

## *Report of the Council*

OCTOBER 20, 2000

TWICE A YEAR I come before the membership of the Society to deliver the Report of the Council. In the past I have tried in my reports to put a human face on the Society by telling our organizational story through the activities and accomplishments of our staff, the words of fellows reporting on their research visits, and the reactions we have heard from people participating in our programs. Published as they are in the *Proceedings*, these reports constitute an important part of the historical record of the Society, and so I have been at pains to detail a bit of the everyday richness of our work and, whenever possible, a glimpse into the motivations that inform our decisions and the aspirations that shape our priorities. My reports are but one part of the picture. Future historians of the Society will find the correspondence we add to the archives each year, the promotional literature we print and distribute, the books we acquire for the collection, and even the edifices that we construct to house and protect those collections, all evidence of what the American Antiquarian Society is at the beginning of its 189th year. 'So why this rambling preamble?', you ask. It is because I have decided to depart from tradition in crafting my report this year. In keeping with the times, we are going digital: I am going to let some pictures projected from my laptop computer do much of the talking for me in telling the story of what we have been up to in recent months.<sup>1</sup> It is my first such presentation and I feel a bit like the person who gave the first lantern-slide lecture might have felt. Like him, I just hope the

1. The images displayed at the meeting are not reproduced here.

thing doesn't catch fire or otherwise drive you screaming out of the hall. But in case you do have to leave before the very end—and in keeping with another convention of modern life—let me offer the 'executive summary' of my presentation now: We've come up with a new logo that we hope you'll like; we are today launching a redesigned website and announcing a partnership in an on-line journal, both holding great promise to engage our constituencies and improve access to our programs and collections; our five-year \$12 million capital campaign has passed the \$6 million mark; and—most significantly—we will be breaking ground in the spring for a major addition to Antiquarian Hall, about which we are very excited in that 'oh-my-gosh, I can't believe they are going to start digging' sort of way. I have the very latest drawings to share with you. And, finally, I have a nice little surprise to share at the end of my presentation. As we begin this experiment in communication, I would be tempted to say 'pay no attention to the man on the control panel,' but for my desire to publicly thank my indulgent husband Frank Armstrong for all his help with the digital photography. So, fire it up, dear.

I hope that you already have noticed the transformation of our promotional materials. The modern typography serves as a foil for the historical images of readers, images that call to mind not only what people do here but also our dedication to the history of the book. Our mix-and-matchable illustrated business cards keep our collector friends occupied, even with this 'rookie year' series. Reducing our collective thoughts and feelings about the Society to mere fonts and layouts was tough, almost as hard as addressing the possible need for a new device or logo. After a number of notable failures, we have settled on one that is proving useful in various applications where our venerable and ancient seal simply won't fit. So look for the 'new look' coming soon to a mailbox near you. And also to your desktop, because we are using the same design elements for our website.

While Frank hands over the control to our webmaster Caroline Stoffel, let me take the opportunity to acknowledge her contribu-

tion to the Society over the past year. Her official title is 'On-line Services Librarian,' but that hardly does justice to all her work as web designer and implementer, explainer of electronic reference resources (to staff and readers alike), keeper of the digital camera, and 'point person' in our Society-wide search for a new library automation system. As she begins her demonstration, you will see the straightforward, user-friendly manner in which she has organized the site. The GENERAL INFORMATION category is just that—providing answers to commonly asked questions about what we are, how to get here, and how to contact staff members. The section on employment opportunities has been highly effective, as two of the three positions listed there are now filled and will be replaced with others. The events section, too, is being constantly updated and expanded. Although we worked with the graphic designer to put the elements of the web design in place, it was essential that we be able to easily update it ourselves. On the USING THE LIBRARY page, for instance, we will be providing up-to-the-minute news on anticipated closings of the library during construction so that fellows and other readers can plan their visits accordingly. From this page also readers are able to order reproductions, a service that we will be expanding now that we have acquired a special scanner/photocopier that captures images overhead from a face-up bound volume.

The CATALOGUES AND COLLECTIONS page does a great job of making as simple as possible the complex job of remote searching of our on-line catalogue. Caroline has given readers all sorts of troubleshooting tips and, in case all else fails, a link to send her an e-mail. As we move over the course of the coming year to a new library automation system and the number of cataloguing records available in the system more than doubles (thanks to 114,000 records we just received from our conversion vendor), you'll want to check this page for the latest updates. Ever useful, however, will remain the narrative descriptions of our collections by subject, genre, and format—an indispensable guide for researchers at all levels. As Caroline continues her quick tour

through the pages on PROGRAMS, PUBLICATIONS, and FELLOWSHIPS let me talk about our aspirations for the website. Nancy Burkett, for instance, is planning an on-going feature on current acquisitions. Jim Moran intends to make curriculum packets for our school programs available to teachers via the web. Gigi Barnhill is representing the Society in planning on several significant nationwide programs for digitizing collections. Alice Gardiner helped launch a website for our Salisbury Sampler open house, and the list goes on.

Among the most recent web-based undertakings of the Society, which is being consummated as we speak, is our sponsorship—with the Gilder-Lehrman Institute—of an on-line quarterly journal called *Common-place* ([www.Common-place.org](http://www.Common-place.org)), described as ‘a common place for exploring and exchanging ideas about early American history and culture. A bit friendlier than a scholarly journal, a bit more scholarly than a popular magazine, *Common-place* speaks—and listens—to scholars, museum curators, teachers, hobbyists, and just about anyone interested in American history before 1900.’ Founded by editors Jane Kamensky and Jill Lepore, supported by column editors including our colleague Joanne Chaison, and presenting articles by many AAS members, fellows, and friends, this on-line journal is such a good idea that we wish we had thought of it ourselves. But by contributing the womanpower of an administrative editor to get the quarterly issues on the web, along with illustrations from our collections, and to manage the correspondence with contributors and respondents, we hope to help insure its ongoing success.

Thank you, Caroline, for the guided tour.

Let me ask you now to turn your attention to a project that consumes most of my waking and sleeping hours these days—our current capital campaign and its major component, our building addition. As the total of gifts and pledges moves through the \$6 million half-way mark—fueled largely by early contributions from current and former Councillors and supportive foundation friends—we are moving systematically through our constituent-

cies to encourage new and renewed giving not only for the building, but also for endowments in support of acquisitions and outreach activities, including our creative writers and artists fellowships. The NEH Challenge grant for acquisitions funds is proving to be especially effective, and we are pleased at the number of new funds that have been established. Our academic members have responded in unprecedented numbers to a special solicitation for support of the campaign, giving at twice the rate of previous solicitations and in amounts at twice the previous average. The first fellows appointed under two new endowments are currently in residence: children's writer Joann Mazzio is the Robert and Charlotte Baron Fellow and filmmaker Katrina Browne is our first Hearst Fellow. Beyond these brief mentions, there are too many gifts for me to cite them all here, but one deserving of special note is a \$400,000 federal grant awarded in July under the Save America's Treasures historic preservation program. The grant will be directed to one of the core components in our building program: the installation of fire protection sprinklers in the public spaces and collection storage areas of the present Antiquarian Hall. In fact, a quick review of the Society's building history reminds one of the on-going concern that AAS Councilors have shared about the protection of the collection from the ravages of fire. The council report for May 1833 described the grove of trees that had been planted around the first Antiquarian Hall on Summer Street and noted that, 'on maturity, the green enclosure will afford no inconsiderable protection from the fires of the dense population fast closing around, in near vicinity.' By the time the site was abandoned by AAS in 1854, however, the trees had become a source of deleterious dampness in the building. Construction of a second hall on the corner of Main and Highland Streets—which was expanded in 1877—was seen then as a move to higher ground and its masonry construction as major improvement in collection security. In studying the history of our present building, erected on this site in 1910, I had assumed that one of the reasons for the new location was the desire to remove the col-

lection from the risks of the bustling city core and had taken the evidence of a view of Lincoln Square, looking up Belmont Street, found in an album of photos taken by Council President Waldo Lincoln, who oversaw and documented the construction, as evidence of the hubbub they were escaping. However, after examining the photo more closely, and given the July 1910 date, I'm suspecting that the crowds may have been present for a holiday celebration or other public event. A panoramic view of Lincoln Square made in 1918 certainly presents a more tranquil view of downtown. This photograph can be found on the Library of Congress website. Waldo Lincoln's remarkable album chronicles the construction of our present building in fascinating detail. In April 1911, after the building was completed, the Report of the Council noted 'there is no reason why the Society should ever fear this greatest destroyer of books. Nor, in view of the large amount of open area around the building, is there danger of a sweeping conflagration. Thus with protection from fire and with a building splendidly equipped to take care of the growth of years, the Society takes on new life and seeks to increase its sphere of usefulness.' Onto a plan of our current site, I have overlaid a record of what happened to that open area as the influence and collections of the Society grew, with first one stack addition in 1924 and then another in 1950. In 1971 an office addition was added and the mechanical systems were enhanced, and with the foresight typical of our predecessors, an adjoining set of parcels was acquired in 1982 to provide for the expansion we are now planning to build. As this chronology indicates, each generation since that of our founder, in turn, has accepted responsibility for a significant expansion of the Society's facilities. As I have only presided thus far over a small project in 1995 to make the building handicapped-accessible, it would seem that our time for construction is at hand.

In our planning work, we have been fortunate to have the services of the architectural firm of Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbot, arguably the most experienced designer of research libraries in the country. They have brought to the table not only

their appreciation of great reading spaces like ours, but also their experience in dealing with multi-tiered steel stacks for library shelving that honeycomb our 1910, 1924, and 1950 buildings like a giant Erector Set. The challenges of retrofitting these systems are legendary, such as the closing in of toespaces to mitigate against stratification in temperatures. However, like Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and countless other libraries, we have decided to do so because the shelving is so efficient in storing great quantities of books in a small space. We also made the decision to extend fire sprinkler protection throughout the existing stacks, a decision that we have made carefully, with benefit of advice from the best experts we could find. Long thought to have been simply incompatible in spaces where library materials of any sort are stored—and especially rare, primary materials—the best advice today is to have a well-constructed and easily maintained sprinkler system running throughout the library, one capable of putting out a common fire with the deployment of a single head. Wet books can now be freeze-dried to arrest deterioration while they await treatment and restoration; books burned to ash remain so. Similarly, we have sought the advice of conservation experts to develop an environment in our stack addition best suited for the long-term storage of paper, especially that paper which is acid in content and subject to reverting to dust, left to its own devices. While the mechanical systems of the Society have been maintained with great care, many components are now almost forty years old. And, of course, like generations of antiquarians before us, our appetite for collecting is rapidly exceeding the size of our plate.

So, what are our plans? We intend to construct a 12,000 square foot, poured concrete addition on two floors and to equip it not only with a fire protection system but also with state-of-the-art conservation environment. The mechanical systems specified for the new building, where appropriate, will be sized to take on the load of the entire building as existing systems need to be replaced. Preserving the residence at 9 Regent Street, we were still able to double our off-street parking capacity on the lower lot behind it.

Landscaping will help to screen the lot from Park Avenue. Staff will enter the building through a locked entrance on the west side of the new addition. The floors of the addition will be in a plane with those of this main reading room, and the exterior will maintain the lines, materials and details of the existing Hall. Viewed from Regent Street, the addition is designed to be respectful to the residential neighborhood in which we are privileged to be located. All mechanical equipment, for instance, is being removed from the roof to a recessed area on the Park Avenue side of the addition.

In concept, the two new floors are laid out similarly. A small part of each is devoted to staff work areas, and the rest is fitted out completely with compact shelving. In the future, the staff areas could be removed and more shelving installed. The areas with shelving will be kept at 60 degrees and 35 percent humidity, ideal for books but not for people who will work with the collections in more temperate climates in the building. On the first floor will be housed the graphic arts workspaces, adjacent to their collection storage—of a size sufficient to allow the department to expand its collection storage three-fold. Readers frequently call for the many oversized materials in their care, so the staff in graphic arts is pleased at the prospect of being on the same floor as the reading room, at long last. The manuscripts storage area will double the current capacity and be housed reasonably close to the department's work area. The second floor workspace in the addition will be turned over to newspapers, as it is adjacent to the newspaper holding areas that command the top two floors of the existing stacks. By shifting some newspapers to the new stacks and finding good homes for out-of-scope papers, we can also accommodate more of the significant growth in our newspapers that we have seen in recent years. Our cataloguers, who are currently scattered throughout the existing stacks, will set up shop in the spaces vacated by graphic arts on the second floor.

In the new addition, we will have gained capacity for approxi-



mately 30,000 linear feet of books—twice that of our current holdings! We think that should suffice, at least until the next generation comes to bat.

I am pleased to note that the budget goal established more than two years ago when the current campaign was being planned—a goal of \$8,000,000 for building improvements—is proving to be fairly close, with current estimates running just under \$9,000,000. Our design team of professionals, volunteers, and staff have all worked with diligence and fortitude to keep this project on track and within scope through the vicissitudes of planning, consulting, and estimating. May our skill and stamina last us through to project end, even now some two years away.

To work in these collections, with this staff, and in this building is a great privilege for me. The White House had it quite right in July when they declared this one of America's great cultural treasures. This building has become a symbol of the strength and generosity of the organization, known far beyond Worcester's confines, wherever the Society's contributions to the world of scholarship and learning are recognized and celebrated. And in celebration of those contributions and of the enduring beauty of Antiquarian Hall, I am pleased to announce that in keeping with a local tradition, our friends at Sharfman's Jewelers have selected our building as the Worcester treasure to be featured this year in their series of fine gold holiday ornaments. At this point in a long capital campaign, it's always good to see the glitter of unexpected gold. And to extend that metaphor in closing, let me note the presence today of many friends old and new, representing as the singing round suggests our silver and our gold. Thank you one and all for your interest in the Society and for your support of our efforts to continue its record of success and service.

Ellen S. Dunlap

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