

Report of the Council

APRIL 22, 1995

IT SEEMS these days that everyone has a ten-point list of some sort: the ten top-selling books of the week; ten wacky thoughts of a late-night TV host; ten political promises of the new Republican Speaker of the House, all ten of which he brought up for a vote before the first 100 days of the 104th Congress had passed. Realizing that I am about to begin my tenth 100-day period as President of the American Antiquarian Society—hard as it is for me to realize that time has gone by that quickly—I thought it might be instructive for me to compile an AAS top ten list of my own.

In the end, I came up with two such lists. The first enumerates ten things that have happened over these past two years at AAS about which the staff is most excited, and about which I—as their titular chief—can point to most proudly as examples of the typical work of an exemplary staff. Never one to rest on institutional laurels, however, we've drawn up a second list of ten items selected from the growing agenda of plans the staff is currently working to realize, problems we have yet to solve, challenges still in search of scarce resources, notably money and time.

#1. on my first list is the work we have done to strengthen our Reference Services Department. In the popular management literature today, much is made over 'reinventing organizations' so that costs can be reduced and the quality of products and services continuously improved. One is advised to put organizational mission front and center and to cut away all layers of bureaucracy which do not directly further that mission. It is also now widely held that decisions about how one's customers can best be served are best made by those employees who themselves serve those

customers. Without realizing how altogether 'current' our thinking was, this was exactly the approach we took when we faced the dilemma of how best to serve an audience of readers at AAS that is increasing not only in numbers but also in diversity. While we could not afford to add positions, the better solution was to re-deploy the expertise and problem-solving ability already on staff. The position of Research Librarian was created—and is now being ably filled by Joanne Chaison—in order to serve as an advocate for and an advisor to all our readers, not only our traditional audience of academics but non-traditional readers as well (about which I will speak more in a moment). Working closely with Joanne in the rethinking of reading-room policies and procedures in light of changing demands are Tom Knoles, who now serves as Director of Reference Services (in addition to his continuing responsibilities as Curator of Manuscripts), and Marie Lamoureux, who has been promoted to Assistant Director of Reference Services. All this shifting was made possible by the willingness of Susan Motyka to be reassigned from book cataloguing to the position of Assistant Curator of Manuscripts. Further underscoring our commitment to reader services—not just as a passing fad but as a long-term priority for the library—we have made the securing of additional endowment for the department a priority of our current Mellon match campaign. We are already more than half-way to our goal of \$1.3 million.

#2. on the list is establishment of AAS as an active site on the Internet—a wonderful new challenge which has been enthusiastically embraced not only by Joanne Chaison but also by Alan Degutis, Head of Cataloguing Services. As of this date, it is possible for Internet users around the globe—no matter what their time zone or their state of dress—to search and download records from the AAS on-line catalogue, to obtain information about fellowships and AAS programs, to get detailed descriptions about our collections and services, and to communicate with our staff. A far cry from ancient days at AAS when two letters of introduction from senior scholars and a coat and tie were required before one

could be admitted to the library. Technology is making it possible, in effect, for us to begin to extend to all the kind of privileged access that Mr. Brigham once afforded only to a select few. Legend has it that he once wrote to a member, 'I won't be in Worcester that weekend, but here is the key to the library. Just lock up when your research is done, mail the key back at your convenience.'

#3. While technology has afforded us opportunity to make information about the early printed record of our nation freely and generously available to all, it has also given us the wherewithal to keep cataloguing more and more of it. By customizing the electronic records we have been creating for our own cataloguing system, we have created a market for tapes and CD-ROMs among other libraries, dealers, collectors, and individuals. This entrepreneurial enterprise has generated \$175,000 in revenues that we are able to plow back into our ongoing cataloguing efforts.

#4. As I mentioned a moment ago, we are now encouraging use of the library by qualified researchers far beyond the bounds of our traditional academic audience. Most significant has been our increased role in the enhancement of teaching at the pre-collegiate level, through our offerings of seminars, workshops, institutes, and individual fellowships for classroom teachers in elementary and secondary schools. While there is much controversy and heated argument today about how American history should be taught to our children, all agree that the way it's been done of late hasn't been working. Teachers are eager to turn away from 'read Chapters 5 & 6 and answer the questions for tomorrow.' They want the kids not to memorize but to analyze and to understand what happened and why. They want to give kids a kind of 'hold-it-in-your-hand' connection with history, and that's where AAS is coming in. Teachers are now leaving our reading room with copies of documents from Shays's Rebellion, political cartoons from the Jacksonian era, sheet music from the Civil War, autobiographies of ordinary men who wanted to make a difference in the fight for abolition—in other words, real shreds of our

nation's history. 'What does this mean?' these teachers ask their students. 'Let's figure out together what this document says about America, and then let's discover other sources of information to answer the questions that this document poses for you.' It's documentary evidence that teachers want in today's classroom—pamphlets, broadsides, manuscripts, newspapers, cartoons, children's books, advertisements—and of course it's documentary evidence that AAS exists to provide. We have just announced our second class of teacher fellows (out of more than eighty nationwide who applied for support for a month-long sojourn in Worcester, only six could be funded), but already it is clear that this program is an overwhelming success.

#5. is a success born out of necessity and desire: to make Antiquarian Hall as welcoming to new audiences and visitors as it has always been to our traditional audience. You will notice many changes when you come: the reading room facilities are now fully accessible to the handicapped, the sign-in desk functions now as a very friendly welcome and information station for visitors rather than merely as a guard's post, a lively exhibit explaining what the AAS is all about is just going up at this time and will be a tremendous help in our orientation of newcomers and casual visitors. Passing through the elegant glass doors that now separate the hubbub of the reception area from the so-called serenity of the reading room, one hears the sounds of modern scholarship and discovery—click, click, click (everyone has a laptop computer, and as a result of our remodelling, they can now all be plugged in).

#6. With the new technology so much around us and the end of the millennium bearing down upon us, it is only fitting that we take time as well to reflect upon and to reconsider from new perspectives something of where we have been. Since the days of Isaiah Thomas himself, the Antiquarian Society has been dedicated to collecting, recording, and preserving the history of printing. Our sixth achievement—the launching of a five-volume collaborative history of the book in America—might seem, therefore, to be nothing new. But it ranks on our top ten list because it is ex-

citing in many ways: here for the first time, leading scholars—including librarians, bibliographers, literary theorists, social and cultural historians, experts in the history of American economics and journalism—are being brought together to reconsider what is known about the history of printing and publishing in our country and to hash out a new narrative account of how the printed word shaped this nation and its people. While our co-publisher on the project, the Cambridge University Press, isn't accepting advance orders just yet—after all, John Hench and the general editors have only just received first drafts of five chapters of Volume 1—the process itself is already an engaging and rewarding one for us.

#7. For those of us who are privileged to work at AAS, history is a lively and endlessly fascinating endeavor. We fear, however, that for the Everyman and Everywoman we encounter at the market, in the neighborhood, at social and civic functions, history is something that—at best—they just don't find time to get involved with, and—at worst—something they avoid as deadly dull. In our new public programming, therefore, we have tried to offer the general public just a taste of what makes history exciting to us: a conversation with Thomas Jefferson (thanks to scholarly impersonator Clay Jenkinson); a reading from personal letters of a nineteenth-century Connecticut family by James and Janet Robertson, authors of *All Our Yesterdays*; a hauntingly beautiful recital of historic selections by cellist Elizabeth Bronstein and pianist Sandra Hebert; a rousing band concert by the American Band of Providence. Many more such programs are planned, including a radio variety show, the first to be broadcast to you live (as it were) from the year 1857, and a second from 1775.

To be successful in presenting historic subjects for today's audiences, one must not only be skilled at one's art or craft—fiction or play writing, filmmaking, poetry, journalism, music, visual art—but one must also have access to historical evidence in all its richness and fascinating variety. To aid and abet the work of those who present history and write about it for general audiences, we have begun a second new fellowship program at AAS. We have al-

ready hosted a poet who is writing about a fascinating nineteenth-century visitor to America named America Vespucci and a filmmaker who is making a documentary on being disabled in America, past and present. Soon to join us are a playwright exploring the fate of the actors on stage the night Lincoln was assassinated, a travel writer writing on the creation of the travel industry in New England, and a radio producer planning a series on the history of Thanksgiving. We call them our multipliers and mediators, as we see that intensive use of the collections by each of these individuals will inform and enlighten many, just as it does our teacher fellows.

The *eighth* initiative I want to cite is a related one. We are so excited about our public programming that we want to broadcast it to the nation, in some cases quite literally. The historic radio shows we are planning will become a pilot for a series on public radio. We are now taking our Wiggins lecture in the history of the book 'on the road' to other campuses—giving academics in other parts of the country a chance not only to hear a good talk but also to learn a little something about a great library which they may want to visit—in person or on the Internet. We are also taking on the road—first to Philadelphia and in a few weeks to Chicago—the most spectacularly successful public program that I have been part of, in Worcester or anywhere else for that matter: Ken Burns's talk first presented at the 1994 AAS annual meeting (attended by 1,000 people), a masterful talk about history, baseball, libraries, and the American experience. In a word, it was fantastic. It was great exposure for the AAS to boot.

Which brings me to my *ninth* point. A pessimist might argue that all these new users are going to use up all the stuff, discover all the history, tell all the good stories, and leave the AAS wasted behind. Not surprisingly, we don't think so. But just in case, Nancy Burkett and her crack team of sleuths in the acquisitions department are busy ferreting out material printed in America before 1877 that we don't yet have. We have seen what happens in other libraries when attention to acquisitions falters: not only do

once-in-a-lifetime opportunities slip away, but opportunities stop presenting themselves. In the acquisitions game, librarians, dealers, and private collectors, though apparent adversaries, are in reality close partners. A library without an active acquisitions program drops from the scene—dealers don't waste time offering rare items, collectors don't think to make donations. But let me assure you that despite so many new attentions and distractions, our enthusiasm for collecting and acquiring continues unabated. Through generous gifts and careful budgeting, we have managed to increase funds available for acquisitions by a full fifty percent over what they were when I first came. And that's a source of great pride for all concerned.

Which brings me at last to #10. Over the past two-and-one-half years, the AAS has secured contributions totalling more than \$5 million dollars: more than \$600,000 in unrestricted operating gifts, more than \$900,000 in special-purpose gifts from individuals and foundations, more than \$1,000,000 in grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation, and almost \$2.5 million from private donors to be added to our endowment for the ongoing support of core library activities. This accomplishment made the list not because we are so proud of our work in raising the money, but because we are so profoundly grateful to all of those who gave it.

Yes, the staff did all that—and dozens of other things that could and should be noted, but here are just ten more we wish we'd had time to do.

#1. We need to go much further in our updating of services, without compromising the standard of service our readers have come to expect.

#2. We want to establish a seed-money fund to be used to launch collaborative projects to make more collections available off-site, using the Internet and other electronic media.

#3. The success of our detailed cataloguing for our early imprints has heightened demand for us to catalogue—in the same

comprehensive way—our nineteenth-century holdings, which of course are even more voluminous. We need to experiment with new ways to employ technology in meeting that challenge.

#4. While I think our new services for teachers, artists, and writers are a good beginning, there is so much more we can do while keeping within our mission as a research library. Should we not be forming partnerships also with publishers, for instance, whose traditional world is changing as rapidly as that of libraries today?

#5. We are considering ways in which we might also augment our fellowship program, to bring promising young academics to Worcester for a year or two, not only to work at AAS at transforming a dissertation into a successful monograph, but also to teach at one of the local universities. The number of people who could profit greatly from a year, a month, or even a week at AAS always exceeds our ability to fund them, modest though our fellowship stipends are.

#6. Of course, the constraints of space are always with us. Those of you who have taken a tour of the stacks can attest to the orderliness of every shelf. You will also have noticed, however, that there aren't too many empty ones left. The same is often true of meeting rooms, reading-room tables, readers' carrels, and lodging rooms at the Goddard-Daniels House. Building a new building is not yet in the cards, however, so we continue to adapt, reuse, and rearrange. Compact shelving for the manuscripts department and air-conditioning of the Goddard-Daniels House in order to enhance its year-round usability are both on our wish list.

#7. In keeping with our goal of getting more people to AAS, we'll be finding the time soon to work on new signage for the building.

And #8, now that our new programs and services have taken shape so nicely, we need to do a much better job of publicizing them, locally and nationally. All that has been provided for in funding from the Lila Wallace-Readers' Digest fund which is making so many of the new programs possible.

#9 on my list is an ongoing challenge: promoting public awareness, not just of our programs but of the institution itself, what it does and why it is important. I know you have been asked these same questions: 'What is an antiquarian?' 'Where is Worcester?' 'Why haven't I ever heard of it before?' Our new promotional agenda must address these questions and more.

And last, #10, our ongoing work at translating people's awareness of the Antiquarian Society and their interest in its collections and services into personal financial support for its operations. The current Speaker of the House, whom I made reference to earlier in these remarks, seems sincere in his conviction that private money alone should support cultural institutions. The American Antiquarian Society has been a good investment of federal dollars. Since 1972 we have taken fifty grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, totalling \$5.2 million, and parlayed them into more than eleven million dollars' worth of work on preserving and cataloguing the nation's printed archive which is in our care. As generous as our donors are, I do not share the Speaker's belief that private money alone can replace federal support for institutions like AAS, nor should it. The tenor of the political times, however, makes it incumbent upon us to continue to broaden the circle of those who are prepared to step into that breach. That should certainly keep us busy until our next report.

Ellen S. Dunlap

1995-96 AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
FELLOWS*American Antiquarian Society—
National Endowment for the Humanities Fellows*

Barry O'Connell, professor of English and American studies, Amherst College, 'Surviving Identities: Native American Writers and Their Peoples' Survival, 1780-1940'; Neal Salisbury, professor of history, Smith College, 'From Frontier to Society: Natives, Settlers and the Transformation of Southern New England'; Robert E. Shalhope, professor of history, University of Oklahoma, 'A Yeoman's Life: Hiram Harwood, 1806-1837.'

Kate B. and Hall J. Peterson Fellows

Catherine Allgor, Ph.D. candidate in history, Yale University, 'Political Parties: Society and Politics in Washington City, 1800-1832'; Jeffrey D. Groves, assistant professor of humanities and social sciences, Harvey Mudd College, 'Ticknor and Fields: Literary Promotion and American Canon Formation, 1840-1865'; Karen Halttunen, professor of history, University of California at Davis, 'Murder and the Gothic Imagination in American Culture'; Peter G. Martin, Ph.D. candidate in history, Emory University, 'Forgotten Immigrant Church: The French-Canadian Religious Identity in New England'; Meredith L. McGill, assistant professor of English, Harvard University, two chapters from 'American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting': 'Rewriting Romanticism' and 'Fashioning the Marketplace'; Joseph T. Rainer, Ph.D. candidate in American studies, College of William and Mary, 'Peddler Folklore in Southern Almanacs'; Stephen P. Rice, Ph.D. candidate in American studies, Yale University, 'Incorporating the Machine: Labor, Fatigue, and the Problem of Self-Regulation in Nineteenth-Century Industrial America'; Heidi M. Schultz, Ph.D. candidate in English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 'Women Writing in the American South: Writing at Female Academies and Writing Without Teachers,

1800-1860'; Mary Beth Sievens, Ph.D. candidate in history, Boston University, 'Stray Wives: Marital Expectations and Conflict in Vermont, 1790-1830'; Jean Silver-Isenstadt, Ph.D. candidate in history and sociology of science, University of Pennsylvania, "Progression in Harmony": The Shared Life and Work of Mary S. Gove Nichols and Thomas Low Nichols in Nineteenth-Century Health Reform'; Albert J. von Frank, professor of English, Washington State University at Pullman, 'Anthony Burns, Fugitive Slave'; Kent Walgren, assistant attorney general, Salt Lake City, Utah, 'Bibliography of American Masonic and Antimasonic Imprints, 1734-1850.'

American Antiquarian Society—

American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Fellow

Brett Charbeneau, journeyman printer, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg Imprints Program; Ernest Freeberg, assistant professor of humanities, Colby-Sawyer College, 'The Meaning of Blindness in Early America.'

Stephen Botein Fellows

Alice Fahs, assistant professor of history, University of California at Irvine, 'Publishing the Civil War: The Literary Marketplace and the Meanings of the Civil War in the North, 1861-1865'; Karen A. Weyler, Ph.D. candidate in English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 'Issues of Privacy and Publicity in the Early American Novel.'

Research Associates

Klaus Schmidt, wissenschaftlicher mit-arbeiter, University of Mainz, 'The Influence of British Aesthetic and Cultural Standards on American Texts, 1702-1809'; Janice Simon, associate professor of art history, University of Georgia, "Woodland Meditations": The Forest Interior in American Art and Culture, c. 1840-1913'; Gail Smith, assistant professor of English, Marquette, 'Reading the Word: Harriet Beecher Stowe and Nineteenth-Century American Hermeneutics.'

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