

Report of the Council

APRIL 1999

TODAY'S REPORT OF THE COUNCIL finds the American Antiquarian Society at the midway point of its 187th year and very much an institution 'in progress'—enthusiastically facing the challenges of a highly promising future and resting on past laurels only long enough to catch our institutional breath. Our dedication to ancient and still venerable purposes—of collecting, preserving, and making accessible a comprehensive printed archive of our nation's past—is exceeded only by our commitment to finding more efficient and effective means to those ends. At every turn, as one moves today from department to department within the Society, one sees initiatives being undertaken to further improve our abilities and extend our capacities. In other words, throughout the organization we are trying to do better than which we have always done well. Perhaps you can see most clearly what I mean if you join me for a short tour through the Society. I recommend that you step lively, though, for he who hesitates around here these days might get run over.

As we enter the Reading Room we cannot help but notice that the place is humming (more accurately, I should say it's quietly clicking, as almost every reader has brought a laptop). A few seats are still unfilled, but the day is yet young, and I notice as we pass the orientation room that a group of first-time readers has just arrived. One of the two simple registration forms they are completing asks 'How did you learn about AAS?', thus helping us assess the effectiveness of our recent efforts to make the Society more widely known and more broadly welcoming to all who have need for our collections. Common answers we get include 'the Inter-

net,' 'the recent feature about AAS in the *Boston Globe*,' 'a mention in last week's *Time* magazine article about genealogy research,' and, a perennial favorite of mine, 'a colleague told me that AAS is simply the best place on earth to do research in early American history, and I had to come.' And you can see that the reference services staff is working hard today, as they do every day, to keep that reputation intact.

Walking along by the card catalogues, we overhear a staff member patiently helping a reader figure out the vagaries of when to consult the cards and when to rely on the on-line catalogue data base, as neither one alone reflects the entire AAS collection. Today, these explanations are being underscored by the sound of a process which will—within another three years or so—make his explanations practically unnecessary: the sound of the rhythmic swooshing of catalogue cards being read one by one—all 613,480 of them—through a high-speed scanner. Scanning is but the first step in the complicated process of converting the cards into data base entries, but as it is a process that takes best advantage of technology, it is a highly 'do-able' one.

As we continue our tour we pass a couple of staff members hurrying off to yet another meeting of the group which is finalizing plans for a complete upgrading of our computer systems into a modern, robust, Internet-connected network. They look harried but happy, and we learn that the urgency of the meeting is the result of a letter the Society has just received—somewhat out of the blue—from one of our favorite foundations, inviting us to apply for a \$500,000 grant for any technology needs we might have. Ah, money to turn our dreams into much-needed reality.

As we turn into the acquisitions department, again we encounter harried faces: here the staff races against the clock daily, for the arrival of every bookseller's catalogue is the beginning of a race to determine those items which we are wanting and to place our order before some other library or private collector does. We find Nancy Burkett seated at the acquisitions table, surrounded by the many collection gifts that have just been received, but the

worry on her face belies her pleasure at such bounty. She has before her a print-out from the accounting department of the status of her book-buying funds. It's obvious that she's juggling immediate buying opportunities against the near certainty that opportunities that will appear next week or next month will be equally attractive. If a 'big ticket' item is in question, perhaps she will turn to one of our generous donors for a special gift. The real toll on her funds, however, is taken by the constant stream of \$500 books and the near flood of \$15 pamphlets. These purchases are essential to the continued strength of the library—they are our bread and butter, our meat and potatoes—but the grocery budget, though it is derived from a well-invested endowment for acquisitions, is under constant strain. In the arena of acquisitions, there are simply too many times when the needs and desires of the Society could outreach our financial means, were it not for Nancy's careful stewardship of her book funds. So let's leave her to her juggling; I hate to see her cry.

From here, let's take the path followed by the new acquisitions themselves. Having been recorded for acknowledgement, these huge volumes of historic newspapers are being loaded on book trucks for transfer up to the stacks. AAS is one of the few libraries in the country still in a position to maintain historical newspapers in their original form, most other libraries having turned now to microfilm alone. These volumes have been transferred to us by a sister institution that simply didn't have the space for them, but as we reach the newspaper storage area upstairs it seems uncertain that we do either. With ingenuity, determination, and broad backs, however, the staff of the newspaper department has figured out how to shoehorn one more shipment in, and the curator is off again on his continuing quest to save other newspapers from the fate of the dumpster. Were we to be standing instead in the graphic arts department or in manuscripts, the tale would be the same: extraordinary new acquisitions, little space in which to put them.

On our way down the stairs, we pass a group of staff with a con-

sultant in tow. They've spent the morning in the basement among the boilers and air handlers and now, still dressed in coveralls, they are heading up to the roof to check out the condensers. The visitor—an expert in creating ideal environments for rare books libraries and museums and in protecting such treasures from the threat of fire and other accidental damage—is comparing his notes on relative humidity readings in the stacks with the records maintained by the conservator and the building superintendent as we pass them. The Society, long recognizing the importance of state-of-the-art environmental systems, installed ours years ago. I hear the consultant exclaim that he has never seen systems so well maintained, but his praise notwithstanding, the systems *are* still twenty-to-thirty years old. He describes the kind of systems he recommends for new state-of-the-art facilities as they continue their climb.

We arrive down in the administrative area, which at this particular moment resembles Grand Central Station. The new stationery and business cards—sporting a graphic look that is at once both fresh and respectful of our historical collections—have just arrived, and many folks are clustered around to ooh and ahh. The runner from another printer arrives to pick up the proofs of the forthcoming members' directory, which we have been at work on for months and hope to have in the members' hands very soon. The business office is a bit busier than in the past, as well, because we have now given department heads at the Society a more active role in financial management, and they are regularly seen dropping by to approve invoices, check on budgets, and make certain that credit for grants and earned income is being properly posted to their accounts. I would suggest that we sit in my office and chat a bit, but planning files, construction proposals, architectural plans, and preliminary models litter every available surface, hinting at what has been consuming a lion's share of my attention for the past year or so: planning for the architectural future of the Society. We could ask to use John Keenum's office, but we dare not interrupt his concentration as he finalizes yet another funding

proposal to be submitted in time to meet an impending deadline.

So, let's take our chances that a quieter place to talk might be afforded us over at the Goddard-Daniels House. Crossing Salisbury Street is never easy, and, just think, staff members of the Academic and Public Programs Division have to do it many times a day as they shuttle back and forth between their offices and Antiquarian Hall. As we wait for a break in the traffic, I hear an all too familiar sound: the distinctive wail of an approaching fire truck making its way through the traffic on Park Avenue, a sound that never fails to raise my anxieties until I am certain that 185 Salisbury is not the truck's destination. Like every other head of the Society before me—from Isaiah Thomas on—I worry about the risk of fire in our library. As they did, we have remained vigilant in our fire prevention efforts and in the maintenance of our fire detection systems. But unlike those who worried before me, I am in the fortunate position of being able to say that, at last, the state of the fire-protection art has progressed to the point that near fail-safe systems can be installed in libraries without running the unnecessary risk of accidental water discharge that might once have been almost as destructive to books and papers as a fire itself. Improving the protection of irreplaceable collections that have been placed in our care for posterity—that is the chief goal that is driving our building planning efforts, along with our need for increased shelving capacity.

With the fire truck safely past—and my anxieties abated—we make it across to the Goddard-Daniels House. But why did I think that we would find quiet solitude here? Proofs of the first of five volumes of *A History of the Book in America*, which we are publishing jointly with the Cambridge University Press, have just arrived and must be returned quickly if the September publication date is to be met. I see John Hench is in his office interviewing a new fellow who has just arrived to take up a residence. This year we have added a number of new fellowships to our offerings, including the Richard F. and Virginia P. Morgan Fellowship (for the study of Ohio history) and the Reese Fellowship (in bibliogra-

phy), these in addition to the other, newer fellowship programs that have only recently 'come into their own'—the Mellon Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence, the Mellon Post-Dissertation Fellow, and the Legacy Fellowship (each in their second years), the Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow and the Joyce A. Tracy Fellowship (both in their third), and the highly successful series of fellowships we have offered for the past four years for artists and writers and for which we are now seeking endowment funding to continue. In another room, a lively planning session for our curriculum development project—being undertaken collaboratively by the Society, Old Sturbridge Village, and the Worcester Historical Museum—is going full tilt, but at last we find a quiet corner in the upstairs music room in which we can talk.

And what is it I have brought you here to say? Just a bit of news that (as many of you already know), the American Antiquarian Society is launching a \$12 million, five-year capital campaign, and that we are pleased to announce that as of this date we have secured \$4.4 million of that total. The goals of the campaign will come as no surprise to you after our little tour: (1) to improve protection of the collections and to expand our collection storage capacity, (2) to increase endowment funds for acquisitions, and (3) to create endowments to ensure that outreach efforts, such as our fellowships for artists and writers, can continue.

The plans for this campaign are rooted in a comprehensive long-range planning exercise undertaken over the past two years by Council and staff under Chairman Bob Baron's leadership. Planning for the building is actively under way at this time, and we have secured the services of the architects of Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson, and Abbott of Boston, well-known for their expertise in library design. The problems presented by our building are complex, owing largely to the multi-tier stack structures that were used, not only in the original 1910 building, but also in the 1924 and 1950 additions. We have every confidence, however, that the architects and advisors with which we are working are among the best in the country.

My own confidence that the campaign will reach its goal of \$12 million is equally high. The generous responses we have received in our first six months of early solicitations have underscored my confidence, not so much in my ability as salesman, but in the ability of the cause and of the institution to sell itself, to continue to earn the respect, the commitment, and the generous support of those who believe in Isaiah Thomas's founding vision and those who share our belief—and his—that by collecting and preserving history for our progeny, we pay a debt to those who preceded us.

Ellen S. Dunlap

1999–2000 FELLOWS AND RESEARCH ASSISTANTS
AND THEIR PROJECTS

*American Antiquarian Society—
National Endowment for the Humanities Fellows*

Marilyn Baseler, assistant professor of history, University of Texas at Austin, "Strangers within our gates": America's Immigrants, 1776–1820'; Woody Holton, assistant professor of history, Bloomsburg University, 'Republics of Hope and the Empire of Despair: A Social Interpretation of the United States Constitution.'

Mellon Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence

Karen Halttunen, professor of history, University of California, Davis, 'Jacob's Pillows: Natural History and Memory in the Making of New England.'

Mellon Post-Dissertation Fellow

Timothy W. Marr, assistant professor of English, Western Connecticut State University, 'Imagining Ishmael: Studies of Islamic Orientalism in America from the Puritans to Melville.'

Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Helen Horowitz, professor of American studies, Smith College, 'Sexual Representation and Censorship in the United States, 1830-80.'

AAS-American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Fellowships

Jonathan D. Sassi, assistant professor of history, College of Staten Island/CUNY, 'Clerical Communities and the Religious Public Sphere.'

AAS-Northeast Modern Language Association Fellowship

Philip Gould, assistant professor of English, Brown University, "'A Barbaric Trade": Commerce, Antislavery, and Cultures of Manners in Anglo-America, 1770-1830'; David M. Stewart, assistant professor of English, National Central University, Chung-Li, 'George Thompson and Men's Reading.'

Stephen Botein Fellowships

Anne Baker, visiting assistant professor of English, Reed College, 'Geography Schoolbooks and Nation Formation in the Antebellum United States'; Mark A. Peterson, assistant professor of history, University of Iowa, 'The Mather Family and the Construction of an Atlantic Protestant International.'

Legacy Fellowship

Elizabeth Reis, adjunct assistant professor of history, University of Oregon, 'Heaven Help Us: Angels, Gender, and American Religions.'

Richard F. and Virginia P. Morgan Fellowship

Michael A. Simoncelli, Ph.D. candidate in history, College of William and Mary, 'Becoming Northern: The Clash of Regional Cultures and the Creation of a Northern Identity in Ohio, 1770-1877.'

*American Antiquarian Society**Kate B. and Hall J. Peterson Fellowships*

Christopher Grasso, associate professor of history, College of William and Mary, 'Skepticism and American Faith: The Early Nineteenth Century'; Catherine A. Haulman, Ph.D. candidate in history, Cornell University, 'The Empire's New Clothes: The Politics of Dress in America, 1765-1820'; Graham Russell Hodges, professor of history, Colgate University, 'David Ruggles: Black Apostle of Freedom'; Catherine E. Kelly, assistant professor of history, University of Oklahoma, 'Things Useful and Ornamental: Gender, Culture, and Gentility in the Bourgeois Republic'; Cindy R. Lobel, Ph.D. candidate in history, CUNY Graduate Center, 'Consuming Classes: Food, Eating, and Images of Consumption in the United States, 1790-1860'; Kathryn E. Mudgett, Ph.D. candidate in English, Northeastern University, 'Dana, Melville, Justice Story, and the Law and Literature of the Sea'; Laura Schiavo, Ph.D. candidate in American studies, George Washington University, "'A Collection of Endless Extent and Beauty": Stereographs, Perception, Taste, and the American Middle Class'; Robert E. Wright, visiting assistant professor, Intellectual Heritage Program, Temple University, 'Early American Finance: Revolution, Integration, Expansion'; Kariann A. Yokota, Ph.D. candidate in history, University of California, Los Angeles, 'A Culture of Insecurity: The Early Republic as a Post-Colonial Nation, 1789-1830'; Rafia Zafar, associate professor of English, Washington University, "'And Called it Macaroni": Eating, Writing, Becoming American.'

Reese Fellowship

Thomas Augst, assistant professor of English, University of Minnesota, 'Making Society Out of Books: Character, Composure, and the Rhetoric of Market Culture.'

Joyce A. Tracy Fellowship

Liam Riordan, assistant professor of history, University of Maine at Orono, 'Newspapers and the Local Meaning of the Nation in the Delaware Valley.'

Research Associates

Cynthia Hamilton, subject leader, American Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, 'The Finest Sentiments: Slavery, Reform, and the Cultural Politics of Benevolence'; James A. Newton, chairman, history and social sciences, Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, 'Political Prints of the Age of Jackson.'

Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest

Creative and Performing Artist Fellows

Nicole Cooley, poet, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, toward a book of poems about the Salem Witch Trials, *The Afflicted Girls*; Jeanne Mackin, novelist, Ithaca, New York, toward a novel, *Adam's Hunger: The Lost Journal of Brillat-Savarin's Travels in the New World*; Sarah Messer, creative non-fiction writer and poet, Madison, Wisconsin, toward a non-fiction memoir, *Red House*, about her family home in Marshfield, Massachusetts; Cassandra Smith, doll artist, Chicago, Illinois, development of new doll and costume designs and accompanying background stories about free persons of color and runaway slaves.

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