

## *Report of the Librarian*

**I**NASMUCH as this is my nineteenth and final report as Librarian, I shall take the opportunity to straighten up and look back at the course over which the Library has come in this generation. When Clarence Brigham came to Worcester fifty-one years ago as the first professional employee of the Society, this institution was at crisis. It was drifting down into the status of a local academy without having achieved the purposes for which Isaiah Thomas had founded it. The obvious need was narrowing of its fields of interest and pruning of its collections. Mr. Brigham's predecessors had held that the scope of the Society's interest was "all that man and nature have done," and accordingly they had followed a practice of accumulation (it could not be called collection) without much regard for utility or space. Mr. Brigham has elsewhere told the story of the breaking up of the museum. The present building, erected in 1909, postponed the necessity of meeting the equally serious problems presented by the Library. In this, on top of the wise gatherings of Thomas and Baldwin, was a vast and incredible accumulation. Typical were the paperback editions of foreign-language literature purchased by past generations of members of the Society at the end of European tours on which they had been frustrated by their lack of linguistic competence. Determined to make the most of the time afforded by the return voyage to remedy this lack, they bought these paperbacks, and for the first few days they sat, reading painfully, a seldom-used page opener in hand; but when they began to make friends

among the other passengers, the good resolutions evaporated. The net result was that hundreds of these foreign-language paperbacks came to rest on the shelves of the American Antiquarian Society, where they remained for as much as a century with only the first leaves opened. This was typical of the policy of collection which had filled our shelves.

Mr. Brigham surveyed the situation which he found in 1908, and then went down to a meeting of the American Historical Association at which he read one of the classic papers on the necessity of order, organization, and clear purpose in the management of research libraries. Coming home, he took his own advice and drew up a plan of reclassification for our collections; but with the exception of the initiation of our imprint catalogue, the greatest tool of its kind, he did not get much further. For Mr. Brigham is a collector at heart, and he has lived in an era which has been golden for a man in his position. Whereas Isaiah Thomas had two hands and two eyes, Mr. Brigham has had, thanks to the development of the rare-book trade, a hundred of each. He had likewise, of course, the support of the members and the help of his own incredible bibliographical memory. Those were the days when treasures could be acquired every week, and cheap. Fifty years later the strength of this Library is the work of Clarence Brigham. Even in the fields, such as colonial newspapers, in which Thomas was the pioneer collector, the acquisitions of the Brigham period far outnumber the pieces which were in those collections when he took charge.

When my predecessor, Mr. Vail, surveyed the problem of reorganization, he decided to leave it until funds were available to hire an army of cataloguers. Perhaps this was just as well, for had he undertaken the task, we would never have had the fruits of the great bibliographical labors of his Worcester years.

During the first thirty-two years of the Brigham administration substantial progress in reorganization of the collections was made only in the fields of almanacs, first editions, and early American imprints, to which Miss Avis Clarke devoted much of her time. When I first surveyed the stacks in 1940 the confusion of 1908 was only buried under more. The local history and genealogical collections which were housed around the reading room were in good order, but elsewhere books and newspapers were piled disorder. Mr. Brigham pointed out places where he said that he had not seen the floor for thirty years. Dozens of fifty-dollar broadsides stood on their edges between bound volumes without the protection of covers of any kind. Some material brought into the building in 1908 was still lying on tables unaccessioned. There were forty uncatalogued collections, acquired since this building was built, some of them containing thousands of books; only the wonderful memories of Mr. Brigham and Mary Brown prevented duplication in purchasing.

The bulk of our collections (not the most active ones, it is true) were still classed according to an alcove arrangement based on the shelving in the Lincoln Square building. These classes originally had represented subject groupings, but for many years it had been the practice to add a new book to any class in which the shelves were not tight. Worst of all, the volumes had no individual call numbers. If you started from the catalogue with the knowledge that a particular book was in class W 42, you might have to take from the shelf and examine a hundred volumes before you located the particular one you wanted. Under the best of circumstances, this situation slowed service so that back in my student days I wondered what could be done to speed it.

In 1940, having finished the much lesser task of reorganizing the Harvard Archives, I came to Worcester as Li-

brarian, consumed with curiosity to see what was on the tightly packed shelves and eager to make their treasure more available. The prime problem was space, and some was made by sending the European paperbacks, still unopened, to colleges which could use them. There were some other expendable collections, like that which had proposed to acquire every printed report of every business corporation; a collection which had ceased growing after it had swiftly filled every corner of its stack. There had been periods in our history when every advertising circular, like those which daily fill our wastebaskets, had gone to the shelf. Twice I went through the shelves, at the rate of a few a day, the first time examining everything on them and making up my mind as to policy, and then a second time, discarding enough to keep the Library breathing until the new stack was completed after the war. The previous stacks, built in 1909 and 1924, had been filled as soon as completed by material waiting in storage; but in 1950 we planned to provide space for a generation ahead.

With the new stack completed, we had the necessary space for processing and shelving the vast accumulation of uncatalogued material, and for reclassification of the material in the old alcove arrangement. By making the first duty of each morning the processing of one shelf of books, we have eroded this mountain to an unimportant stub. Looking back over my old reports to you I can see that there were times when I did not believe that we would ever reach this promised land of space and order.

What about the future of our collecting policies and our space? The present change of administration means no serious change in policy. Years ago I calculated that we would need the income from an additional five million dollars of endowment to afford all of the services which we were then trying to afford, and to collect effectively in the fields which we were trying to cover; since then we have

been withdrawing gradually from areas in which our collecting efforts were futile. Periodicals, because of the cost of processing and binding and because of the space which they occupy, had been a particular problem. One of my first tasks when I came to the Library was to check the *Union List of Serials* to make sure that we had a complete run of every periodical relating to American history. This is a very useful series of collections, and I believe that ours is the strongest. However, during the last two decades the character of such publications has changed, many of them becoming mere mimeographed newsletters, not capable or worthy of preservation. This change reflects a thoroughly admirable popularization of American history, but it simply is not our field of activity. As the most recent step we have adopted the general rule of discontinuing most periodicals which fall in one of the following classes: mimeographed material, newsletters, local house organs, and the publications of museums and societies devoted to anthropology, folklore, family genealogy, and city and county history. In each class, of course, there will be exceptions, but still the saving in money, time, and space will be great. Unless a very considerable increase in endowment enables us to revise our policy of collecting, the shelf space which we have now will suffice for my administration.

Work space is a more serious problem. If we expand our micropublication program we shall have to find means to build quarters for it in what might be the first floor of another wing. Sometime in the near future we must also face the problem of air conditioning the building, not for comfort or even because of the effect of 120-degree heat on the materials shelved on the upper newspaper floor, but because of air contamination. The difference in life between old and modern paper is due chiefly to the presence of sulphur in the latter. In any industrial city, sulphur is in the air, and it is being deposited in our old books, which

must inevitably become fragile like those on modern sulfide paper. Our heating plant has long passed its normal life expectancy, and the replacing of this should be combined with the air conditioning of the building.

One marked change during the last twenty years has been the great and steady decrease in the number of important rarities acquired. This leaves more money for rounding out our collections, but it also means fewer luscious accessions for description in our annual reports. Recently we purchased the Benjamin Tighe collection of early American criminal trials, confessions, and related material, amounting to 133 pieces.<sup>1</sup> This has turned up some interesting bibliographical discoveries such as an Albany item of about 1790 "Printed-By G. Hooker for J. Carlton," both of whom are completely unknown to our catalogue of printers and booksellers. This item, by the way, is the life and confessions of a little wretch named Stephen Arnold, who playfully whipped to death a little niece; juvenile delinquency probably involves no greater a proportion of the population today than it did a century and a half ago.

A debate over the location of the court house for Cecil County, Maryland, caused one Ezekiel Traffick to address a bitter protest to Nicholas Hyland dated 2nd day, 3d month, 1748, in the form of a two-page leaflet from the press of Jonas Green of Annapolis. Last week we acquired the first copy to be recorded. It was by exchange with another library that we this year acquired three Williamsburg, Virginia, almanacs: the William Rind for 1769, the Purdie & Dixon for 1771, and the Dixon & Hunter for 1776. From a bibliographical point of view the most important accessions were in the newspaper field. These included good files of the Portsmouth *New Hampshire Gazette* for 1772-1774 and 1779, and the Brooklyn *Long Island Star* for 1811-1815. A

<sup>1</sup> The total accessions for the year included 1,877 bound volumes, 1,694 pamphlets, and 552 maps, broadsides, etc., bringing the total count of our holdings to 300,052 bound volumes and 447,665 pamphlets.

copy of *The Mifflin and Huntington Gazette and Weekly Advertiser* for July 20, 1796, being No. 29, printed by Michael Duffey, is the first issue of this paper ever found. We also acquired good files of the Georgetown, District of Columbia, *Daily Federal Republican* for 1814, the *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer* for 1794, the *Baltimore Evening Post* for 1809, the *Baltimore Federal Gazette* for 1797, 1800, 1802 and 1810 and the *Baltimore Federal Republican* for 1811. In one group of Virginia and West Virginia newspapers which we purchased almost every copy was the first example of that issue to turn up, and some of them added considerably to our bibliographical knowledge. These papers were Winchester, *Bowen's Virginia Centinal*, December 24, 1791, and July 23, 1793; Sheperdstown, *The Potowmac Guardian*, December 7, 1791, and July 23, 1793; *The Berkeley Intelligencer*, May 29, August 14, 21, 1799; the *Martinsburgh Gazette*, March 12, 1813; and these other Martinsburgh papers: *The Republican Atlas*, April 16, 1800, *The Republican Atlas and General Advertiser*, November 4, 1801, *The Potowmac Guardian*, and *Berkeley Advertiser*, September 3, 17, November 12, 26 to December 31, 1792, January 7 to February 4, 1793, September 12, 1795, January 14, March 10, 17, May 5, June 23, July 7, December 20, 1796, February 1, 1798; and *The Potomak Guardian*, March 24, December 12, 1798, July 10, August 7, 14, December 25, 1799, February 5, April 2, 1800. By exchange for foreign discards with another institution we acquired a file of the *Sacramento Union* for 1853-1861, nicely filling in our run.

Early California newspapers are expected to be rare, but few startling finds are to be expected in the field of the Boston presses of the nineteenth century. Such was, however, a file of *The Daily Advertiser*, published by B. Parks at Boston from June 5 to July 30, 1809. In spite of the researches of many years, only a single issue of this newspaper had been discovered—the initial issue of June 5, 1809. Its

rarity prompted Mr. Brigham, in his *Bibliography*, to surmise that this might have been only a prospectus number, and that nothing further was published. Now a file turns up, carrying the publication to July 30, 1809, Vol. 1, No. 46. In addition, at the beginning of the file was inserted a single unnumbered issue of *The Democrat* for June 2, 1809, also published by Benjamin Parks. In this, the unique and final issue of a journal which had lasted for over five years, Parks announced that the paper would be discontinued and would be succeeded by *The Daily Advertiser* on July 5, 1809.

When, some years ago, I told Mr. Brigham that I had a mind to take up work on Evans' *American Bibliography*, he exclaimed that he had lived to see the day. He has since then seen volumes thirteen and fourteen finished and published. The latter, which came from the binders last month, is the work of our member Roger P. Bristol, and is even more than the cumulative index of the series which it claims to be, for it lists works by title and subject as well as by author, and abounds with cross references. Volume fifteen will be a bibliography of additions to Evans, also prepared by Mr. Bristol; the preliminary lists for this will be circulated sometime this year. Volume sixteen will be a short-title cumulative revision, correcting the thousands of errors in the earlier volumes and presenting the results of the bibliographical studies by many men in this field during the last fifty years. This revision through the year 1760 is ready for the printer. For the period of the 1790's in which we are now working, it appears that a third of the Evans titles are ghosts or are incorrectly described, so the revision will clear out a great deal of deadwood.

The first 23,000 numbers of Evans, covering the years 1640 to 1790, have now been reprinted and distributed in microprint, leaving some spaces where we as yet have not been able to wheedle film out of certain uncooperative institutions. Our project to issue microreproductions of the files



of certain key colonial newspapers received such hearty response that the work could not be carried out as an odd-time employment, and had to be suspended pending the obtaining of capital support. We hope that means can be found to resume operations next year. The past year we have reproduced by offset eight issues of our *Proceedings* of a century ago which have long been out of print, so we can now again supply complete sets. Unexpectedly these reprints have quickened the demand for complete sets of our publications.

Typical of the tools manufactured by our staff for our own use, but of general utility, is Miss Avis Clarke's five volume alphabetical listing of all newspapers printed in the United States between 1821 and 1936. The *Union List* is arranged geographically, with the result that queries and references to newspapers by title have often presented insoluble problems. It took Miss Clarke the evenings and weekends of five years to transcribe, arrange and type the 50,000 titles. Next year we hope to begin publication in the *Proceedings* of Miss Clarke's prodigious dictionary of American printers and booksellers; when this is done there could hardly be a more enduring monument to a life bibliographically well spent. We hope also that Mr. Brigham will be able this year to prepare for press Dorothea Spear's bibliography of American directories. The loss of Mrs. Spear, one of the most learned reference librarians in our field, was a blow so unexpected and so disastrous to our operations that we had not even dreaded it. Nothing but thirty years of experience could have built up the knowledge which she possessed, and now that it is lost, much of it can never be recovered. Fortunately Mr. Brigham will still be with us to recall from his unequalled store of bibliographical data what became of that collection or of this library, and so to supply us, daily, with information which would otherwise be unobtainable.

There is sometimes a tendency to regard the rare-book library as simply an immortal book collector, and some librarians seem to buy chiefly for prestige reasons and for bibliographical love, which can be as unreasoning in its objects as personal love. Usually the activity of the individual book collector is very properly confined to gathering what interests him, without regard to the historical importance or the utility of his acquisitions. Isaiah Thomas was not a collector in this sense. He had been through the American Revolution and had seen its effects spread through Europe. He founded the American Antiquarian Society to preserve and interpret that record for posterity. Howard Mumford Jones in his new book, *One Great Society*, points this up when he says that a civilization without knowledge of its history would be as sterile as Sparta, as helpless as a man with amnesia. He goes on to say that if artifacts and documents are to yield their full values to successive generations of men in varying cultures, they must be exposed to these processes: they must be discovered, they must be identified, they must be preserved and, if possible, they must be duplicated both as a precaution against loss and a means of increasing their availability for study. It would be hard to find a better statement than this of the purpose of Isaiah Thomas and of the scope of our present activity, and hard to find another library as widely active. During the past two decades we have cleared away irrelevant collections and activities, and have made remarkable progress toward our original goal.

The administration which takes over today will have a term of nine years, at the end of which the key employees will reach retirement age almost simultaneously. These nine years will be fully occupied by completing the tasks we have begun, and in raising to peak efficiency the institution which we shall turn over to our successors.

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