

Report of the Council

THE addition to the library building begun in July last, was finished in January. This, as explained in previous reports, consisted of the shell of the structure only, leaving for future construction the erection of the steel bookstack. The contractors, the Fiske-Carter Construction Company, have performed a highly satisfactory task. An engineer who examined the building after it was finished said that the walls were built with the precision of a watch and that a plumb line showed that there was not a deviation of a fraction of an inch. Everything is completed except the basement terrazzo floor, the erection of a retaining wall on the west side, and the final grading of the grounds. The building of the steel stack, after competition, was awarded to the Art Metal Construction Company of Jamestown, New York, on their bid of \$90,657. The Company has drawn plans almost exactly matching the bookstack of 1924, will begin work in June, and should finish by October. Although we have \$20,000 left in the Gage Fund toward the cost of the stack, the remainder of the cost has not yet been raised.

Moving the books into the new stack, when it is finished, will constitute a troublesome and somewhat expensive problem. There are several thousand bound volumes of newspapers in the old coal cellar which will have to be brought up to the two top floors of the stack and shelved in their proper places. A hundred thousand books will be removed from various sections of the library and placed in their new locations. All this requires much planning. Before any books are moved, every volume has to be vacuum cleaned, which means that the entire collection has to be subjected to this long desired process. But relief from the

present crowded condition of the shelves will be the reward for all this labor. We have every reason to believe that we shall need no further addition to the bookstack for at least thirty years.

The comprehensive rearrangement of the books will give us the opportunity to install some new method of classification. For the last forty years we have followed the old fixed shelf arrangement of books. As a result there has been no comprehensive gathering of books by subject. Only a new classification will solve the problem. Yet classifications adopted by other libraries, such as the Library of Congress, are not feasible for this library, as practically all of our holdings concern some phase of American history and literature. Three-fourths of the subjects included in the recognized classification systems would not apply to this library. Therefore we shall have to draw up a new kind of classification based on other systems but designed only for our own library. This is difficult and hazardous, since a system once devised cannot be altered except with much labor and rewriting of cards. But by the end of summer we hope to have the problem solved.

Acquisitions for the library have been numerous and important, but description of new titles must await the Librarian's report at the annual meeting. In the field of American printing before 1820 we have obtained some important items. This is our most useful field of collecting. We already have by far the largest collection in the country, and as a result a good share of the demands on the library, both through visitors and correspondence, fall in this field. There has been in recent years a vastly increased amount of publication in sectional bibliographies of early imprints. A notable volume in this field is the bibliography of early Rhode Island printing, entitled *Rhode Island Imprints, 1727-1800*, edited by John E. Alden and published by the

Bibliographical Society of America. This is the most complete and comprehensive bibliography of eighteenth century printing compiled for any State, listing the holdings of 250 libraries. The notes are scholarly, and the index thorough and useful. From the point of view of this Society it is interesting to note that we stand second among the libraries represented. No one could surpass the Rhode Island Historical Society which for fifty years has studiously sought early Rhode Island imprints, and then finally acquired a few years ago the Shepley collection, the finest private Rhode Island library existing. Of the 1712 numbers entered in the Bibliography, the Historical Society has 1284, a notable collection considering that about two hundred items are known only through advertisements or supported evidence. This Society has 869 entries followed by the John Carter Brown Library with 687. One of the reasons for the superiority of the Historical Society is due to its large collection of broadsides, including the hundreds of broadside Revolutionary acts and the scores of "prox" tickets gathered so successfully by the late Howard M. Chapin. If only books and pamphlets were counted, the Antiquarian Society has 783 items compared to 879 owned by the Historical Society. But in broadsides, we have only 86 compared to their 405. Yet broadsides are of typographical and historical importance and their scarcity is shown by the fact that fully half of those listed by Mr. Alden are not entered in Charles Evans's monumental *American Bibliography*. The Antiquarian Society is fortunate in having photostats of most of the broadsides included in the Rhode Island list.

There are only two deaths to announce at this meeting. R. D. W. Connor died February 25, 1950. As head of the North Carolina Historical Commission, Archivist of the United States for seven years, and at the time of his death

professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Mr. Connor was a helpful friend to this Society since his election in 1919. Dr. Harvey Bassler, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, died March 14, 1950. Elected in 1932, he became an outstanding scientist, but his chief connection with this Society arose from his collecting and philanthropy in the field of early German American literature.

By means of stringent economies and with the aid of generous contributions from members and friends, the Society manages to finish each year without a deficit. But there are many things that we cannot do and we have to restrict book purchase to a minimum. Printing especially has doubled in cost, yet this is something we have to accept. This last winter our supply of paper was exhausted, and we were faced with the problem of obtaining 100% rag paper, which is not now too generally manufactured. Mr. George S. Barton, of the Council, helped us to find the proper paper, and in addition, through his firm, the Rice Barton Corporation, presented us with the entire consignment, 26,700 sheets, sufficient to last for two years. He also assumed the cost of a watermark on the paper, carrying the name of the American Antiquarian Society. Although the gift came directly from the Rice Barton Corporation, the Council realizes that it is really due to Mr. Barton's generosity and long continued interest in the Society.

Respectfully submitted,

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