

## *Report of the Council*

APRIL 14, 2000

AS I BEGAN TO PREPARE THIS Report of the Council, I decided to jot down a list of the current projects and initiatives of the Society—just the major ones and the ones on which there has been significant development since my report at the October meeting—as an aide to organizing my thoughts. That the list grew at a prodigious pace came as no surprise, for these are exciting and productive times at AAS. What came as something of a revelation for me, however, was the large number of projects on my list about which I could claim little hands-on knowledge. In fact, I was especially pleased to note that the management and leadership for most of the projects are distributed among many pairs of highly capable hands on our staff. These staff leaders—the vice-presidents and department heads at AAS—need no introduction to many of you, but some have recently taken on new assignments and all are managing significant projects which merit our attention today, so permit me to introduce or re-acquaint you with them all and with the range of initiatives they are undertaking.

First, let me say a word about our staff in general. The American Antiquarian Society at this time has thirty-six full-time and thirteen part-time staff positions. We are organized into three divisions: the Library, Academic and Public Programs, and Administration. In addition to the three vice-presidents and me, there are ten department-head positions: six in the library, two in programs, and two in administration. Collectively, these managers have more than 182 years of experience at the Society. Their knowledge of the collections, their commitment to serving read-

ers, and their passion for the mission of the Society are among our greatest resources.

But to talk about the staff as a collective hardly does justice to the individual contributions that each has made, so let me begin our manager-by-manager look with the senior member of our staff: Georgia Barnhill, Andrew W. Mellon curator of graphic arts. This past year—her thirty-second at AAS—has been marked by significant growth in our collections of nineteenth-century lithographs—made possible largely by the generous support of Society member Jay Last—and by the making available on-line of an innovative catalogue of the lithographs collections. This effort is providing access to these resources in an unparalleled way, as has another database for which Gigi has long been responsible—the Catalogue of American Engravings Project, known as CAEP. Gigi's article about CAEP in the a recent issue of the *Proceedings* is bringing awareness of this great on-line finding tool to a much wider audience and has garnered for Gigi and her small staff well-deserved accolades from print curators, collectors, and scholars around the world.

Coming next in seniority on my list of colleagues is Nancy Burkett, the Marcus A. McCorison Librarian of AAS. Following in Marcus's footsteps as a great collection builder, Nancy has not only presided over a robust year for our acquisitions purchases and gifts (as she will be happy to show off to you at the annual meeting in October), but she has also turned her attention to the fundraising challenge presented by the National Endowment for the Humanities when, in November 1999, it awarded the Society a \$450,000 grant to encourage new gifts over a three-year period of \$1.8 million for increased acquisitions endowment (one federal dollar for each four dollars we raise in private contributions). As of yesterday, pledges toward the challenge topped \$1 million and cash donations already in hand toward those pledges have been sufficient for Nancy to make a successful request of NEH that the first third of their grant be released to us.

John Hench, vice-president for academic and public programs, recently learned of a successful request of his own: this one for \$500,000 from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for the continued support of key portions of our fellowship program. The foundation began their support of three new types of fellowships at AAS three years ago, in response to John's initial proposal that outlined the case for a Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence and a Postdoctoral Fellowship, both supported by stipends which would put us in competition for the best and the brightest in the academy, and explained how these new fellows would contribute greatly to the further building of a community of scholarship at the Society. John also proposed a third type of fellowship which would permit us to offer a recently-minted Ph.D. the opportunity to work with the AAS collections, staff, and scholarly advisors over the course of a year's time to develop a successful dissertation into a promising book manuscript, ready to be submitted for consideration to the Cambridge University Press. With the third Mellon postdoctoral fellow now completing her tenure, the third Distinguished Scholar ready to take up residence in the fall, and the third Post-Dissertation Fellow just announced, news of the Mellon's renewed support for the series has been timely, indeed.

Our next most senior manager, Alan Degutis, also received news in recent weeks of another major grant award to the Society. Alan is director of cataloguing services, a department that is certainly no stranger to grants, having subsisted on an unprecedented string of multi-year NEH awards since the mid-1970s. But news that this most recent application had been successful and that \$290,000 would be forthcoming from NEH—provided that we are able to secure \$50,000 in private matching funds—came as particularly good news to Alan, who has long dreamed of having all the AAS holdings represented in our on-line catalogue. Alan directs our North American Imprints Project, which began with our creation of first-quality cataloguing records for all imprints printed in America through the year 1800—the 'Evans' imprints.

As that monumental task came to a close, it might have seemed most logical to start in on the cataloguing of books printed between 1801 and 1820—the ‘Shaw Shoemaker’ imprints—but because Stanford University had by then created brief records for those titles based on the microfilm set we published and because the Stanford records were available in the national cataloguing databases, Alan had agreed to move attention of the AAS cataloguers on to more virgin territory—the 1820s—and when those imprints were done, to the 1830s. As the end of the 1830s work is now coming into view, Alan is also directing the monumental effort to have all entries in our card catalogue files which represent books printed after the 1830s added to our on-line catalogue through a retrospective conversion, or ‘recon,’ project. This later effort is supported by a \$600,000 grant from Mellon and is being done largely, at least at this stage of the project, by outside vendors under Alan’s direction. But in between supervising the largest department in the institution, managing the 1830s project, worrying about the problems which the department will inherit when recon records start to be received from the outside vendor, and keeping our old computer system on life support until the replacements could be installed, Alan also found time to remain concerned about the fate of the imprints from the first two decades of the nineteenth-century. This most recent NEH award gives Alan one less thing to worry over. When the skilled team of AAS cataloguers completes their work in the 1830s it will be back to the ‘aughts and the teens’ for them, at last.

Having all collections represented in the on-line catalogue has been a dream that Alan has shared with many on the AAS staff, but by none more so than Joanne Chaison, our research librarian, for it is to her that the task of explaining the vagaries of the computer system—including what’s in the on-line catalogue and what’s not—most often falls. Having begun her tenure at AAS nineteen years ago as a cataloguer, she is certainly up to the task, but as our readership grows and as the size of our fellowship pro-

gram expands in such significant ways, the reading room staff has been challenged to meet the demands of our clientele without diminution of the high standard of service for which AAS is so widely known. As research librarian, a post to which she was named five years ago, Joanne has been instrumental in insuring the successful launch of all our new fellowship programs, which include not only the Mellon fellowships and five new short-term fellowships for academic researchers, but also our innovative fellowships for artists and writers. In the coming year, for instance, AAS will welcome (and Joanne will have to explain the catalogue to) six long-term fellows for stays of four to twelve months each and twenty-four fellows for one to three months each. Now that Joanne is also acting in her previously-held post as head of the reference services, she is leading the efforts to consider how best to balance the need to serve our broader audiences without compromising either the standards of our service or the physical integrity of our collections.

In this latter and highly important cause, Joanne has a strong ally in Babette Gehrich, our chief conservator. But for the moment Babette's attention and considerable expertise are being co-opted by the project that commands much of my own time, and Nancy's, to say nothing of the time of several Councillors and a host of architects, construction managers, engineers, and consulting experts: the design of our new book stack wing, for which we intend to break ground next spring. In addition to much-needed space for our growing collections, construction of this new wing will permit us to house our collections in an environment optimized for their long-term preservation and security. By keeping the temperature and humidity levels lower and more constant than are possible in our existing facility, we will be able to slow dramatically the process by which wood pulp paper (which is present in our collections, although to a lesser extent than in many research libraries) ages, oxidizes, and—if that process is left unchecked—crumbles into dust. The new vault will also provide for excel-

lent fire detection and suppression, much to the relief of all of us on the staff and the Council who have long felt the burden of unprotected risk to the irreplaceable collections in our care. The current stack buildings—with their self-supporting, multi-tier stack construction—were all built in an era when sprinkler systems in libraries were simply unthinkable. Now sprinklers have been made so reliable and effective that they are a welcomed and necessary part of any library loss-prevention strategy. In fact, we are especially pleased to announce that within the \$8.5 million construction budget we have for our project, we will be able to provide fire protection throughout the whole of Antiquarian Hall, in addition to protecting the new stack building. Remembering that Isaiah Thomas was himself worried about the risk of a fire in the library, and sited us in 1812 in Worcester, in large part, because there we would be inland and out of range of the British fleet, we trust that our founder would offer his own ‘Huzzah!’ for our decision to install sprinklers throughout our facility. Our design team has completed the conceptual design and is now hard at work on schematic design for presentation at the July meeting of the Council, and our fundraising efforts are moving into high gear as we approach the ‘50% of goal’ for the building component of the campaign, so these are busy times for all of us associated with the project. But most critical at this juncture is the work being done by a staff team on which Babette is playing a very significant part: measuring collections in their existing locations, deciding how they should be rehoused or stored, calculating the space that each will be allocated in the future, and then determining whether they should be housed in the new vault or in the newly protected old stacks. Issues of access must be weighed against those of preservation, and upon the decisions that the team is making will rest many of the hard-cost investments of the building, including the compact shelving systems. We are indeed fortunate to have Babette at the table as those decisions are being made.

Among the collections which are being 'measured up' for removal to the new vault are the manuscript and archives collections, which long-ago outgrew the room built for them in the 1972 addition and are among the most intensively used collections in the library. Five years ago when our manuscripts curator, Tom Knoles, agreed to add the phrase 'and head of reference services' to his title, we told him it was only going to be for three years. At last, he is able again to turn his attention full-time to the manuscript collections and to the 'backlog' of unprocessed collections that have been acquired in the interim. In his effort to dispatch them with efficiency, Tom is taking excellent advantage of the network of Internet-connected computers that we installed throughout the Society last December. In fact, when I sent an e-mail out to the staff the other day asking for any testimony they might want to share about how the new computers are affecting life at AAS, Tom's was one of the best ones I got back. It said: 'Although AAS has been on the Internet since 1992 and had word processors since the '80s, fast, modern equipment has made even routine jobs like writing a letter much faster. We can communicate internally much more efficiently. We are increasingly sending memos and announcements via e-mail rather than via Xerox, although as our institutional archivist that gives me a new set of issues to worry about. We now have a PC at the reference desk with access not only to the online catalogue but also to the full Internet, and we can answer a huge range of questions for readers—such as whether a book is in print, whether a library in Boston is open on Saturdays—quickly. And readers can do similar things for themselves on the five other terminals in the reading room, or from their own laptops at the Goddard-Daniels House at night, as it is now wired to the Internet as well. Readers and staff now have access to research sources that were previously unavailable. HarpWeek and Archives USA (a database of repository holdings) come to mind as examples, as do the online catalogues of Harvard, Yale, and other libraries. Online Services Librarian

Caroline Stoffel is alerting staff to new resources of this sort almost daily.' Tom continued, 'Last week I was processing an account book kept by a young man named Nathaniel Wood while a student at Colby College in the 1840s. While doing biographical research on him in the stacks I found that a memoir and collection of his sermons was published in 1877, but that AAS didn't own a copy. Returning to my desk, in less than 5 minutes I found a copy of the book being offered via the web for \$20 and forwarded the information to Nancy, who has ordered it. And finally,' Tom concluded his message to me by saying, 'I'm sending this message from home this evening—something that is infinitely easier to do now than it was with the old system.'

Improved e-mail communications—both among the AAS staff and with the outside world—are a particular boon to those who work across the street in the Goddard-Daniels House, such as Caroline Sloat, our academic program officer and editor of publications. Now that her hard drive can be cleared of all the working drafts of Volume One of the *History of the Book in America*—which appeared triumphantly last fall, just a few weeks *after* its official publication party at the Annual Meeting—she is busy now tracking progress on the remaining volumes, each with its multiple editors and choruses of contributors. Another major project in Caroline's domain is the annual summer seminar in the history of the book in American culture. This year's offering is going to be a special treat for all, not only because of the two leaders of the seminar (Scott Casper and Jeff Groves, who are with us today) and the topic (on the philosophy, techniques, and materials in teaching book history), but also because the Goddard Daniels House is being air-conditioned, at last. If you cannot imagine how this could be of importance to one such as Caroline, who works so hard to insure that our seminars are of the highest academic caliber, then you have never tried to sit through a session in the Elmarion Room on a stifling summer day with the French doors wide open, bringing in more street noise than fresh air.



Equally pleased at the prospect of this new-fangled air conditioning contraption is an older gentleman often seen in the Goddard-Daniels House in the company of Jim Moran, our director of outreach. Even on pleasant days this fellow sometimes appears uncomfortably warm, but then you would be too if you dressed as he does—long frock coat, waistcoat, ruffled-neck shirt, powdered wig. But the man to whom I refer is professional actor Neil Gustafson, and he is not at all uncomfortable ‘in the skin’ of Isaiah Thomas, who he portrays in the various one-man plays that Jim has written over the past year for presentation before a wide variety of public audiences. In recent months, Neil has been presenting a performance called *Isaiah Thomas, Patriot Printer*, which has now been seen by 1,500 students in grades 4 through 11 in fourteen area schools. Both the performance and the curriculum/facsimile packet that Jim developed for use by the teachers are getting rave reviews from students, teachers, and administrators. One group of thank you letters from a class of sixth-grade scholars was particularly impressive, since it was clear to me in reading them that they had paid close attention to the play and had gotten a lot out of the study materials. I was especially amused by the endorsement offered by a twelve-year-old budding theatre critic who wrote, ‘I’m sure Mr. Gustafson practiced a lot in order to have such a good performance. That was one of the best performances I’ve ever seen . . . He was so funny. But then again, that’s what a good actor does. I’m sure that Mr. Gustafson was also excited about being able to perform to us because he learned so much about Isaiah so he could teach us. I actually learned a lot by listening to the performance.’ A classmate wrote in her letter, ‘I can’t believe that Mr. Gustafson remembered all of his lines as he played the parts of Isaiah. The actor also answered all of our questions calmly without having to look through papers.’ It is true that Neil is a great Isaiah, but Jim Moran has done an excellent job in developing our Isaiah Thomas ‘products’ for national distribution and we are now working to find the ways and means to

capture Neil's excellent performance in digital form and to distribute it nationally, perhaps as an interactive DVD.

If one considers Jim Moran's mission as outreach director to get the word about AAS and all it has to offer as a research library *out* to the world, consider by comparison the mission taken up with enthusiasm by Russ Martin, AAS curator of newspapers: to bring the world of yesterday *into* the research library, one newspaper issue at a time. A prodigious institutional collector and a born horse-trader, Russ brings newspapers to the AAS collections by the carload, the truck full, and item by precious item. He has managed in the first seven months of this fiscal year, for example, to acquire more than 30,000 separate issues of some 300 newspaper and periodical titles. He writes in his acquisitions reports with such zeal about each new gift, purchase, and conquest that it is easy for us all to share in his passion. Having just assembled an unequalled run of nineteenth-century newspapers for Allentown, Pennsylvania, Russ writes, "The weekly record of this community now awaits discovery by some intrepid scholar." In that same report, Russ noted with gratitude the recent gifts of 'Peter Haack [who] has given us many wonderful things over the years, but this year was truly exceptional. Thanks to him, AAS now has the only surviving issue in the world of the *American Centinel* (Pittsfield, Massachusetts, October 19, 1787). This copy was once in the possession of Robert C. Rockwell, a collector from Pittsfield. Clarence Brigham, who knew Rockwell and knew his collection, was unable to account for this exemplar when he compiled his bibliography. Mr. Haack recently acquired the Rockwell newspaper collection and gave the entire lot to AAS, including many from western Massachusetts that are almost as rare as the *American Centinel*.' Incidentally, Russ didn't have to wait long for an 'intrepid scholar' to come in search of the *Centinel*: within days of its receipt, one of our members asked Russ his advice about where she might try to find a copy of that very newspaper. Putting people and collections together; it's what we do best.

Rounding out our all-star roster of AAS vice-presidents and department heads are John Keenum, vice-president for development, and his neighbor in the next office and newest member of our staff, Ed Harris, director of administration. With \$5.4 million secured toward our \$12 million capital campaign, you know what occupies John's days (and most likely some of his sleepless nights). But as the letters and proposals are sent and the visits and phone calls are made to all those who have been supporters of AAS in the past, John is also helping the Council set our sights on reaching out to those who have not yet learned of the collections, programs, and contributions of AAS. In John's business, it is called prospect research, but those of us on the AAS membership committee look on it also as a way of identifying those who may be in a position to support and lead the Society into our second century and beyond. John has been particularly helpful to us as we have organized all the names of those suggested for membership in the recent years and has made excellent suggestions about cultivating individuals into donors and friends. That is rarely an overnight process, he reminds me, and so he would have me tell all who hear this report or read it in the *Proceedings* that we of the staff and membership committee welcome your suggestions and nominations of those who might come to share an interest in the goals and purposes of this ancient Society and the important work that it continues to do even at its advanced age.

As director of administration, Ed Harris's responsibilities include personnel, budget and finance, planning and evaluation, administrative support (including all these new computers), and—at least until he completes a search for a new superintendent—building operations. Before joining our staff in March, Ed was working with us as a trainer and a consultant in organizational management. Among the institutional innovations he has already helped us effect is the Department Heads Forum, which has provided an arena for these key staff leaders from all three divisions to work together on solving problems, building consensus and

understanding for departmental initiatives, and identifying critical issues which require the attention of senior management and the Council. While department heads at AAS have long been recognized for their abilities in managing their own departments, rarely have they been given the opportunity for broader decision-making that the new Forum is affording them. Ed has been instrumental in securing the success of our new management structure and has already become an indispensable member of a pretty terrific team. As wonderfully busy as we all are these days, as I hope you have seen by this report, having a person of his organizational abilities on board is a godsend to us all. I am pleased to be able to add my thanks to Ed—along with my thanks to all the other staff managers—for jobs well done indeed.

And in conclusion, let me offer, on behalf of the Society, my thanks to each and every one of our members and our donors who support the work that we are doing. While our mission is clear and focused, it is nonetheless broad and deep. To continue to build the collections, to hold them safe from harm, and to make them accessible to all who have need for them, we will continue to need your help and to be eternally grateful for it.

Ellen S. Dunlap

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