in Worcester between 1786 and 1807. These little books first introduced to American children some of the beloved tales of their European contemporaries, and with their delightful woodcuts they set a new standard for popular graphic art in this country. Naturally the discovery and acquisition of examples of hitherto unknown editions is a matter of considerable moment to us. This year we acquired the unknown first Worcester edition of *An Alphabet in Prose . . . for the Use . . . of all Great and Small Children in New England* (1798), the unknown second Worcester edition of *The Death and Burial of Cock Robin* (1794), and an apparently unique copy of the first Worcester edition of *The Royal Alphabet; or, the Child's best Instructor* (1787). We have made so many additions to the bibliography prepared by Dr. Charles L. Nichols and printed in 1916 that the time is now ripe for the publication of a revised check list of Thomas juveniles. We could print it if someone could be induced to edit it.

Our collection of early American editions of Robinson Crusoe is so large that additions to it are about as unusual

as accessions to our Thomas juveniles, but this year we acquired editions of *Crusoe* printed at Albany in 1790, Baltimore in 1794, and New Haven in 1806. The time is now ripe for at least a trial bibliography listing our holdings and utilizing our notes distinguishing the real from the several bogus *Crusoes*. Here, too, we seek some volunteer editor.

A similar situation exists in the field of early American catechisms, in which our collection is without rival. Most of these little books were printed between 1805 and 1820, but this year, in a gift of a lot of no less than seven from our member, d'Alte A. Welch of Cleveland, was a copy of *The Shorter Catechism* printed by Green & Russell in Boston in 1757. A few years ago we acquired the unique Cambridge Press catechisms, so this collection is another field awaiting the hand of the bibliographer.

Mr. Welch is, of course, the country's leading authority on early American juveniles, and we are constantly in correspondence with him in regard to bibliographical problems. In the past year we have added many items in this field, including *Pictures of Seventy-two Beasts and Birds*, Boston, 1796, Abner Reed's *First Step to Learning*, East Windsor, 1800, *The Puzzling Cap, being a Choice Collection of Riddles*, Albany, 1808, *Metamorphosis*, Cheshire, Connecticut, 1814, and editions of the *New England Primer* printed at Springfield in 1787, Dover in 1806, Carlisle, Middlebury, and New York in 1811, and Greenfield in 1818. Our collection of Primers is without rival and should be used for at least a trial bibliography. The illustrations in these little books, like those in other juveniles, make them particularly appealing to people interested in the graphic arts. The reproduction of the illustrations and texts in microprint would be a simple matter if we had the bibliographies on which to work.

We have never been in the position to press the collection of maps as vigorously as the other segments of the field of

graphic arts, but over the years we have acquired a surprising number of rare or unique pieces. This year we received from Mr. Tinker one of the great rarities of Louisiana collecting, the *Plan of the City and Suburbs of New Orleans from an actual Survey made in 1815 by J. Tanesse City Surveyor*, engraved by Rollinson of New York and published in 1817 by Charles Del Vecchio of New York and P. Maspero of New Orleans.

From Mrs. Joseph Carson we received one of the rarest prints to come to the Library in recent years. This is the engraving made by Henry Dawkins in 1759, after the painting by William Williams of Philadelphia, of Benjamin Lay, the eccentric Quaker and abolitionist. Lay was born in England in 1677, came to Pennsylvania early in the eighteenth century, and died in 1759. He was a deformed dwarf who wore clothes of his own manufacture, and was distinguished for his philanthropy and his effective opposition to slavery.

A younger and more famous contemporary of Lay was George Whitefield, the cross-eyed evangelist who threw the colonies into an uproar. We have recently purchased a hitherto unreported broadside, *A True Copy of the Last Will and Testament of the late Rev. George Whitefield*, published in Boston by Nathaniel Coverly in 1771. This was one of the pieces which Isaiah Thomas failed to find when making the collection of Coverly broadsides for this Library.

I have spoken today almost entirely in terms of our special collections, and it is in the direction of specialized collecting that every institution which wishes to be an effective organ of research must turn. In my fifteen years as Librarian here I have seen a vast increase in publication in every field in which printing is still carried on. In many fields, such as local history, the problem has become one of selection, both to save space and to save the researcher from being swamped

in useless material. The modern librarian should know the subject matter as well as the bibliography of each of the fields which he collects, and should know the problems of research in it, well enough to make a wise selection for the use of posterity. Obviously he cannot know many fields thoroughly.

No longer can the librarian follow the easy path of accepting all books offered to his institution. Collections which do not fall within the pattern of his library policy will be, unless reasonably complete, a snare and a waste of time for future researchers. His successors must get rid of such collections, which is certainly not keeping faith with the donors. In this Library we are fortunate that the purposes of our founders and first builders were so clearly formulated, and so practical, that we have not been obliged in recent years to make any fundamental changes or serious amputations.

The other day in the diary of John Langdon Sibley for February 24, 1860, I came across a good example of the changes which have taken place in the library field. On that day he visited this institution for the first time. He describes the interior of the building, the frigid temperature, and the warmth of his welcome, and concludes: "[I] worked exceeding hard till nearly midnight without exhausting the resources of the library on the subject which I am examining." If Sibley were to visit us today he could work for the rest of his life without exhausting the resources now in this Library on the subject which he was examining, and this in spite of our modern aids and tools which would greatly speed his work. We often remark on the vast revolution in industry and communications which has occurred since Isaiah Thomas watched the first canalboat dock in Worcester. Just as great a revolution has occurred in the tools and resources for research in history. In its chosen fields, the Society has maintained and even increased its leadership in

the accumulation of the materials of early American history, in the processing of them so that they can be absorbed into the body of history, and in the preparation of tools of research of revolutionary importance. And this in the face of the friendly competition of many institutions with vastly greater endowment. When in heaven Clarence Brigham and I meet the founders of this Society, we shall be prepared with confidence to account for our stewardship.

Respectfully submitted,
CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON,
Librarian

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