

## *Report of the Council*

WE ARE quite accustomed to have people who enter our library for the first time exclaim at the beauty of its architecture. The wiser ones then observe the dead-weight construction, and ask, "But what can you do about air conditioning?" This is, of course, a crucial problem for a rare-book library which acquires only material which should be kept for all time. For years we have been all too aware of the blistering summer heat and the winter dryness in our newspaper stacks, of the four state highways from which powdered rubber drifts into the building, and of the more insidious industrial gases inevitable in a city like Worcester. For years we have consulted with air-conditioning engineers, most of whom took one look at the construction of the building and reported that any solution would be impossibly costly. Last October the Building Committee decided to settle for cooling the stacks, but the Council asked us to take one more look at the over-all problem. Then a local engineer discovered that our building had originally been designed with air conditioning in mind, and that a mass of rusty machinery which we had supposed belonged to a disused forced-air heating system, was in fact intended to provide air conditioning, although apparently it had never run. Our last two stacks have been built without knowing of this system, but it can easily be extended to them.

The upshot is that we are in a position to provide thorough air conditioning for the stacks, including winter humidification and the elimination of industrial gases, and to provide cooling for the main reading room and offices, for a cost so low in comparison with the earlier estimates as

to make further delay indefensible. Indeed, one member of the Council has already offered to assume the main cost of the operation, and another to pay for the well which is needed to provide clean and cool water. We trust that the system will be in operation by the time of the October meeting.

The engineering survey conducted in connection with this operation has produced some surprises. For example, it was found that the float in the water tank in the dome had sunk years ago, permitting cold water to run constantly into the heating system, where it has been hastening the deterioration of our boilers. These, fortunately can be put into good condition for much less than the cost of replacing them.

No doubt our library staff sometimes feel that the officers of the society are more concerned with the well being of our building and books than with the well being of our people. This would be particularly unkind on our part, for we make unusual demands on our employees. In most libraries, the staff is chiefly occupied in serving the immediate needs of visitors. Our people spend most of their time in preparing to serve future and distant needs by creating bibliographical tools. The result is that our visitors frequently find here not only great collections of books in their fields, but unique bibliographical tools which expedite their work beyond their fondest expectations.

Typical of these tools is our index to the early volumes of the British Museum Catalogue of Prints and Drawings, which we have had twice microfilmed for British libraries. The progress of these tools, such as our catalogue of authors and printers, was sharply demonstrated when in the revision of Evans we came to Volume 13, which we ourselves produced between 1950 and 1955. In the revision we can add dozens of author identifications because of the progress of our catalogue since then. In the course of revising Evans and microfilming the material which it lists, we early this month

wrote target number 39162, which marks the end of the main part of the project. Mr. Bristol's volume of additions is at least two years away. Our most important bibliographical publication this year will be Mr. McCorison's bibliography of Vermont imprints, which should come from the press this summer. Our plans stand as I have described them in earlier reports, so I shall not review them now.

One result of our preoccupation with this type of service is that we are better known away than at home. Last month the local office of the Telephone Company called me up to apologize abjectly for having in the yellow pages listed the American Antiquarian Society as a library. About the same time a member of the Supreme Court of Tasmania walked in to ask me to explain a rumor heard on the other side of the world to the effect that in the eastern part of the United States, librarians "like little birds in their nests agree" instead of crouching, vulture-like, waiting for the death of prospective donors, to drop on their collections and rend them with bloody talons into unrecognizable fragments, to be carried back to their own particular nests. I told the Judge that, if only to avoid indigestion, we librarians had formed the habit of cooperating, in order to centralize research collections in the institutions where they would be most useful. The largest of the several operations of this type in which we are at present engaged concerns the publications of American colleges, chiefly annual catalogues, which are the longest and rarest series of Americana, and, in their earlier stages, are priceless repositories of reference material, but which are now pouring out at such a rate from the hundreds of new institutions that the responsibility for keeping such a collection up to date is a great burden. Today the three chief collections are at Columbia, Harvard, and the American Antiquarian Society. Harvard has decided to eliminate its research collection, giving us all the items we

need to fill out our collections and sending the rest to Columbia. We take the responsibility for keeping all of this material printed through 1876, but after that date keeping only the tenth catalogue in each series, turning over the rest to Columbia, which engages to keep the collection up to date.

These changes in policy we enjoy because of the challenge which they present to our judgment, and because they result in the improvement of the facilities for research. Quite otherwise are the changes which are marked by the dropping of names from our list of members. Since the October meeting we have lost Charles Belcher Rugg, who died on November 25, LeRoy Elwood Kimball, on November 27, Irving Sands Olds on March 4, and Frederick G. Melcher on March 9.

Next year we shall join with Clark University in holding, early in April, the Fifteenth Conference on Early American History, which will be devoted to colonial law, and will draw participants and audience from most of the eastern states. There will be two sessions on successive days, one in our library and one at Clark. The members of the Society will receive formal invitations when arrangements are complete.

The Brigham regime in the history of the American Antiquarian Society was devoted chiefly to the making of enormous accessions. For the last two decades we have been concerned largely with the organization of this material, with the building of a new stack, with re-lighting and air conditioning, with getting the salaries of the staff off the floor, and with introducing health insurance and a pension system. These are now accomplished, in good part, so we should once more turn our attention to filling out our collections. Some members have been quietly doing it. Professor Beard, behind my back, has been building up our first edition collection as earnestly as Mr. Brigham used to do. Esther Forbes has this year established a book purchasing fund in memory of her mother, Harriette Merrifield Forbes,

who in my early years as librarian used to be almost every day engaged in her historical research in what we called the Forbes Alcove. Books and a salary scale which will enable us to compete with other libraries for staff are the goals on the horizon, now that we have surmounted what seemed only a few years ago to be the impassable mountains in our path.

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*For the Council*

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