

Report of the Council

APRIL 20, 1996

AS A STATUS REPORT on the Society, the Report of the Council is presented twice each year, at the members' meetings in October and April and in the printed proceedings that follow. Although called the Report of the *Council*, I think we all recognize it as the president's chance to place her own spin on the ball—to place the news of the Society in the larger context of questions over 'where are we going?'; 'why are we headed in this direction?'; and 'what resources will get us to our desired goal?'

Indeed it is matters of mission, momentum, and support that I want to address this afternoon. I have chosen to do so, however, not in my own words, but through those written by others. I have prepared two letters to read to you today—actually I've quilted them together from scraps snipped from real letters we have received over the course of the past twelve months. I think they will provide you testimony as to the status of the Society far more vivid and interesting than any I might write.

But I cannot resist the opportunity to put my own spin on the letters before I read them to you. For the past two-and-one-half years I have been talking in these council reports about our efforts to enhance the public dimension of AAS—to serve new audiences, to enhance access by the use of new technologies, and to strengthen efforts to increase awareness of the Society, its library, and its many fine program offerings. In each of these reports, however, I have also tried to underscore our continued commitment to the basic mission of the Society as a national research library of American history.

We are seeking to broaden our audience for two obvious reasons. First, we want to be sure that we are serving all who might

profitably conduct research in the library and who, through their writings, teachings, and artistic expression, will contribute to a greater public understanding of our nation's past. And secondly, we must foster a greater awareness of and appreciation for AAS among those who can aid and abet our cause, even among those who will never personally use AAS as the excellent research facility it is meant to be. Programs such as our concerts of historical music and our *History Show 1857*—which has to date been broadcast in more than forty radio markets across the country—build awareness of AAS. In no way, however, should one mistake this new agenda of presenting history in a popular form as supplanting our continuing mission of collecting and preserving documents which record and reflect our history. Nor should one assume that we have lost sight of our primary function as a research facility to make this documentary history available for study and analysis.

One might well ask, on the other hand, how well we are doing in maintaining our commitments to serve our traditional audience of professional historians, professors, and graduate students. Are our attempts to enhance our public dimension taking any negative toll on our ability to serve these core constituents? Here's a sampling of what our academic fellows have told us recently:

When I applied to the American Antiquarian Society for a Peterson Fellowship, I was familiar with the Society's reputation as an unparalleled resource for scholars of New England history. . . . My expectations were more than fulfilled. It was one of the most fruitful and productive experiences in my career to date. I came away not only with abundant material for my project but also with numerous ideas for projects I hadn't previously imagined.

Upon my arrival in Worcester, I was immediately impressed with the efficiency of the fellowship program. Caroline Sloat gave me a tour of the library and went out of her way to make me feel at home, introducing me to everyone from the receptionists to the president of the society. Each one of the staff members I met showed sincere interest in my research and offered helpful and valuable suggestions for avenues to pursue.

Early on it became apparent that I faced a problem unlike any I had encountered previously at other archives—AAS had so much material . . . that I would have to carefully focus my data collection. With the help of the online catalogue, I was able to instantly locate 148 books, 20 periodicals and 17 manuscript references relating to [my narrow topic]. I was amazed to find that AAS had nearly every resource I could want . . . all in superb condition and readily accessible.

Most importantly for the longer run, AAS opened up my horizons for what to imagine might exist in the way of sources. I did not know, for instance, that insurance periodicals appeared on the scene as early as the 1850s. Nor did I realize the richness of the broadside as a printed form. The afternoon I spent in the graphic arts division introduced me to a range of nineteenth-century ephemeral items—such as menus—that I simply had no idea could still be found.

To offer but one example: Gigi Barnhill brought to my attention a collection of broadsides, among them one for the 1833–34 lecture season announcing that Judge Samuel M. Burnside would speak to the lyceum (in Worcester) on March 27, 1834. The official record books of the lyceum (located at AAS) confirmed that Burnside did indeed speak to a ‘full house’ that evening on the subject of the political and moral dangers threatening the nation . . . from the spread of Roman Catholicism. Turning to the papers of Samuel Burnside in the Society . . . , I found the complete texts of three lyceum lectures written by the Worcester jurist . . . including the 1834 lecture. . . . Finally, with the help of Tom Knoles, I was able to locate the diary of a young man who was in attendance at the lyceum lecture that evening. William Austin Goddard commented frankly on Mr. Burnside’s lecture in his journal, recalling the statistics which Burnside presented and pondering the future of the nation if Burnside’s prediction proved true. To have all of these resources available in one location is unprecedented in my experience, and made it possible for me to recapture the atmosphere of the lyceum more completely than ever before. Findings like the one I describe are only possible at AAS.

More than the tremendous collections themselves, what made my tenure at AAS truly exceptional was the people. I found AAS to be much more than an archive. It is a vibrant community of scholars, researchers, enthusiasts, and advocates for the study of early American culture. The numerous conversations I had with other scholars in residence made this experience the epitome of what ‘fellowship’ should be about. Staff members and researchers directed me to still other

scholars whose work would be of interest to me, both in the Worcester area and beyond.

Often a shared meal at the Goddard-Daniels House or a coffee break in the staff room led me to new sources, both primary and secondary, to names of people I should contact, and to new ways of thinking about the material I had already collected. Even after my fellowship had officially ended . . . Joanne Chaison continued to search out references in the collections for me, forwarding photocopies of these sources along with follow-up letters.

I hope the Society will be able to find the means to continue to fund the new secondary school fellowship program. The fellows in this program were wonderful colleagues. More importantly, I think it was invaluable for all of the University-level fellows to hear from the secondary school teachers about what is happening in those very schools which are providing us with our students. University faculty like to complain about what they see as their students' lack of preparation. The forum that AAS provided for a dialogue across this boundary resulted not only in a degree of empathy for the budgetary and other battles being waged in the secondary schools, but in shared ideas about the teaching of history and literature that inspired all involved. The teacher fellows brought an important pedagogical presence to the reading room that constantly reminded me that academic research serves educational goals and not the other way around.

I will remember fondly the tenure I spent at the American Antiquarian Society for years to come. The members of the staff displayed a rare combination of friendliness, courtesy, knowledge, and professionalism, that places the Society at the pinnacle of repositories from Mississippi to Boston in which I have studied.

And a young graduate student appended to her letter this final note:

To have made these discoveries in the first months of my dissertation research was only possible because of AAS. My colleagues and advisors have all warned me that I have had the best first, and I am now spoiled. I know that I shall be back for more. Thank you for this opportunity.

This is high praise indeed—especially coming from professors (whom some stereotype as 'jaded') and graduate students (known more often as 'cynical'), but praise that is altogether standard among all who travel to AAS and enter into the circle of learning and research that flourishes here.

We are now beginning our second round of new fellowships for artists, writers, journalists, and others whose work—intended for a general, nonacademic audience—might be informed and enlivened by research in AAS collections. What has been their experience? And indeed what, you may be asking yourself, would a poet or a dancer do for a month at AAS? Here is their testimony, presented first in the words of a dancer:

The residency was fulfilling and fruitful in ways that I had not imagined. The afternoon I arrived, I was given a brief tour around the Goddard-Daniels House and the library. Everyone I was introduced to knew of my arrival and was enthusiastic to help me begin researching for my project. I have been away from an academic setting for ten years, but Joanne Chaison helped me get accustomed to using the library resources. I felt comfortable and independent enough to delve right into my work with few stumbling blocks or frustrations.

Having a carrel was one of the greatest benefits of my residency; time and solitude to think and work, but also having immediate access to the staff and resources. My lifestyle in Brooklyn offers me little opportunity to work undisturbed or to have a wellspring of information all in one location.

I chose to be in residence in February and March because it is usually the coldest time of year and I knew the housing accommodations were right across the street from the library. For me, this meant no frustrating commuting, carrying heavy books and bags, or the regular hassles of subways and traffic in New York. Lunchtime at the Goddard-Daniels House gave me a chance to get to know and talk with the other fellows, researchers, and staff members. There was a perfect balance of privacy and community.

Being in residence for a month took away the pressure usually associated with fellowships or commissions granted to artists. There is usually the bargain of an immediate performance or a completed work. Many organizations place an emphasis on result rather than process. This however was not how I felt at the Antiquarian Society. I felt supported and understood in a process that did not force me to meet a deadline with a formal performance. There was genuine interest in my research topic and my life as a dancer.

A few days before the end of my residency, I did a lunchtime colloquium at the Goddard-Daniels house. There were about 26 people from the staff and local community present. . . . It was an informal

setting and I was free to structure the [hour] as I pleased. Being a performer, the idea of presenting myself to a group of scholars was somewhat nervewracking, so I used a format that was more familiar to me. I presented my research in a lecture-demonstration format, drawing from my notes to reveal how text can be turned into movement and the different tools a choreographer uses to find and create movement.

After my colloquium, I was approached by Eileen Rodgers to recreate my lecture-demonstration for public access TV. This was a wonderful way for me to document and preserve what I did while in residence. [This format] is also something I can use for some of the outreach and nondance venues I perform in (i.e., schools, libraries, community centers, prisons, homeless and battered women's shelters).

This type of fellowship is . . . unique in the dance world, but it can serve as an essential part of the process of creating art and performance from American history.

During my time at AAS I also had the privilege to get to know some of the preeminent scholars of early America and the republic. I look forward to calling on them for the expert advice that I'm sure I will continue to need as I move ahead on my project.

And a creative-writer fellow adds:

In short, this was a superb opportunity for me, for which I am so grateful as almost to be sentimental.

While I consulted various genealogies and books of vital records in efforts to track down small facts and family details about certain individuals [involved in the Salem witchcraft incidents], one in particular was surprisingly useful [as it included the] complete text of the will of Thomas Putnam, father of the Thomas [Putnam who] was a key player in the trials. Though described in secondary sources for its functional significance, the will is never quoted in full—and why would it be? It is a long and potentially tedious rehearsing of the boundaries of the land itself. Yet its great black oak and its brooks and bridges and fallen red oaks near a pile of stones all are rich details for me [as a writer].

While the language of the books is vital to me . . . , the language alone I could have found on microfilm, but there is no substitute for holding the books while reading them, for turning their pages, for experiencing directly their size and weight and feel, the texture of their paper, and Babette Gehnrich and Amanda Hegarty were generous in helping me imagine the material character of the bindings of these little books as they must have been when they were new.

And these further comments from a poet fellow:

The object of my research—to use gathered facts and background information in the writing of a book-length series of poems and prose pieces—also helped dictate the direction my note-taking and online searches would take. Like any good historical detective, I was eager to follow logical paths from one fact or rumor to the next. But because poetry is as much about the language we live in as it is about the lives we live, I also needed to follow those less logical paths that meander through verbal associations or serendipitous coincidence.

The end of my residency came too soon, and I was sorry to leave. Since my return [home], I've found myself saying 'When I was in Worcester . . .' the way other people say 'When I was in Paris. . . .'

Thank you all again for making this program possible. Keep it going! It was hard work and a great pleasure.

I said earlier that it was matters of mission, momentum, and support that I wanted to address. As you can see, our sense of mission remains sharply focussed. We are—and intend to remain—nothing less than a great research library. Our momentum toward enhancing our public dimension is emerging, hectically judging from the enthusiastic response of our staff and happily judging from the feedback from our constituents.

As we build these mechanisms that we hope will lead to a broader base of public support for the good works of the Society, we must take special note of all the support we are receiving now. Our fellows, staff, and I want to join together to express thanks to not only those who make the fellowships possible—the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Lila Wallace–Readers' Digest Fund, and those like the Petersons who have established endowments at AAS to support fellowships—but also to all of our members and supporters whose selfless generosity makes it possible for us to acquire, catalogue, and preserve the collections for others to use. The fellows—through their writings, their teachings, and their performances—will repay your investment in them.

Ellen S. Dunlap

1996-97 AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY FELLOWS

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

Paula Bennett, associate professor of English, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 'Dissenting Angels: The Emergence of Modern Subjectivity in American Women's Poetry, 1850-1900'; Barbara E. Lacey, associate professor of history, St. Joseph College, 'Religious Imagery Transformed: The Eighteenth-Century American Illustrated Imprint'; Philip D. Morgan, professor of history, Florida State University, 'The World of an Anglo-Jamaican in the Eighteenth Century'; John Nerone, associate professor, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, 'U.S. Newspapers from the Revolution to the Industrial Revolution.'

Kate B. and Hall J. Peterson Fellows

David J. Anthony, Ph.D. candidate in English, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, 'Scandalous Aesthetics: Masculine Emotion and the Birth of the Public Sphere in Antebellum America'; Jennifer Jordan Baker, Ph.D. candidate in English, University of Pennsylvania, 'Currency of Words: Paper Money and Textual Representation in Early America'; David W. Blight, associate professor of history and Black studies, Amherst College, 'Reunion and Race: the Civil War in American Memory, 1870-1915'; Paul W. Foos, Ph.D. candidate in history, Yale University, 'Mexican Wars, 1835-1853: Manifest Destiny and American Society'; Joanne Barrie Freeman, Ph.D. candidate in history, University of Virginia, 'Affairs of Honor: Political Combat and Political Character in the Early Republic'; Megan Haley, Ph.D. candidate in American studies, College of William and Mary, 'Pest Control Strategies and Their Social Implications in the Chesapeake Area, 1600-1800'; Melissa Homestead, Ph.D. candidate in English, University of Pennsylvania, "'When I Can Read My Title Clear": Harriet Beecher Stowe and Copyright'; Gregory

Maertz, associate professor of English, St. John's University, 'Goethe's Translators, Critics, and Readers in Nineteenth-Century New England'; Timothy W. Marr, Ph.D. candidate in American studies, Yale University, 'Islamic Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century America'; Ben Mutschler, Ph.D. candidate in history, Columbia University, 'Cultures of Sickness, Cultures of Health: Illness in New England, 1690-1820'; Michael Sappol, Ph.D. candidate in history, Columbia University, 'Singing the Body Electric'; Rachel M. Wheeler, Ph.D. candidate in history, Yale University, 'Forgotten Conversations: The Indian-European Negotiation of Religion in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast'; Sergei I. Zhuk, associate professor of history, Dnepropetrovsk University, "'Brothers in Divorce": Quakers' Attitudes Toward Sectarian Religious Groups of Early America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.'

American Antiquarian Society-

American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Fellows

Geoffrey Plank, associate professor of history, University of Cincinnati, 'The Culture of Conquest: Acadia or Nova Scotia in the British Colonial Imagination, 1690-1759'; Rosemarie Zagarrri, associate professor of history, George Mason University, 'Gender and the First Party System.'

American Historical Print Collectors Society Fellow

Cynthia Packard, lecturer of Afro-American studies, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 'The Black Image in Photography, Art and the Popular Press, 1850-1876.'

Stephen Botein Fellows

John Evelev, recent Ph.D. in English, Duke University, "'Tolerable Entertainment": Herman Melville, the Literary Profession, and the Cultural Life of Antebellum New York'; David Paul Nord, professor of journalism and American studies, Indiana

University, 'The Religious Roots of Mass Media in America, 1800-1860.'

Research Associates

Deborah L. Madsen, reader in English and director of American studies, University of Leicester, 'Puritan Ancestors of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Thomas Pynchon'; Steven C. Bullock, associate professor of history, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 'The Making of American Gentility: Culture, Class, and Power in Provincial America.'

Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Fellows

Creative and Performing Artists, Writers, and Journalists

Robert J. Begiebing, novelist, Newfields, N.H., 'The Adventures of Allegra Fullerton, Artist; or a True Account of Startling and Amusing Incidents from Itinerant Life'; Catherine Gammon, novelist, Pittsburgh, Pa., the Salem witchcraft trials; John Lee, playwright, Los Angeles, Calif., a play about the nineteenth-century orphan trains; Aubrey Wertheim, playwright, Oberlin, Ohio, for 'The Genuine Article,' a one-woman show about the columnist Fanny Fern; Kimmika L.H. Williams, poet, Darby, Penna., the life and times of the African-American poet, Lucy Terry; Andrea E. Woods, dancer, Brooklyn, N.Y., 'Ballad of the Black Cowboy,' a music and dance performance piece.

Teachers and Librarians in Grades K-12

Sandra Bornstein, Columbia Grammar and Preparatory School, New York, N.Y., American reaction to Darwin's theory of evolution; John Deaderick, Pliocene Ridge High School, North San Juan, Calif., images and ideas of the American frontier on the professional stage, 1825-75; Jocelyn Lee, Sequoia Union High School, Redwood City, Calif., 'Seneca Falls to Suffrage: A Study of the Early Women's Movement in America, 1840-1920'; Joy Reeves, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Ill., indentured servants in colonial America.

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