

## *Report of the Council*

**D**URING the past summer the Library has been extensively used by researchers from many States, some of them remaining for a month or more of study. The collections notably used were early newspaper files, psalmody, local history of the West, American fiction, early music, juvenile literature, almanacs, and the graphic arts. One researcher, in search of railroad material of the middle nineteenth century, found help in the large collection of railroad guides and propaganda circulars published to attract emigration to the West. Another perused letters and diaries of the Civil War in preparing a work on the life of the common soldier in the War. These were only a few of the many subjects of inquiry for which students sought information. An especial drive seems to be on for material regarding early printing in such localities as Brooklyn, Mississippi, Louisiana, Virginia, and Tennessee. Our recently developed catalogue of imprints before 1820, with elaborate records of printers and geographical locations, proved its value many times. It was noticeable that the books chiefly sought were not the standard works of history available elsewhere in many libraries, but rare and ephemeral titles which were part of collections formed in recent years.

Librarians and collectors have eagerly awaited the recent publication of the revised edition of Lyle H. Wright's *American Fiction*. This bibliography records 2772 editions of prose fiction written by Americans and published between 1774 and 1850. Students of American literature now have access to a large field of creative prose writing, covering

scores of phases of social life chiefly in the first half of the nineteenth century—factory life, western travel, conditions on the farm and in the city, aspects of American society, sports, foreign elements and immigration, and of course the ever present narratives of affairs of the heart. Noted authors, such as Hawthorne, Irving, Cooper, Longfellow, Paulding, and Simms, are recorded more fully than ever before, but the chief interest in this comprehensive study is in the little known, or almost unknown, authors whose work in creative literature is now for the first time brought to light.

The field of early American fiction is one in which this Society's library has a highly important collection. Of the 2772 editions listed, the Antiquarian Society has a total of 1520, followed by Yale with 1218, Library of Congress with 1057, New York Public Library with 1016, and Harvard with 846. Although the Society for the moment leads Yale, it recognizes the fact that when the collection formed by James T. Babb, the Yale Librarian, with its 505 titles, is turned over to his Alma Mater, we will hold second place. These comparative figures have been noted largely to show how a collection on a given subject can be built up through effort, chiefly the watching of book catalogues and the establishing of friendly contacts with book dealers. Fifteen years ago not even a hundred of these titles were owned by this Library, but an interest in the subject and the demand from researchers and users of the Library magnified this small beginning fifteenfold.

A contemplation of this single field of American fiction can be used as a text to show the change in collecting trends. Today the most popular forms of collecting are in children's books, native American literature, and narratives of early Western travel and settlement. In the nineteenth century no institutional libraries even thought of collecting in these

fields. Libraries sought to acquire the current output of standard books, but seldom attempted to create and enlarge special collections. As far as literature was concerned, they sought the American reprints of English and foreign writers rather than the less imposing expressions of native talent.

Private collectors looked further into the future. Men of means, such as John Carter Brown, James Lenox, and George Brinley, gathered invaluable collections of rare Americana, emphasizing the period of discovery and the establishment of the colonies. Brinley more than anyone, before or since, collected not only that which was important, but realized the value of the ephemeral in literature. Other collectors, notably Samuel W. Pennypacker of Pennsylvania, built up important State collections. The disposal of the Brinley and Pennypacker collections gave libraries the opportunity to acquire rare books, but especially brought to their attention that there were some things in the field of collecting besides standard works.

Many other private collectors before 1900 collected in smaller and more highly specialized fields. Stephen H. Wakeman, Frank Maier and others collected first editions of American authors. Samuel G. Drake, Edward E. Ayer, and Thomas W. Field gathered books on the American Indian. There were many wealthy collectors of the rare English classics. Thomas J. McKee's specialties were American literature and the drama. Bishop Robert W. Peach collected psalmody; Albert C. Bates and Wilbur Macey Stone, children's books; Frank E. Marshall, book-plates; and Samuel L. Munson, almanacs. The American Antiquarian Society followed the nineteenth century trend, but with less opportunity for book purchase than those libraries supported by public funds or by liberal donors. Except for the books purchased at the Brinley sale in 1879-1893, as a result of that collector's bequest of \$5000, almost

no books were bought for the Society until after 1908. The library collected by Isaiah Thomas, and the gifts of libraries which he induced owners to donate, gave this Society a remarkable head start, but from the time of the deaths of Thomas in 1831 and Christopher C. Baldwin in 1835, no effort was made to increase these collections. There was little income and the small funds were needed for administration and publications. Yet the opportunity was present to acquire, for a few cents each, thousands of titles which today run into tens if not hundreds of dollars. But our present day fields of collecting were not then in vogue. Children's books were regarded as not serious enough for a library to collect. Even Isaiah Thomas himself, the greatest of all publishers of juvenile literature, held to this view. When I came to this Library in 1908, I found that only eight of the Thomas children's books were preserved in his Library and these only because he was proud of their bindings. He so lightly regarded them that he apparently did not include such publications in his gift to the Society. Yet today a single one of his juveniles—for instance, the first edition of *Mother Goose*—would bring more than all of the other titles which he printed during his publishing career.

During the last forty years this Library has followed the vogue of the time and collected extensively in several chosen fields. The remarkable collection of eighteenth century newspapers founded by Thomas has been enlarged fourfold and carried to 1820 and beyond. Almanacs have increased from about 1000 to 24,000. Similar increases have been made in juvenile literature, early American printing, first editions, bibliography, local history for the entire United States, American directories, bookplates, journalism, and early graphic arts. The very important collection of far Western travel and exploration formed by Donald McKay Frost is the most recent of our acquisitions.

Nearly all of these collections are developments of the last thirty or forty years. Resultingly they provide researchers with large bodies of material in most cases more complete and comprehensive than can be found in other libraries. What the trend of collecting will be during the next forty years cannot be foretold. We do know, however, that the collections already mentioned should be increased and the gaps filled. Furthermore, no collection should be started unless its limits are clearly defined and every effort is made to make it as complete as possible.

During the year many rare and important pieces of early Americana have been acquired by the Library. Due to the fact that we have been able to sell, at a good figure, considerable duplicate and discarded material, we have been enabled with such funds to take advantage of numerous purchases of primary historical importance. These acquisitions are recorded in detail in the Librarian's Report. Many of the items were hitherto unknown, or represented only by single copies in distant localities. Book dealers and pessimistic collectors have in recent years bewailed the belief that the day of collecting early rare books is over—that attics have been exhausted and the golden days of collecting are in the past. But judging from our experience of the past year this strictly is not so. It leads us to believe that the first example of American printing, the Freeman's Oath of 1639, sought in vain for a century or more, may yet be found in some unexpected hiding-place.

Four members of the Society have died since April and obituary notices will appear in the printed *Proceedings* of this meeting. Harry T. Peters, of New York, a leading collector of prints and of books on sport, and the author of important works on American lithography, elected in 1932, died June 1, 1948. Nathaniel F. Ayer, of Boston, who was instrumental in having the John W. Farwell collection of

Americana given to this Library, elected in 1942, died July 26. Henry W. Kent, of New York, writer on art history and long secretary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, elected in 1929, died August 28. Aldus C. Higgins, of Worcester, manufacturer, patron of arts and letters, and leader in civic affairs, elected in 1926, died September 10. Mr. Higgins had served on the Council for eighteen years and was one of the most helpful and able supporters of the Society's activities. It is seldom that in one man are combined an outstanding business ability, a sense of responsibility in support of charitable endeavors, and a love of cultural life. To no one on the Council did the officers of the Society turn more frequently for advice in questions of detail or of general procedure in the Society affairs. He left the impress of his geniality and friendliness upon the members of the Society in receiving them each year in his home at the time of the annual meeting, and they will miss the warmth of his greeting and his hospitable participation in the Society's affairs.

As in recent years, members and friends of the Society have generously added to the annual income, enabling us to purchase books for the Library, make a slight increase in salaries in the lower brackets, and in fact, maintain a balance in our financial operations for the year. Nearly \$16,000 was contributed for general expenses and \$2,400 for special salaries, from fifty-one members and friends. A new feature was inserted in the Treasurer's Report for this year—a list of contributors of a total of \$500 or over to annual expenses for the years from 1910, when this form of appeal was instituted, to 1948. Such a schedule of gifts was suggested by the late Aldus C. Higgins, and I believe is a new idea in institutional financial reports. As Mr. Higgins pointed out, it seemed unfair that members should charitably support an organization for years and that all records of their generosity

should be forgotten except for the single mention of a gift in an annual report. The list as printed is impressive, as over seventy members have contributed liberally over the years, and this does not include the scores of members who have given lesser amounts, not perhaps so large in substance, but evidencing equally their interest in the aims and purposes of this Society.

The problem of an addition to the book-stack, which has beset us in recent years, may be a little nearer to solution. Dr. Homer Gage, who died in 1938, bequeathed to the Society the sum of \$100,000, with the hope that this would suffice for building the stack addition. Upon the recent death of Mrs. Gage this bequest became payable to the Society. When Dr. Gage inserted the legacy in his will, there was every belief then that it would cover the cost of the new construction, as the expense of the 1924 addition to the stack was about \$98,000. Sad to relate, conditions are very different at the present time. The vast increase in building costs, due chiefly to the unprecedented rise in wages, would force upon us an outlay of over \$250,000 if we wish to construct the new building. It is doubtful if building costs will come down in the next few years, if ever, and we need the new stack now. This is a problem for the Society, and its Council, to face.

Respectfully submitted,

CLARENCE S. BRIGHAM,

*For the Council*

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.