

Report of the Council

APRIL 16, 1994

RARELY at a loss for words, I find myself struggling with this mid-year report on the state of the Society. There is so much I want to convey on behalf of the Council about the work of our fine staff, the generous support of our members, the development of our collections, our commitment to providing service to scholarship unmatched at any other research library. It has been a challenging and highly productive half year. There is much to report, yet I sit at the computer keyboard, speechless.

As I divert my eyes from the blank screen before me, I catch sight of the bookcase filled with volumes of the *AAS Proceedings*. Since 1849, each number of our journal has included a Report of the Council. First delivered before a convocation of members such as today's, each report covers six months of the Society's activities. Similar reports were published on an occasional basis in the earlier decades of the Society as well. Lined up together, their format little changed over time, they constitute a formidable precedent to face when one is fumbling to find a voice of one's own.

Leafing through the volumes, I review again the form my predecessors have followed: items acquired and processed are enumerated, new publications and projects announced, donors thanked, aspirations articulated. Year in and year out, the dedication of staff is recognized, the need for additional support (or space or personnel or whatever) is lamented, and developments in the world around us are commented upon, be they seen as pro or contra to our cause. Reading through one report after another, I find the familiar cadences are comforting, the sheer volume of information nearly overwhelming.

In my Report of the Council delivered at the annual meeting last October, I was hardly short on words myself. There I an-

nounced our three-year initiative to increase public awareness, appreciation, and support of AAS and its collections, detailing plans for lectures and concerts, videos and radio show pilots, on-line computer services, educational programs, expanded fellowship opportunities, and more, all underwritten by a \$750,000 grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. In giving a follow-up on Wallace today, I might do well to limit myself to a pithy quote I found in an 1821 council report: '... Nothing adverse has arisen to disappoint the anticipations authorized by the report which was made at the last annual meeting.' Or should my report today instead provide even more details of Wallace activities—the hiring of new promotion and program staff, the meetings with architects and advisors, the scheduling of speakers and performers, and the engineering of our on/off ramp to the 'national information superhighway'?

My consternation over this report is amplified as I anticipate its appearance in the *Proceedings*. Some among the Council and staff have grown concerned at the sheer density of the mailings we send our constituents. 'Are they being read?', we ask ourselves. (Recognizing that you who receive our mailings are in a better position to answer that question than are we who issue them, the Council voted at its meeting this morning to send out a questionnaire seeking, among other things, your honest appraisal of our publications. I hope you each will respond.) I want our publications to effectively transmit a picture of AAS as a vital institution, relevant to today's world, and to convey to the reader a clear sense not only of the strengths, needs, and workings of this great research library, but also of the vibrant community of learning that thrives in its environs.

So questions of style, tone, and content hound me for days as I cogitate over my unwritten report. What voice could I use to impart the lively spirit of AAS? Permit me to use not my own words, but those sounds and voices I heard one busy, but not atypical, day last week.

It is Thursday morning, and an introductory course about AAS for 'lifelong learners'—offered in association with the Worcester Institute for Senior Education—has just begun its next-to-the-last weekly session. This is the first of our new Wallace programs. Four weeks earlier, a good number of the thirty-five participants had admitted knowing next to nothing about AAS, despite their lifelong residence in Worcester. Now they are learning about it firsthand. They have explored its history—from a consideration of the political and social context of its founding to a recounting of its more recent accomplishments. They have heard informal presentations by two visiting professors and a graduate student, who have generously taken time out from their own reading room endeavors to talk with this lay audience about why they are studying here and how AAS collections inform their research and teaching. The group has been given the Cook's tour of the facilities, including the stacks, and they are now beginning to fathom the breadth and depth of the collections. An entire session devoted to the graphic arts department has heightened their appreciation of the near infinite variety of AAS holdings, as well. A session on conservation is yet to come.

Today they are enjoying an extended conversation with the reading room staff, who have prepared a show-and-tell of local history and genealogy materials. Not only do the WISE participants find the collections of great interest personally, they are fascinated to hear how such materials have become indispensable resources for academic and amateur researchers alike. The session concludes with a hands-on presentation on the use of local history materials in the teaching of American history. After hearing a local high school teacher (a regular at AAS himself) talk about the dynamics of his classroom, some of these seniors look ready to head back to the eleventh grade to catch up on what they missed. The classroom he describes is one where students work together to understand cause-and-effect relationships in history and to strengthen their skills in information gathering and analysis—

rather than simply memorizing dates and names only to forget them soon after the test.

The second sound bite I'd like to share begins a few hours later when my phone rings. A fourth-grade teacher from the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Wolf Point, Montana, is calling to accept our offer of a one-month summer research fellowship, one of four such offerings being made for the first time this year thanks to the Wallace grant. She has proposed to spend her time at AAS developing lesson plans and a reading list for her pupils, many of whom, she says, have problems with low self-esteem. She wants to expose them to American history by focussing on positive experiences of European and Native American women in colonial America. I know that the staff will be pleased that she has accepted. It is my further privilege to convey a second offer to her as well. A noted historian of the Native Americans (a highly regarded teacher himself) will be in residence during her stay in Worcester, and he has volunteered to serve as her mentor. She jumps at the offer. The odds that she will have an extraordinarily positive experience at AAS have just been multiplied several-fold. Our fellowships are about making connections—with the collections, with staff, and with other researchers. Even before her arrival, she has made a fortuitous connection.

Scene three: it is now early evening that same Thursday, and two hundred chairs have been set up in Antiquarian Hall in four triangular blocks arranged to form a tight square. All the chairs face the center of the room. The occasion is the annual conference of the Sonneck Society, which has attracted to Worcester from across the nation almost 300 musicologists, performers, collectors, librarians, and students interested in the history (and the future, for that matter) of American music. Many in the group are old friends of AAS, many more are learning for the first time of the library's exceptional holdings of early tunebooks, songsters, and sheet music. The crowd settles down as people select their seats—tenors

in this section, trebles there. . . . Now proclamations are being read honoring AAS for its service to the field. Its monumental contributions to music bibliography are noted, as are the unfailing helpfulness and courtesy of its staff. The crowd responds with a sustained ovation, not only for AAS but for our staff members who have worked so hard to make the Sonneck meeting such a success.

Then the evening's program begins: a participatory singing of shape-note hymns, an indigenous American folk-music form dating from the early nineteenth century. In turn, various members of the audience step into the center of the square, select the hymn to be sung, set the pitch, and lead the group through the four-part harmony. Many experienced shape-note singers in the audience are observed to mark time, as if conducting on their own. The dome above the reading room reverberates with rugged harmonies; the parts echo and double as if in rounds. With each new selection, enthusiasm grows among experts and novices alike, and the volume intensifies. From its very beginnings, we are told, this style of singing has been more social and recreational than liturgical. I wonder to myself whether the man listed in the conference program as presenting a paper on the marginalization of the Grateful Dead is among those here tonight joining in this exuberant celebration of a common musical heritage we share as a nation.

Now that my report is 'written,' you see that in doing so I have co-opted the voices and experiences of others, as they serve my purposes today better than do statistics and six-month summaries. The point they help me make is this: AAS will flourish, I believe, as long as it continues to nourish vital connections among its various constituencies and to find effective means to bring its extraordinary collections to life for the enrichment of our society. That is the mission that the Council and staff are pledged to fulfill. With your help it can be done.

Ellen S. Dunlap

1994 – 95 AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
FELLOWS*American Antiquarian Society—
National Endowment for the Humanities Fellows*

Dale Cockrell, associate professor of music, College of William and Mary, 'Demons of Disorder: The Early Blackface Minstrel and His World'; Wayne S. Franklin, Davis Distinguished professor of American literature, Northeastern University, 'A Biography of James Fenimore Cooper'; Carol F. Karlsen, associate professor of history, University of Michigan, 'Relations of Power, the Power of Relations: Iroquois Communities in Western New York 1750–1900.'

Kate B. and Hall J. Peterson Fellows

April Alliston, assistant professor of comparative literature, Princeton University, 'A Cultural Biography of James Fenimore Cooper' (with Pamela J. Schirmeister); Martin J. Burke, Fulbright lecturer in history, University College, Galway, 'Signs of the Cross: Protestants, Catholics, and the Construction of Religious Identities in America, 1700–1900'; Oz Frankel, Ph.D. candidate in history, University of California at Berkeley, 'The Politics, Culture and Rituals of Public Investigations in Nineteenth Century U.S.'; Katherine M. Grant, Ph.D. candidate in American history, Yale University, 'The Lyceum Movement in America, 1826–1890'; Sally E. Hadden, assistant professor of history, University of Toledo, 'Slave Patrols of the Old South' and 'Newspapers as Disseminators of Legal Information'; Laura B. Kennelly, adjunct professor of English, University of North Texas, 'Samuel West: Private Life in Revolutionary Times, 1738–1808'; Elise V. Lemire, Ph.D. candidate in English, Rutgers University, 'Miscegenation Discourse in the United States, 1800–1865'; Stephen Middleton, assistant professor of history, North Carolina State University, 'The Black Laws of Ohio'; Marla R. Miller, Ph.D. candidate in

history, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "My Daily Bread Depends Upon My Labor": Gender and Artisanry in Early America'; James R. Raven, lecturer and director of history, Magdalene College, Cambridge University, 'The Importation of Books to North America in the Eighteenth Century'; Pamela J. Schirmeister, assistant professor of English, New York University, 'A Cultural Biography of James Fenimore Cooper' (with April Alliston); Rebecca J. Tannenbaum, Ph.D. candidate in history, Yale University, 'A Woman's Calling: Women's Medical Practice in Early New England.'

American Antiquarian Society—

American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Fellows

Joyce Appleby, professor of history, University of California at Los Angeles, 'The First Generation of Americans'; John Bidwell, librarian, Clark Library, University of California at Los Angeles, 'Printing Supplies in Colonial America.'

Stephen Botein Fellows

Ann Fabian, associate professor of American studies, Yale University, 'Selling Experience: Amateur Authors and Pamphlet Publication in the Nineteenth-Century United States'; Fredrika J. Teute, editor of publications, Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, 'Writing a Woman's Life in the Early Republic: The Liberation of Margaret Bayard Smith, 1778–1844.'

Research Associates

William J. Astore, Ph.D. candidate in history, Oxford University, 'Observing God: Thomas Dick (1774–1857), Religion and Popular Astronomy in Great Britain and America, 1823–57'; Fiona Robertson, lecturer in English, University of Durham, 'Representing America, 1776–1830'; Richard R. John, assistant professor of history, University of Illinois at Chicago, 'Communications Infrastructure, 1840–1880.'

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