

Report of the Librarian

DURING the past year the one of our activities which has occupied the largest segment of our time has been the Early American Imprints Project, which is now well ahead of schedule. The editorial work has reached Evans No. 23000, in the year 1791, and the publication of the microprints has passed No. 19500 in the year 1786. Whenever I look at the boxes of microprint cards which so prominently display the name of the American Antiquarian Society, I have a guilty feeling that they should also display the names of at least the New York Public Library and of the Library of Congress which have been carrying a portion of the burden which must at times seriously hinder their other work. On the other hand, if we printed on our boxes the names of cooperating libraries we would not know where to draw the line, for the aid given by scores of smaller institutions has been limited only by their holdings.

The pressure of this work on our staff has greatly eased during the past year, although I have spent so much time with my head in a microfilm reader that one frequent visitor referred to me as "that man who spends all his time watching TV." The time freed by this easing pressure has been devoted largely to research for the revised edition of Evans. Our microprints have included the fruits of the fifty years of revision which had been made up to the time of publication, but the pressure of schedule prevented the doing of much additional research as we went along. Now that we have a little breathing space we are turning our attention to the thousands of titles included in Evans of which no copy has ever been reported. In one of my reports,

about a decade ago, I said that practically every week we had acquired an imprint hitherto known only by Evans' description taken from an advertisement. That flow has now almost ceased, leaving us with a core of titles most of which are certainly ghosts.

These ghosts have a most deceptive air of reality. Charles Evans' love of bibliography was such that he simply could not resist designing title pages. He would, for example, construct a page-long description from nothing more substantial than a bookseller's laconic notice that he had copies of the *Ready Reckoner* for sale. He would reconstruct the twenty- or thirty-line title, indicating in his copy what he thought to be appropriate caps and line endings. He would give an exact imprint, based on the bookseller's other publications, and would give an exact pagination, taken from another edition. People using the bibliography have assumed from all this detail that Evans was describing an actual copy which for some reason he did not care to locate.

Unfortunately this bibliographical fantasy was built on a substructure hardly more sound. When Isaiah Thomas began work on his *History of Printing* he bought up all of the newspaper files he could find, and searched some of them for data relative to his subject. He intended to publish as a part of his history a bibliography of American imprints, and he recorded thousands of the publications advertised in the newspapers. He died leaving this work unfinished, and young Sam Haven who took up the task left it still unfinished when he died in the Battle of Chancellorsville. The elder Haven, who was an excellent antiquarian but no bibliographer, edited the twice unfinished manuscript somewhat less than critically. From this bibliography, as we published it in 1874, Sabin, Evans, and almost all subsequent bibliographers have copied the ghosts, assuming that Thomas or the Havens saw books of which no copy now

survives. We should have been warned long ago by the fact that the ghosts swarm in the press of one town for a few years and then desert it for another. The answer is that Thomas, Haven, and Evans searched only certain files of newspapers.

The chief source of the trouble has been the assumption that when a colonial bookseller advertised a book as "this day published" he meant that it had that day come from the press with his imprint. Actually, what the bookseller meant was only "now on sale," as is clearly indicated in advertisements which read "this day published, new books from London and Paris." Thomas, of course, knew the difference, and had he finished his bibliography he would no doubt have weeded out most of these ghosts; his notes on them were probably taken to remind him to look for possible American editions of those titles. Sam Haven had segregated some of these ghosts, but his father, not realizing the character of the titles, printed them in the bibliography. Evans, unfortunately, was too respectful of his predecessors. He would locate the advertisements for the ghosts and would insert the name of the printer of the newspaper in the imprint given by Thomas or Haven, but very rarely would he drop even the most obvious ghost if it had been admitted to the canon of their bibliography.

These ghosts have much more than bibliographical interest. For example the bibliographies contain lists of dramatic works supposed to have been printed by Hugh Gaine of New York, lists which would seem to prove that New York was far ahead of the rest of the colonies in its appreciation of the theater. Unfortunately for this theory, Gaine used the words "just published" to mean "just placed on sale"; the same English editions were to be had in Boston bookstores. I myself had a narrow escape from a similar trap. A tract bitterly attacking the Boston

clergy and Whig politicians was printed in New York and later announced as "just published" in Boston in an advertisement which implies a reprint. Since no copy of a Boston printing survives, the natural conclusion is that the clergy, which had prevented the printing of the tract in that town in the first place, had in some way suppressed the second edition; I am now sure, however, that the advertisement referred to the sale of copies of the New York printing.

Fortunately Isaiah Thomas had the usually reprehensible habit of marking in his newspapers the advertisements of what he thought might be new American editions. Our procedure is to make from modern bibliographies lists of titles of which no copy can be located, and to search for marked advertisements which may be the source of the ghosts. If we find an advertisement reading "tomorrow will be published," we are presumably dealing with an American edition. If the marked advertisement reads "just published" we look for evidences of importation. A Rivington notice of the arrival of an English shipment is usually followed by "just published" advertisements by other booksellers who obviously are handling books on consignment. In our revised, one-volume, short-title, Evans we shall publish the wording of the advertisements on which the ghosts rest and leave it to the user to decide whether or not these indicate that the titles represent American imprints of which no copies are known, or are mere reflections of known editions.

A word of warning to other bibliographers: the ghosts now canonized in the bibliographies are no more than a sample; Thomas, Haven, and Evans searched relatively few of the newspaper files now available, and were far from consistent in their criteria of inclusion. Frequently they recorded obvious ghosts while ignoring advertisements for real American imprints.

Roger Bristol's consolidated index to Evans is in page proof. Using it in proof form, I have found one of the most useful things about it to be the cross-indexing by which Bristol has brought out material not to be located by the original indices. This volume will be printed by means of the revolving fund established by George Francis Booth and Harry Galpin Stoddard to enable us to publish Mr. Brigham's newspaper bibliography, and since used to publish volume 13 of Evans. After it has revolved to publish the index, it will be used to publish Mr. Bristol's volume of additions to Evans, and then our one-volume, short-title revision.

Unfortunately there is no such easy solution to the more pressing problem of the microprinting of the colonial newspapers. This is a crying need because the files are disintegrating under use, and even more seriously from repeated microfilming than from reading. This wear remains a problem even when we have eliminated unnecessary orders for microfilm, such as those from veterans looking for means to use up surplus research grants received under the G.I. Bill. Since my last report, Alden Johnson and our microfilm operator, Nathan Cohen, have devised a means of microprinting the newspapers, and we today announce the publication of a package of three files of Boston papers for the critical years immediately preceding the Revolution. These represent an uneconomic labor of love. Before we can launch into a program of extensive micropublication of newspapers we must have capital for machinery, supplies, and the building up of a stock. Our Early American Imprints Project was made possible by the fact that the Readex Corporation had a plant which could be used, and by the fact that Mr. Boni was willing to put up the venture capital necessary. We had hoped to obtain from foundations such launching funds for our newspaper project, but our applications have been neither rejected nor granted.

One very useful by-product of Mr. Johnson's labors on this project has been the making available to us of a pretty complete photo-duplication service. As essential as this is to modern library work, no institution with our limited income could afford to maintain it under ordinary conditions because of the great volume of orders necessary to meet the costs of operation. And, moreover, limitless filming of our treasures in order to create the necessary volume of business would soon destroy them. Now, thanks to Messrs. Johnson and Cohen, we can fill reasonable orders at usual prices.

Behind these which might be called our external activities are the internal and essential library tasks. The vitally necessary recataloging is moving swiftly toward its completion. During the last two years Alden Johnson and his daughter Judith classified for the first time our collection of Latin American materials and revised the catalogue. Miss Clarke is swiftly incorporating our schoolbook collection into the imprint catalogue. In the process she is turning up many authors, printers, and booksellers whose names have hitherto not appeared in the bibliographies. As the last pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fall more quickly into place than the first ones, so her hitherto unidentified printers are now rapidly surrendering and identifying themselves.

We are not spending as much time as we formerly did on research to answer queries which come in by mail, simply because currently there are fewer such requests for service. Presumably the lull is temporary. We could have spent more time on this kind of service but we did not feel that we ought to do much research trying to discover for one of our customers the name of the Willey family dog which was lost in the avalanche of 1826, nor did we comply with another request that we tell all that we knew about a certain subject in order that the person making the inquiry might know whether or not we knew something that he knew.

Scores of reasonable queries have been answered by means of our catalogues and partly complete bibliographical tools.

A troublesome problem is the visitor, frequently a distinguished scholar from a respectable institution, who has never heard of the fundamental bibliographic tools of his own subject and expects us to do research which he ought to have done before leaving home. More consistently than most librarians, Mr. Brigham and I try to talk to new visitors in order to find out how we can best serve them. Frequently we can save a visitor days of fruitless searching and save needless wear and tear on our staff and our collections. I have wished that we had a very brief leaflet about the library and its collections which we could hand to visitors, but I have never been able to boil down the essentials of our work into a small compass. Many visitors do not realize that our purpose is research and not providing materials for reading or teaching. Our pattern of collecting, our system of classification, and the nature of our bibliographical tools all reflect our preoccupation with the problems of research. So far as practical we try to obtain all printed source materials in our field, but we do not purchase new secondary works unless they would be of assistance to those who do research here. Of course all secondary works in time become themselves research material, and we hope that when our members weed their libraries they will bear us in mind. Thanks to this situation we do not have to face the problems of swift growth which torment every university library. During the past year we added 2,269 volumes, 1,774 pamphlets, and 530 prints, maps, etc., bringing our official count to 298,175 volumes and 445,971 pamphlets. The only sizable collection of importance which we acquired this year came from Mr. Streeter and consisted of 126 pieces relating to the trans-Mississippi railroads of the period from 1849 to 1887. It

includes reports, guides, and speeches, many of them with Mr. Streeter's invaluable annotations.

A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity presented itself when the Historical Society of Berks County, Pennsylvania, decided to dispose of its files of newspapers issued in other counties. Of these we obtained the Harrisburg *Morgenrothe* for 1804-07, the *Lancaster Correspondent* for 1800-02, the *Norristown Herald* for 1805-13, the *Philadelphia Political and Commercial Register* for 1813-14, and the *Philadelphia Columbia Chronicle* for 1813-15. From other sources we acquired the *Sandwich Island Gazette* for 1837-39, a fine file of the *Western Reserve Chronicle* published at Warren, Ohio, from 1818 to 1821, and a complete run of the *Catskill Packet* for 1797.

By purchase we have acquired several interesting juveniles. A copy of *The History of the Holy Jesus*, Boston, Fowle & Draper, 1762, contains nine cuts unlike those usually found in editions of this work. The peculiar choice of cuts and the bad typography suggest that this item was set up after Draper had lost interest in the firm, and that the apprentice, Isaiah Thomas, had a hand in it. We also acquired *The Holy Bible Abridged . . . with Cuts for the Use of Children*, Philadelphia, Young, Steward & M'Culloch, 1786, which has hitherto been known only by the booksellers' advertisement. An edition of *The House That Jack Built*, New York, 1800, has the hitherto unrecorded imprint of Durell for Jansen. Another item hitherto known only by advertisements is the *Account of a Horrid Murder, Committed by Captain William Corram*, Philadelphia, 1796, which has a cover worthy of a modern who-done-it. It is rare that we find an item which escaped Mr. Alden's bibliography, but this year we acquired an entirely unknown edition of *England's Timely Remembrancer . . . a Particular Relation of Many Wonderful Things Seen by the Rev. Mr. Thomas Chamberlain, in a Vision just before his Decease*,

printed at Newport in 1770. We also obtained copies of two editions of a book on horse medicine unknown to Seidensticker, the *Kurz Gefasstes Ross-Arzenen Buchlein*, Ephrata 1802 and 1803. Also unreported is a Coverly of Boston, 1816, edition of *The Adventures of Lucy Brewer, (Alias) Louisa Baker . . . who after Living Three Years a Distinguished Member of an Immoral Society of her Sex in Boston, became Disgusted with the Sisterhood, and garbed as a Male, Entered as a Marine on Board the Frigate Constitution*. This might be called an Horatio Alger type tale with a different slant. Not unique, but by no means as common as Lucy and editions of her tale is a copy of the Exeter, 1792, printing of Arthur Bradman's *Narrative of the Extraordinary Sufferings of Mr. Robert Forbes, his Wife and Five Children, during an Unfortunate Journey through the Wilderness from Canada to Kennebeck River, in the Year 1784*. From Mary C. Stone of Worcester we received a manuscript Revolutionary orderly book not in the Forbes bibliography. Seth Oak bought the volume and on July 3, 1775, began to enter in it the General Orders issued at Headquarters in Cambridge. He continued to copy them fully, without comment, until August 24. The volume then passed into the hands of Benjamin Haywood who, as officer of the guard for January 29, 1776, made one entry in it.

Looking at the past year in perspective the significant thing about it is the comfortable progress we have made in almost every one of our many projects. The vast arrears of cataloging and classification which hung over us a decade ago have dwindled to a few small files which will soon disappear. Our new projects are going better than anyone could have hoped. Everything is ahead of schedule. We are ready to begin tasks which used to be over the horizon, and are making the blueprints for bibliographical tools which when I first came here we would have regarded as science fiction.

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