

Report of the Council

IN recent years the Council Report for the April meeting has been written by the Director, and that for the annual meeting in October by the President. But this year the President of the Society is in the service of the United States, acting as naval historian of the War. His absence from New England and frequently from the country has given to the Director the privilege of rendering to the Society the usual report of its progress during the year.

In these days of turmoil throughout the world, this Society has followed the role of its sister institutions in beleaguered England in carrying on—not that there is any comparison between our present relative security and the dangers and annihilation to which English libraries and museums are subject. But still we live in fear. There is always the possibility of enemy bombing and consequent destruction of property.

So far we have decided upon safeguarding our possessions in our own building rather than following the plan of sending a selection of our holdings to the western part of the State. It is not easy for us, moreover, to make a selection of rare material in this Library, as so large a proportion is rare and irreplaceable. Only a small percentage of our books is of the modern and recent type which is still in print. Due to the particular construction of the Library building, there is more than the ordinary factor of safety if the rarer books are shifted properly to the basement. Except for the central domed rotunda, the four basement wings are protected by three floors above, each consisting of seven inches of concrete. The ordinary bomb would not penetrate three such

floors, and only the complete destruction of the building through bombing, which is extremely improbable, would destroy our possessions. Therefore the Library so far has operated as usual, being ready at any approaching emergency quickly to take advantage of its basement catacombs.

The result of this keeping of its collections accessible has been a greatly increased use of the Library during the past summer. Scholars and researchers who ordinarily have spent part of their summers at such library centers as New York and Washington have worked in Worcester, where there has been no hindrance to their quests, and volumes necessary for their use have been immediately available.

The staff has been particularly busy during the past few months, not only in attending to the wants of researchers, but especially in absorbing the unusually large number of collections which has recently been donated by members and friends. Among these were the Alexander Hamilton collection presented by Alfred L. Aiken, representing almost a lifetime of collecting and perhaps the largest existing showing of the printed works by and relating to Hamilton; the Henry James collection formed by Mrs. Roswell Skeel, Jr.; and the final consignment of the George W. Cole manuscripts, diaries, and correspondence.

The largest gift of all, and the most important single gift of rare books that has come to this Library since the days of Isaiah Thomas, has been the donation of the library of the late John W. Farwell. Mr. Farwell died in 1929, at the age of eighty-six, and for fully thirty years before that time he had been collecting rare Americana. So quietly and unobtrusively did he gather his books that few of us, even those who were familiar with his library, realized its scope—especially in the fields of colonization, of travel, and of rare and early printing. His map collection, which particularly interested him toward the end of his life, was impressive

and contained many of the atlases and separately printed American maps of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

After his death the Farwell library remained in the possession of his estate until this past summer when his nephews and nieces agreed that the entire collection should be presented to the American Antiquarian Society. Therefore to Mrs. John E. Rousmaniere, Nathaniel Farwell Ayer, James Bourne Ayer, and Mrs. Henderson Inches the Society returns its grateful thanks for the generous gift. The books have scarcely arrived at the building and only a small proportion have been examined and compared with our own collection. Not until the annual librarian's report of next year can we report in detail upon this donation.

Mr. Farwell had been a member of the Society since 1915. He was deeply interested in the Library and frequently sent us gifts of rare volumes. Through his friendship with Mr. Waldo Lincoln, former President of the Society, he contributed constantly to the funds, and upon his death left a generous bequest to the Society. We believe that he would be happy to realize that his treasured volumes are in our keeping.

The accessions to the Library have been unusually numerous and valuable, especially in newspaper files, early printing, American literature, and engravings. They are referred to in detail in the Librarian's report. Such acquisitions have been made possible only through the continued generosity of members. From fifty-seven members the sum of nearly \$9000 was contributed as a result of the appeal sent out last December. Opportunities have been exceptional during the past few months to purchase items needed to fill in our varied collections, and fortunately we were in a position to take advantage of them.

The *Proceedings* for the meeting of October, 1941, have been recently distributed to members and libraries, and the

issue for April, 1942, is now in press. The Index to the *Proceedings* has been efficiently prepared by Mrs. Dorothea E. Spear, continuing the work which Mrs. Reynolds, now retired, did so well for a period of fifty-nine years. The new format and type of the *Proceedings* have met with general favor.

The building, now over thirty years old, has been kept in good condition, only requiring this year the repointing of the roof. Unexpected repairs, however, were required for the boilers. The much needed book and passenger elevator, authorized a year ago, has been delayed, due to the inability to obtain priorities.

Four members of the Society have died since the last meeting in April. John W. Garrett, of Baltimore, collector of Maryland books, elected in 1940, died June 26, 1942. Edward T. Esty, of Worcester, prominent in civic affairs in this city, elected in 1930, died July 4, 1942. Wallace H. Cathcart, of Cleveland, Director of the Western Reserve Historical Society, elected in 1924, died September 6, 1942. John H. Scheide, of Titusville, Penn., collector of Americana and recently chosen to the Council of the Society, elected in 1938, died September 29, 1942. Obituary sketches of these members will appear in the printed *Proceedings* of this meeting.

After thirty years the Director of this Society has finally completed his Bibliography of Early American Newspapers. This record, covering the history of all newspapers published previous to 1821 and accompanied by a checklist of known files, was printed in the *Proceedings* of this Society from 1913 to 1927. It was started partly to acquire information about a subject in which this Library was deeply interested, and partly to spread the prestige of the Society's collection. But the printing in the *Proceedings* was only a tentative and preliminary publication. During the past ten years the Director

has spent what time he could find outside of Library hours in rechecking the files in hundreds of libraries, correcting the histories of the various journals, and writing literally thousands of letters to correspondents and owners of papers. Now the entire work has been completely revised, and except for obtaining replies to about two hundred unanswered letters, is ready for publication. Steps will be taken this winter to arrange for printing and, if possible, to secure a publishing sponsor.

As we look forward to another year, we cannot but be concerned by the uncertain times that lie ahead. What the future will bring, either in changes in economic and social conditions, or even in life itself, no one can foretell. Founded in the midst of a war one hundred and thirty years ago, this Society has survived three major conflicts and now is witnessing a world struggle which makes former wars pale into insignificance. But institutions do not change or suffer destruction. Their physical possessions may sustain injury, but the body corporate continues to live. Churches, colleges, libraries in this English speaking world have survived for centuries. We have faith in the permanence of this Republic and in the righteousness and inevitable ascendancy of our cause. Time marches on and to institutions like ours is given the privilege of marking the steps of the onward movement.

Respectfully submitted,

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For the Council

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