

Report of the Council

ANOTHER year has rolled around and the Society has apparently expanded its usefulness to scholars. Its Library has increased in size and quality and has welcomed more visiting researchers than ever. The greatly added amount of space acquired through the construction of the new bookstack has relieved the crowded condition of the past few years and has enabled the staff to shelve the volumes by a proper and more accessible system. What are the probabilities of expansion in the future? How long will the new bookstack serve our needs? We believe that it should last for at least thirty years. This would not be true if we continued to accumulate material as we have for the past forty-five years. But we have decided on certain lines of collecting, and we see no reason to invade the spheres of other libraries. In such fields as early American newspapers and imprints, our collections are so nearly complete that we have only to fill in the occasional gaps in our holdings. The same is true of early American fiction, first editions, almanacs, psalmody, secular music, children's books, Bibles, directories, and other lesser collections. In subjects where we feel required to obtain the current output—such as bibliography, biography, reference books, general history, book catalogues, genealogy, and local history—the increase is small compared with the comprehensiveness and fullness of the present collections.

This is all in accord with the practice of the other great American libraries which are meeting the same problem by specialization and cooperation, instead of following the old wasteful practice of omnivorous competition.

The erection of the three bookstacks in 1910, 1924, and 1951 brings to mind many interesting memories. I became Librarian of the Society in October, 1908. The old Library building, familiarly called Antiquarian Hall, was located at the corner of Highland and Main Streets. It was crowded beyond belief, with material stored in attics and cellars. It housed scores of disintegrating plaster casts and a museum of relics and antiquarian objects, displayed in many glass cases. The Council wisely decided to deposit the relics in other institutions, chiefly the Peabody Museum at Cambridge, and the Worcester Historical Society, and to maintain no museum in the future. Yet the old building, in spite of its ancient appearance and its conglomerate aspect, had considerable charm. The Librarian's room, in the front of the building overlooking Lincoln Square, was a large and rather imposing room, housing much of the fine furniture and many of the portraits; and the main room, with the galleries and alcoves of books, was typical of mid-nineteenth century library construction.

The new and present building, made possible through the Salisbury bequest, was completed in 1910. The bookstack, with five floors, contained over five miles of shelving. The first load of books, consisting of two tons of bound newspapers, left the old building on a wintry day, December 5, 1910. I remember well the horse-drawn moving-vans furnished by the Worcester Storage Company. It was a coincidence that this first load carried the newspapers, emphasizing one of the Society's most valuable and treasured collections. I remember that I went out to the van and brought in a bound volume of early Alabama newspapers, the first book to enter the new Library.

In less than fourteen years the necessity for a new bookstack was apparent. During these years the number of volumes had been trebled, due to the establishing of new

collections and to the developing of collections already possessed. This growth was phenomenal and ought never to happen again. The new stack, completed in 1924, was of the same size and capacity as the original stack. It took twenty-seven years before another bookstack was needed. It has now been completed, increasing the capacity of the building to about a million books and twenty miles of shelving. We hope that it will be another thirty years before further increase in shelf-room is necessary.

During the past summer the Manuscript Room has been rearranged, with the volumes and filing-boxes in two alphabetical orders, also a section for oversize folios. This new plan we have found has simplified the arrangement, and has apparently provided space for another decade. We are very selective in accepting manuscripts for preservation, taking only papers of general or early importance, Worcester material, or documents relating to subjects of especial concern in our various fields of collecting. Other manuscripts we steer to more proper depositories.

The landscaping made necessary by the building of the new stack, was finished in the late Spring. The road leading to the new parking space was bordered by a privet hedge, the slope from Regent Street was covered with honeysuckle and juniper to prevent soil erosion, and various trees, bushes, and flowering plants were set at the corners of the new building.

There have been four recent deaths in the membership, three of them among the Society's oldest members. Edgar Erskine Hume died on January 24, 1952, only three months after his election to the Society. George Parker Winship, elected in 1899 and a member for fifty-three years, died June 22, 1952. Mr. Winship was Secretary of the Society from 1909 to 1913, and thereafter on the Council until the year of his death. He was a devoted friend of the Society

and especially in early years an active force in its counsels. Abraham S. W. Rosenbach died July 2, 1952. Elected in 1927, he was a constant donor to the Library, proud of his membership, and always ready to advance our interests. Victor H. Paltsits, elected in 1904, died October 3, 1952. One of the leading bibliographers and librarians of the country, he aided us often by reading papers and donating material to the Library. Mr. Winship and Mr. Paltsits were the second and third senior members. Mr. John M. Merriam, elected in 1888, has long been the Society's senior member, and we all hope that he will so continue for many more years.

The response of members to our appeal for funds was generous and much appreciated. As has been constantly stated, were it not for this support from members and friends, the Society could not function adequately or increase its collections.

In the exhibition cases in the upper hall has been placed a selection of the more noteworthy additions made to the Library during the year. They include rare books and broadsides, Vermont imprints from the Spargo collection, and some of the scarce and frequently unique examples of song-books and juvenile literature.

Respectfully submitted,

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For the Council

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