

The Impact on the Institution

JOHN B. HENCH

HERE ARE A FEW VIGNETTES of life at the American Antiquarian Society over the last twenty-five years. The AAS head of reader services introduces two visiting researchers to each other. Nothing terribly unusual about that. Except that both of these individuals were faculty members at the same Big Ten university, one in English, the other in the history department. Their offices were in the same building on that Midwestern campus, one right above the other, in fact. Both came to AAS to work on projects that fell within the scope of a then-relatively new field of interdisciplinary scholarship, called the 'history of the book.' Posterity, in fact, has even counted them as pioneers in the field. But they had not actually met each other until this occasion under the generous dome of Antiquarian Hall, hundreds of miles away from the so-called 'community of learning' that was their home base. Vignette number 2. A scholar from Montana arrives at AAS to pursue her research on toys and games in early America. After hearing her describe her project at a meeting of the staff, the Society's director and librarian suggests she might wish to take a look at our holdings of amateur newspapers, a genre that the visitor had never heard of and an AAS collection that had hardly ever been consulted. The visitor dips into the collection, is struck by the research potential of the material as examples of the cultural production of adolescents, and, accordingly, shifts her work plan drastically—and ultimately very productively. Here's a third episode. A staff member working on

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one of the Society's National Endowment for the Humanities-funded computerized cataloguing projects puts the finishing touches on several hours worth of imaginative and painstaking detective work and description and enters the record into the Society's cataloguing data base. This record is another worthy addition to the data base, one fully up to the Society's high cataloguing standards. Several days later she learns that a reader in the library has used the record to locate an item crucial to his research. Fast forward again. Members of the AAS Department of Academic and Public Programs need to draw up a list of potential leaders of a future AAS annual undergraduate American Studies Seminar. Fortunately, coming up with the names of top-notch scholars and teachers who are thoroughly familiar with the AAS collections and eager to help turns out to be a snap. Another scene. It's December and the mailboxes of many AAS staff members are overflowing with holiday greetings from young graduate students and university professors from all around the world, all of whom have spent extended periods of time at AAS and gotten to know the staff as friends as well as colleagues. One final vignette. A Ph.D. candidate from a major southern university spends several weeks doing work at AAS. While here, he meets one of the Society's staff members. In time, they fall in love and become engaged to be married in a ceremony that will take place in the Society's Goddard-Daniels House.

All of these stories are true—only the names have been concealed to protect the innocent and the guilty. All of these episodes of mind and heart happened in the context of the Society's program of visiting research fellowships. These and many other stories help define the impact of the fellowship program on AAS as an institution and on the individuals who work here.

Make no mistake about it. No other undertaking of the American Antiquarian Society over the last generation has been as important in the life of this institution as the fellowship program, the silver anniversary of which we celebrate here today.

The origins of the AAS fellowship program lie in the efforts of

Marcus A. McCorison, after he became director in 1967, to establish AAS as a player in the national arena of humanities research. In 1969 he developed a major exhibition of many of the Society's treasures, called 'A Society's Chief Joys,' first shown in this reading room and then sent traveling to three major metropolitan areas around the country where bibliophiles and scholars would see it and have their eyes opened up to the gems to be mined in Worcester. The sites were the Grolier Club in New York City, the Newberry Library in Chicago, and the UCLA library in Los Angeles. This stunning traveling show may be considered to be the Society's debut on the national scene. If this was McCorison's effort to take the Society's collections to the country, the fellowship program was designed to bring the academic nation to 185 Salisbury Street in Worcester.

The Society's Council, or governing board, in 1970 authorized McCorison's plan for the establishment of a visiting research fellowship program at AAS. The idea was not one that originated with the AAS director. A few other fellowship programs were already in existence at such kindred institutions as the Huntington Library in California and The Newberry Library in Chicago, institutions that McCorison admired. He sensed, however, that AAS might need such a program even more than the colleague institutions did, meaning that at the outset it might take more of an effort to attract scholars to a place like Worcester—only the *second* largest city in New England, after all—than to such metropolises as the Windy City and greater LA. Once established, the AAS fellowship program has itself become a model for many similar programs that have flowered at other libraries, both independent and university-based.

The first fellowships were awarded for tenure during 1972-73. These short-term awards supported residence at AAS for periods ranging from one to three months in length. Financial support that first year came from the U.S. Steel Foundation. Stipends were set at a maximum of \$1,500 for three months, or an average of \$500 per month. That first class consisted of six individu-

als—Professors Gaylord P. Albaugh of McMaster University, Richard Crawford of the University of Michigan, Michael H. Harris of the University of Kentucky, Mason I. Lowance, Jr., of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Georgianne McVay of PMC Colleges, and Perry Viles of Lyndon State College. Two of those—Albaugh and Crawford—later published the fruits of their research through the AAS book publishing program. Both projects had been under way for many years. They turned out to be two of the largest, most complex, and rewarding publishing ventures with which we've ever been associated. In the second year McCorison used income from a recently established endowment provided by a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support the stipends, administrative costs, and overhead for the fellowships. For 1974-75, a new source of fellowship funds became available, and the object of the Mellon endowment was shifted to the support of the AAS Department of Graphic Arts. The new funding derived from income on an endowment created by a challenge grant from the Fred Harris Daniels Foundation. This became the principal support of the short-term fellowships until 1981, when the death of Eleanor Goddard Daniels caused ownership of her family home, across the street from the library at 190 Salisbury Street, to transfer to the Society and the Daniels Endowment to be directed toward the maintenance of the house as an AAS property. Since then, numerous sources of funding have been used to keep the short-term fellowship program alive and growing. For the last fourteen years, the bedrock of short-term fellowship support has come from a series of endowment gifts made by a family foundation through the good auspices of Kate B. Peterson and her late husband, Hall J. Peterson, a member of AAS. Naming fellowships has been an appropriate opportunity to memorialize persons closely associated with AAS, including our friend and colleague, Steve Botein, who held an AAS-NEH Fellowship in the mid-'80s, and Joyce Tracy, our much-loved curator of newspapers, who assisted so many fellows in the twenty-three years she served AAS before her death last year.

The monthly stipend for short-term fellowships has risen to all of \$950 per month. Using one of the all-time best-selling AAS publications, a 1992 pamphlet entitled *How Much Is That in Real Money: A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* by John J. McCusker, as the source of necessary information, I calculate that the original monthly stipend of \$500 would be the equivalent of \$1,925 today. It is safe to say that no one has ever gotten rich on an AAS short-term fellowship! And, AAS Trustees, please note that fellowship stipends is one budget line that the Society's administration has kept *well* below the rate of inflation!

A major *qualitative* expansion of the AAS fellowship program occurred with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which enabled AAS to offer long-term grants for the first time in 1976. A total of eleven additional grants from NEH since then have kept this program flourishing. More recently, a major gift of half a million dollars from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation enables us to appoint additional long-term postdoctoral fellows over a four-year period. Some of these funds will go to support scholars doing research at AAS for a minimum of nine months. Non-resident foreign nationals are eligible for these Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellowships, as they are not for the NEH-funded awards. Another category funded by this recent grant is the Mellon Post-Dissertation Fellowship. This aims to bring to AAS for at least twelve months a scholar no more than three years past conferral of the doctorate to extend his or her research and revise the doctoral dissertation for publication. As a condition of accepting the fellowship, the successful applicant must agree to offer the completed manuscript for publication in a new historical monograph series sponsored jointly by AAS and Cambridge University Press. These long-term fellowships have been of great importance to the program, for scholars who are here for extended periods provide continuity and mentoring to many of the short-term grantees who come and then go in a month or two.

In 1982 we added another category of visiting scholar to our offerings—that of research associate. These are individuals holding other fellowships or sabbatical leaves from their own institutions (or former fellows) who need to come to AAS for a minimum of one month's research. Research Fellows effectively receive the privileges of fellowship at AAS, but are paid no stipend. We added this program in order to try to achieve, inexpensively, a critical mass of scholars to be in residence at a time when we had far fewer stipendiary fellowships to offer than we have now. This program too has been a success. Thad Tate, then the director of the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Virginia, was the first of many distinguished RAs, as we call them, to spend a month or more on Salisbury Street.

Also recently, we have ventured outside our customary niche of academic scholars and, with the munificent help of an omnibus grant from The Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, established two quite different types of fellowship. One supported work in our library by schoolteachers and librarians in grades K-12, the other by people we call, for lack of a better term, creative and performing artists and writers. More about these fellows later.

Who are these individuals who left their homes, families, classrooms, studios, faculty colleagues, and students to come to the Heart of the Commonwealth for periods ranging from one month to a full year?

Since 1972, 403 individuals have received a total of 450 appointments as AAS visiting fellows or research associates. Forty-five of these individuals have served as fellow or RA more than once—a few even three times. Of all these appointments, 375 were academic fellowships, 42 research associate positions, 18 teacher fellowships, and 15 artist fellowships. Of the academic fellowships, 65 have been long-term—64 AAS-NEH fellowships and 1 Mellon Postdoctoral Research fellowship—and 310 have been short-term. I estimate the total amount of stipends awarded our fellows over the twenty-five years to be close to \$1.5 million. Biographical information on our fellows and research associates,

including lists of publications stemming from their fellowship research, appears in the *Directory of American Antiquarian Society Fellows and Research Associates, 1972-1997*, which we recently revised as part of the anniversary observances. An on-line edition of the directory will shortly be mounted on the AAS gopher site (gopher://mark.mwa.org).

Our fellows in all categories and RAs have come from 37 states, the District of Columbia, and 12 foreign countries. Our academic fellows and RAs have ranged in age or experience from promising young graduate students to eminent senior professors holding endowed chairs. Approximately 38 percent of them were in the senior ranks of the profession—associate or full professor. Another 31 percent or so were graduate students at work on their Ph.D. dissertations. The senior staff have from time to time debated setting restrictions on the number of Ph.D. candidates awarded fellowships. I am glad that we have resisted imposing such limits. Many of the scholars who have held AAS fellowships as graduate students have gone on to distinguished careers in the academic world. The AAS fellowship made a big difference to them at a crucial stage of their careers. Many have remained in close contact with us over the years and some have sent us their own students as researchers or fellowship applicants. Many of our more recent graduate student fellows are, we predict, well on their way to equally stellar careers. We love having postdoctoral scholars as fellows, and we love having graduate students, with all their energy and enthusiasm, here as well.

The Society's library is a library of history, but the collections are so broad and deep within our chosen field of America through 1876 that historians of all stripes and from a wide variety of academic disciplines and departments can find crucially important material here. The rolls of former academic fellows and research associates, accordingly, contain people from many different academic departments. Members of history departments—not surprisingly—head the list, with about 44 percent of the total. Members of English departments—probably also not very surprisingly—



Fig. 1. Some of the books and dissertations written by AAS fellows from 1972 to 1997 that were displayed in Antiquarian Hall for the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Symposium.

are second, at approximately 20 percent. The remainder—a third of the total—come from some thirty-three other departments or specialties, including American studies, art, landscape architecture, women's studies, music, and library science, and from academic and independent research libraries, from journalism and mass communication, political science and government, and sociology.

How productive have our fellows been? It seems to me that they've turned out *lots* of stuff. No fellowship—no research project, for that matter—is ever a sure thing. Career changes, good old-fashioned writer's block, ill health, and, in a few lamentable instances, even death have been factors in the inability of a small percentage of AAS fellows to complete and publish the work that brought them to Worcester.

But most have completed what they began. Our academic fellows and research associates have published at least 135 books and at least 430 articles that grew out of work funded by AAS fellowships. In addition, about a hundred doctoral dissertations have re-

sulted from AAS fellowships, a number of which were subsequently turned into books, which are included in the book total. All of these numbers are probably minimum figures, because there are surely other publications by our fellows of which we are simply not yet aware. Quite a few other books and articles are at present somewhere in the publication pipeline, to say nothing of doctoral dissertations not yet completed or defended. Most of the dozens of fellows in residence this year and the past several years may still be some distance away from completing and submitting their work to a journal, book publisher, or dissertation committee. So the list will continue to grow. Even as it stands now, this output bulks as a pretty substantial body of work. You can see for yourself. We've brought the books (but not the articles), plus many of the dissertations, written by our fellows and research associates out of the stacks and placed them on about twenty linear feet of shelving behind you in the reading room, where they are available for browsing. (I am grateful to Marie Lamoureux, our assistant director of reference services, for coordinating the display.) I will not attempt to assess the impact of this scholarly output. That is the task of one of the speakers who comes after me—Phil Gura. As staff members, we are pleased to have been able to play a role in facilitating our fellows' accomplishments. We are furthermore proud of how many of our fellows have won awards for publications that came out of their fellowships here. One of the most recent such books was a Pulitzer-Prize winner. This was the book by UC-Davis historian Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early Republic*, which he researched during his AAS-NEH fellowship in 1989–90. We also just had a couple of near misses. Two of our former fellows were runners-up for the most recent Pulitzer Prize in history—Mary Beth Norton of Cornell for *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gender, Power and the Forming of American Society* and Steve Nissenbaum of UMass-Amherst for *The Battle for Christmas*. I should add that these books by Norton and Nissenbaum as well as Alan Taylor's Pulitzer winner of a previous year were all pub-

lished by Alfred A. Knopf and all shared the same editor—Jane Garrett, who herself happens to be a member of AAS if not a former fellow.

The fellowship output by our elementary- and secondary-school teachers and by our creative and performing artists and writers is necessarily different from that of our academic fellows. Given the newness of these programs, much of it also remains work in progress. Our eighteen K-12 teachers—an equal number of men and women—came from all over the country, almost as many from west of the Mississippi as from east of it. One hailed from Montana, where she taught school on an Indian reservation. About two-thirds of them taught in secondary schools. Our fifteen artist fellows—60 percent of whom were female—were more an eastern bunch. Only three reside beyond the Mississippi, including two in that West Coast artists' paradise, California. Among them were playwrights, novelists, poets, journalists, documentary film makers, a performance artist, a dancer/choreographer, and an installation artist. Most of the teachers have produced course packets or new or rewritten curricula and have begun using these in their classrooms and making them available to colleagues elsewhere. As for the artists and writers, we are beginning to see the fruits of their work on the stage and elsewhere. The academic fellowship program, of course, paved the way for the success of our programs of awards to teachers and artists. The staff has long known how to make themselves useful to fellows and flawlessly transferred this skill to dealing with the new constituencies.

What has all of this meant to AAS as an institution, to the AAS staff, and to the larger community that is centered upon the Society—its members, friends, and other researchers? It's meant a great deal indeed. It has profoundly shaped AAS as an institution and my forty-nine colleagues and me as a staff.

We have long been convinced of the enormous importance of the fellowship program to AAS. From the institution's standpoint, fellowships have been a crucial element in the general expansion

of programs and services to humanistic scholarship that has occurred at AAS (and in other similar organizations) within the last generation—raising these institutions to a whole new tier in the nation's educational and research infrastructure. The program has enabled the Society *actively* to stimulate the use of our resources. No longer is an institution like AAS content merely to open its doors and see who happens to come across the threshold to do work. Now we actively seek some of the best and the brightest scholars to come and exploit the incredible research resources that stand on miles of shelving in this building. It's a win-win-win situation. The individual fellows, the Society and its staff, and the larger world of scholars and citizens all benefit from residential fellowship programs like ours. Having the opportunity to contribute to the selection process has given the staff a chance to provide lots of creative curatorial encouragement and direction in how to use the collections. Specifically, this has allowed us to encourage new lines of scholarly inquiry, to promote the use of newly obtained, newly processed, or hitherto underutilized collections, and to pursue other institutional objectives. Awarding fellowships has been one means by which the new history-of-the-book field has been advanced, as, I suspect, both Phil Gura and Scott Casper will say in their presentations. To give another example, the fellowship program has allowed us to ensure that scholars make effective use of our excellent and extensive children's literature collection now that a series of NEH grants has funded our highly detailed cataloguing of the collection. The fellowship program has given staff close contact over extended periods of time with a group of energetic, imaginative, and productive scholars; clearly the staff has learned from them and they from us. As a result, the staff continues to develop more and better ways to use the collections under their care and this, in turn, benefits later fellows and, even more importantly, *every* reader who passes through the glass doors of Antiquarian Hall. The teacher and artist fellowship programs have, of course, gotten the staff thinking about ways the collections can be useful for work aimed at

products other than the usual scholarly article, book, or dissertation. The Society's fellows have provided a number of articles for the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* as well as some eight manuscripts for the Society's book program. For us, the program functions in many ways like a talent agency. The fellowship connection has often been the prelude to later cooperation with a number of fellows on specific projects or other activities, especially in the Society's Program in the History of the Book in American Culture and our annual American Studies Seminar for Worcester undergraduates. A number of former fellows or RAs have taken on important roles in our book history program, most notably as leaders of our summer seminars in the history of the book or as editors and contributors to one or more of the five volumes we have in preparation under the series title *A History of the Book in America*. Also, former fellows or research associates have populated the rolls of leaders of the AAS undergraduate seminar—in fact, accounting for ten of the last seventeen leaders, as well as next year's. Finally, a number of former fellows have returned the favor, so to speak, by serving on selection committees that have chosen subsequent classes of fellows.

What AAS is today—what it is as a library, as a center for advanced research, as a community of learners, as a place where people don't simply put in time but rather work hard to make a difference in people's lives, as a research destination that scholars eagerly come to and reluctantly leave—is in large part a result of the fellowship program that was inaugurated a quarter century ago and that we celebrate today. What's wonderful about it from the institutional and staff viewpoint is that it places us at the very heart of the research process, at the center, therefore, of the Society's mission and of our value to society. In our orientation sessions with the fellows, as they give their customary talk about their project at a meeting of the entire staff, as they go about their daily work in the reading room or in their carrels, we become virtual partners in the scholarly enterprise. Anne Moore, a longtime rare-book cataloguer here, wrote tellingly about what the program has meant to her. 'The presence of scholars in the reading

room,' she said, 'takes cataloguing out of its vacuum-sealed box and links it to the exciting atmosphere of research. In conversations with fellows, we cataloguers find living, breathing proof that what we do matters and makes a difference in their work. Sometimes it even happens that a reader calls for an item for which a bibliographic record has been added to the on-line catalogue that very day, or week—an item previously uncatalogued, perhaps, and therefore unlikely to be found by the researcher. Very rewarding and satisfying to have right there in the Reading Room a community whose requirements we can help meet.'

Much has been written and said about the likely impact that the Internet, on-line academic discussion groups, and the digitization and electronic delivery of images of books and manuscripts will have on how scholars and students will carry on historical research in the twenty-first century. These innovations will undoubtedly have a profound effect—most likely a highly salutary one—and should be encouraged. At the same time, however, we must ensure that initiatives like our fellowship program continue to exist and to thrive and that other programs be created that will bring scholars and librarians face to face for extended periods in centers of research like AAS. As exciting and potentially useful as it is, the electronic world of the future could be an impersonal, even alienating, world. We *need* programs like the fellowships at AAS to put a human face on the culturally vital but often lonely process of historical research and writing.

Our program *has* brought hundreds of visiting researchers from around the nation and the world together with scores of AAS staff members. Speaking as one who has been on the staff since the second year of AAS fellowships, I believe it has been a defining experience for AAS as an institution and for all of us who have enjoyed the energizing company of our visitors. Bringing books and people together. What could be simpler—or more rewarding? Thanks to my colleagues on the staff, past and present, for making the program such a singular success. Thanks to *all* of you who have in any way supported, facilitated, or participated in the AAS fellowship program during the last twenty-five years.

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